

The Berlin Senate's inhuman deportation policy

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The solidarity of broad social layers with the refugees in Berlin remains considerable but the policy of the Berlin Senate of SPD and CDU is diametrically opposed to this sentiment. Refugees are being crammed into inhumane camps, bullied and brutally deported.

The latter is now to be massively expanded. In early April, the Berlin interior senator (state minister) Frank Henkel (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), welcomed the call by Chancellery Minister Peter Altmeier (CDU) to double the forced deportations of refugees and the number of those "returning voluntarily."

Henkel believes this demand is "absolutely realistic," and stressed, "Berlin is working consistently on increasing the number of deportations." He identified himself completely with the demand from the Chancellery, saying, "This is consistent with our ambitions and, given the situation, is also called for."

The interior minister, who was elected in April as the CDU's lead candidate in Berlin for the House of Representatives (State Assembly) elections in September, has for months been agitating aggressively against refugees. He has repeatedly stressed that Berlin has to "significantly reduce" the number of refugees.

In October last year, Henkel had already announced an "increase in the number of deportations," and boasted that Berlin was at the top of the table compared to other federal states. The state government would increasingly encourage "voluntary return." However, "If this did not happen voluntarily, then in the end it must come down to deportation," Henkel told the dpa news agency.

According to official figures, 512 people have been deported in the first quarter of 2016. If this trend continues, it will be more than double the 806 deported in the previous year. In 2014, 602 were deported.

Henkel is using his attacks on the weakest of the

weak to erect a veritable police state in Berlin aimed essentially against all workers. He allows the deportation of families that have lived in Germany for many years.

Without prior warning, the police turn up in the middle of the night or early morning outside the rooms of desperate people, who are given only a short time to get their children out of bed and gather their belongings.

This is intended to prevent refugees avoiding deportation. Also, it ensures they cannot access legal protections and support, nor lodge an appeal against their deportation.

The actions of the Berlin Senate have repeatedly led to protests by the population. School classes, teachers, neighbourhood and support organizations have tried to obtain stays of deportation for those classmates and families torn from their midst.

To avoid attracting attention and to enable the deportations to proceed as smoothly as possible, the police follow a so-called "sensitization strategy." Accordingly, night deportations should be avoided whenever possible in order not to disturb people's sleep! In addition, children should, if possible, not be taken out of school. However, in practice this strategy is not worth the paper on which it is written.

Currently, more than 10,000 people are at risk of deportation. These are mostly people from the Balkans whose asylum applications have been rejected in the past year and a half. The new package of asylum laws, combined with the intensification of the deportation law adopted in record time, means refugees live in constant fear of the police knocking on their door.

A recent example is the deportation of the Gambian Surakata C., who had just turned 18. He had arrived in Berlin, aged 16, and been housed in a youth facility

supported by social workers. On March 16, in the middle of the night, he was seized from the hostel and deported directly to Gambia.

According to the Berlin Refugee Council, his roommates said the police suddenly appeared at the apartment and took Surakata away. He had been granted temporary permission to remain, had never had any trouble with the police and was studying German and taking other qualifications.

In mid-January 2016, the Berlin police deported eight-year-old Denica, who suffers from a heart condition, and her father back to Bosnia. For the eight-year-old, however, her father is more like a stranger because he spent several years in prison in Bosnia because of racist persecution. The desperate mother and Denica's brother, who also has a heart condition, had received temporary permission to stay because of the severity of his condition, but then decided to travel back to Bosnia "voluntarily." It is uncertain whether the children, or the father who had been tortured in prison, would receive proper medical treatment back in Bosnia.

At the end of March, the *Berliner Zeitung* publicised the case of single mother Ariane Demiri and her three children, aged 16, 14 and 6, from Albania. In autumn 2015 they had received a letter rejecting their asylum application demanding that they emigrate "voluntarily" by April 7, 2016. Mrs. Demiri had come to Germany in the summer of 2015 because there was "no hope of a decent education in Albania" for her children, which they could receive in Germany.

Classmates of the middle son, Glendis (14), at the Lichtenberger Manfred-von-Ardenne School, along with their teacher, launched a struggle against the imminent deportation of the family. But as part of the asylum package II laws, Albania has been classified by the German government as a safe third country, along with Montenegro and Kosovo. The danger is great that the family will be forcibly removed "quietly."

"Glendis was quick to learn German," said his teacher. "He is popular in class and was immediately integrated." An Internet petition set up by the teacher, directed at Berlin's immigration authorities, received 48,919 signatures within a short time.

Various aid agencies warn that the number of those "legally obliged to leave" could quadruple this year due to the restrictive policy of the Senate rejecting asylum applications.

The brutal deportations continue the policies of the SPD and Left Party-led state executive, which governed Berlin from 2001 to 2011. Even then, the capital was infamous for its for harsh deportation policy.

The current verbal opposition of the Greens and the Left Party in the state assembly is therefore hypocritical because, wherever they are in government, the same parties organise the detention and deportation of refugees.



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