

# Major police operation against Roma in Berlin

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27 May 2016

On Sunday evening, a hundred-strong force of the Berlin police conducted a brutal raid on Roma families protesting against their threatened deportation at the city's memorial to the Sinti and Roma murdered by the Nazis.

The initiative "All stay," in which several Roma and Sinti groups are cooperating nationwide, demanded in its call for the rally "a revision of the restriction of the right to asylum, unconditional right to remain in Germany and right to participate in society." The historic promise to integrate Sinti and Roma must become reality 70 years after 500,000 members of these minorities were murdered, said Stefan Asanovski of the Romano Jekipe Ano Hamburg association.

Approximately 80 Roma from northern Germany, including many women and children, occupied the grounds of the monument opposite the Reichstag building to draw attention to the increased deportation of Roma to their supposedly safe countries of origin in the Balkans. Many of them had received a letter confirming their deportation in recent weeks.

However, around midnight, the police, following consultations with Bundestag President Lammert (CDU) and Uwe Neumärker, the director of the Holocaust memorial, cleared the memorial grounds. They deployed batons and there were arrests.

As justification, it was stated that a protest at the memorial, only opened in 2012, could not be tolerated because it disturbed a holy place for the dead.

This was an absurd argument, according to the Roma families. They had deliberately chosen to protest there in order to honour their dead relatives and draw attention to the fact that today they are still impoverished, isolated, excluded and targeted for arbitrary state repression and persecution. During World War II, the Nazis murdered 500,000 members of

the Sinti and Roma population across Europe, around 90 percent of the total.

The timing of the protest was to coincide with the Roma uprising in the Auschwitz concentration camp from May 16 to 23, 1944. Thousands of inmates of the "gypsy camp" fought SS guards with stones and work tools.

WSWS reporters spoke on Monday to two participants in the protests, who requested we keep their names anonymous due to the threatened deportations. They were still agitated over the night-time police operation.

## **"We respect our murdered people"**

"We were ordered to leave the memorial grounds," said S., who has lived in Germany for some time. "It was a holy place for the dead, and we ought to show respect to the dead. We fully respect our murdered people! Half a million were murdered in a bestial manner. In addition, the days May 16 to 23 are holidays for us, and I am very sad that I could see no flowers on the monument. If this location is so holy, then they should do something. No flowers—no attention, that's how I see it!"

His friend K. was disappointed by the behaviour of official representatives in the Berlin State Senate and the Bundestag, including the opposition parties. The Green Party politician Volker Beck and Left Party spokesman for interior affairs in the Berlin Senate, Hakan Tas, had merely pressed for the Roma to end their action. This included the chairman of the central council of Sinti and Roma, Romani Rose, and Roman

Franz from the state association NRW, who tried to persuade them by telephone.

“All of those present from the administration and parties wanted to convince us to leave. And in the end, they watched it being cleared. There was no party or initiative backing us and saying: ‘We’ll stay with you here.’ Only the volunteers stood with us who belonged to no organisation.”

During the afternoon, access to the monument was blocked and the toilets were sealed off. Only thanks to some supporters did the Roma receive food and water. “There was something odd about the situation,” S. said. “We actually thought that a humanitarian understanding had won out and that we would be able to spend the night here and calmly deal with everything in the morning.” But the situation suddenly changed and the clearing of the grounds began at midnight.

“They tried above all to separate the men from each other. They struck my brother, on his kidneys. He is still in pain and has an injured foot. My niece had her wrist and hand brutally twisted by a young police officer. My 14-year-old nephew was arrested and confined to a police car.” He was charged with “resisting state power.”

The children cried and screamed in the commotion. A woman suffered an epileptic fit. “She and her husband threw themselves in desperation into the monument’s well. They see no way out; they’ve already received the deportation order. Our people have never had good experiences with the police, and that was shown once again yesterday,” summarised S. “We Roma are stateless. We are sometimes tolerated for a time but then deported everywhere. We are foreigners everywhere.”

**“In the Balkans, our children go on the rubbish dump instead of to school”**

S. described the terrible situation confronting refugees from the Balkans, the vast majority of whom are part of the Roma minority: “In the ’50s, the German government promised to recognise Sinti and Roma as citizens in Germany and give us a permanent right to reside and a perspective for life. In this way, the

injustice of the Nazis to our people was to be recognised. But the government’s promise has never been fulfilled to this day.”

Since the Balkan route was completely closed, hardly any Roma are coming to Germany. They are confined in special camps in Eastern European countries for two or three weeks until their asylum applications are rejected and then immediately sent back. “The families now being deported from Germany have sometimes lived here for more than 20 years and have raised their children here,” S. said. “The children learnt German and attend school. They cannot speak the Roma language. If they are deported, education is over for them. And a people without education is not a people.”

In the Balkans, the Roma are isolated and have no prospect of sending their children to school. Ninety percent of adults cannot read or write, are forced to struggle for survival and even the children have to work. “A child is hardly old enough to pick up a scrap of paper and the child has to work. They go to the rubbish dumps instead of to school,” he added. “That is one of the most important reasons for this demonstration; we are trying to give our children a better future.”

Just last month, on April 8, a commemorative day for the murdered Sinti and Roma took place at the Berlin monument. German President Joachim Gauck, Bundestag vice presidents Petra Pau (Left Party) and Claudia Roth (Greens) and Neumärker from the memorial association along with other prominent politicians proclaimed their solidarity with Sinti and Roma.

The policy of deportations and the deployment of police against a peaceful Roma protest at the same location demonstrate how hollow such words are.



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