

Hundreds demonstrate in Berlin against harsher asylum law

Our correspondents
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On Tuesday evening, several hundred people, including many young people and refugees, demonstrated in Berlin in front of the State Office for Health and Social Affairs against the recent tightening up of the asylum procedures.

“No borders, no nations, no deportations,” was one of the chants in several languages. “To flee is not a crime! No person is illegal”, “We are not numbers, we are human beings,” could be read on posters and banners.

Several organizations and refugee groups had called for the demonstration on Facebook. With the new asylum package II debated this Friday in the Bundestag (parliament), the government is setting out a “policy of isolation and division” directed “aggressively against people who had fled”.

Among the main points in the “asylum package” is the adding of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to the list of “safe countries of origin”; the establishment of “special registration centres” and mass camps for people from these countries; a residency requirement; asylum procedures shortened to three weeks; the elimination or drastic reduction of family reunification possibilities for Syrian refugees and the rapid expulsion of all those who have no prospect of being granted asylum, even the sick.

Many demonstrators expressed their outrage to the WSWs over this policy. “Every few weeks, the asylum laws are tightened up”, said Christine, a lawyer for Migration Rights and member of the Republican Lawyers Association (RAV). “In particular, the short deadlines and faster asylum procedures mean it is simply impossible to ensure effective legal representation. That’s one of the reasons why I’m here.”

The RAV participated in the demonstration with its own banner: “No person is illegal!”

Christine is also concerned about the border closures in Europe and the “loss of solidarity within Europe”. She “used to be quite a convinced European”, she said, but the European Union is obviously “no longer a community of [shared] values worth fighting for.” This had begun with Greece and was “sad, even frightening”, she added.

Erol came to Germany from Turkey 30 years ago. His plan to study at that time had failed for financial reasons, and now he has to work as a cleaner in three different jobs to support his family. Solidarity with the refugees is a matter of course for him, despite his long workday.

This is about poor people, said Erol, who grumbled, “The EU countries and the USA are thieves.” First they stole the riches of other countries and continents—“raw materials, gold and even art treasures”—and drove them into misery with bombs and military operations, and then they refuse to allow the people from these countries to escape to a better life.

Regarding the agreements of Merkel and Erdogan against refugees, Erol said Germany had “bought” the Turkish government. The closure of the border with Turkey was “simply inhuman. Yesterday, when I saw the situation at the border in Southeastern Anatolia on television, I had to turn it off. It was unbearable.” The current policy, according to Erol, was generally directed against the poor. In Germany too, “the gap between rich and poor is becoming greater.”

A large group of students came from Mendelssohn-Bartholdy High School. Vincent, 14, and Felix, 13, are pupil representatives and proudly report that their school was just commended as a “School against Racism, School with Courage”.

“The government want to impose the new asylum package over the heads of the people”, Vincent said.

The stopping of family reunifications will lead to entire families with children climbing into inflatable dinghies and even more people will drown in the Mediterranean. Vincent and Felix spoke decisively against military operations by Germany and arms exports. “We are against war. Bombs cannot end the Syrian civil war. It will only get worse.”

Regarding the scheduled NATO mission against the smugglers’ boats, Felix added, these boats “are the only means of escape, an attack on them is a direct attack on those fleeing.”

Both spoke out against the planned mass camps. Vincent pointed to Tempelhof Airport, where 7,000 refugees are to be accommodated. “They cannot do that! People have no privacy. You wouldn’t house 7,000 homeless people in a single facility.” If there are clashes in the camps, according to Vincent, the finger gets pointed at the people there. “In this way they ultimately help the extreme right.”

Vivien and Marika are studying at a college for design, wood and glass technology in Berlin-Weissensee, Vivien’s friend Michael comes from Austria. “The situation of refugees at the border and in Berlin worries us”, said Vivien and Marika. They are also concerned about the growth of right-wing parties and military rearmament.

However, Vivien believes it is hopeless to expect a change of official policy. “The rich are interested in wars”, she said. “They sell weapons and earn from it.” She was not particularly well informed politically, she said, but was of the opinion that “everyone in politics was bought and paid for. That’s quite obvious!”

Michael is particularly outraged by the situation in Austria, where the minimum support for asylum seekers has been halved. “The official programme of the governing parties is now the same as the positions of the far-right Austrian Freedom Party of 20 years ago.” In contrast, the majority of the Austrian population, as in Germany, stand in solidarity with refugees, he said.



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