

German interior minister supports partial ban on the burqa

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24 August 2016

The campaign in Germany for domestic repression and war is assuming ever more openly racist forms. Last Friday, the federal and state interior ministers of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) spoke out in favour of a partial ban on the burqa and niqab during their so-called “Berlin Declaration.” Since then, politicians and the media have intensified their agitation against Muslim citizens and refugees.

In an interview with *Bild am Sonntag*, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière defended the partial burqa ban and other law-and-order measures proposed in the “Berlin Declaration,” including the expansion of state surveillance, the militarisation of the police and the domestic deployment of the German army (Bundeswehr).

“We reject the burqa,” said de Maizière, “It does not fit in with our cosmopolitan society.” The interior ministers of the CDU/CSU were agreed “that we want to establish a legal requirement to show your face where it is necessary to coexist in our society.” Being fully veiled was “an affront to an open society as well as anti-women.” He wanted “everyone in our country to show their face.”

If de Maizière and the state interior ministers have their way, the burqa and niqab will be banned in many spheres of daily life, and violations of the ban would be interpreted as a petty crime. The ban would apply in schools, institutions of higher education, day care facilities, the entire public sector, in the courts, in record and registry offices, at passport and border control, at demonstrations, public transport and anywhere “that identification is necessary and required.”

De Maizière knows very well that the virtual complete banning of the burqa that he intends is

incompatible with the constitutionally-guaranteed rights of freedom of religion and the “unhindered practicing of religion.” He excluded an all-out ban of the burqa by stating, “One cannot just ban everything that one opposes. I don’t want my burqa ban to be defeated in the Federal Constitutional Court.”

The niqab or burqa, like other religious symbols or pieces of clothing, have nothing progressive about them. But anyone who wishes to cover their face for religious reasons has a right to do so. “The state is prohibited from evaluating such religious beliefs on the part of its citizens or even to describe them as right or wrong,” the Constitutional Court ruled in 2015 in the so-called headscarf ruling.

Despite this, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) publicly supported the interior minister. In an interview with the newspapers of the Editorial Network Germany, Merkel made clear that she viewed the full veiling of Muslim women as a barrier to integration. From her point of view, “a fully-veiled woman hardly has a chance to integrate in Germany.” With the partial ban now proposed, the issue “is a complex political and legal matter of consideration.” The minister of the interior has her “full support” in his efforts to resolve it, said the Chancellor.

Merkel and the interior ministers are being openly supported by sections of the Green Party. The chairman of the Greens’ parliamentary group in the Saarland state parliament, Klaus Kessler, said he viewed the banning of the full veil in state institutions as the right step. It was “in the spirit of integrating people of Islamic belief into our cosmopolitan society,” Kessler declared on Monday in Saarbrücken. “In the private sphere and in the general public,” a “legal ban [was] not justifiable.” But the burqa was “in contradiction with equality between men and women and therefore in

contradiction with our value system.”

While the Left Party officially opposes the burqa ban, it supports the reactionary politics bound up with it. Sahra Wagenknecht, the chair of the Left Party’s parliamentary group in the federal parliament (Bundestag), regularly agitates against refugees and calls for more police.

That sections of the government and opposition are now openly undermining basic rights and German courts now sanction this—on Tuesday a court in Osnabrück refused to allow a Muslim woman to wear her niqab at school—underscores the rightward shift of the ruling class. The *World Socialist Web Site* has long warned that with the return of Germany to an aggressive foreign policy, all of the historical filth would re-emerge: racism, chauvinism and outright hysteria are once again methods of official politics.

In a disgusting lead article in Saturday’s issue of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, co-editor Berthold Kohler declared the burqa to be “the new symbol for a state which has already shown itself to be far too open and powerless when it comes to its borders, whose representatives preach to the citizens that the influx of migrants (including those with strange customs) has to be accepted in a liberal society as the price of an otherwise beneficial globalisation.

“But ever fewer Germans are prepared to accept this assertion,” proclaimed Kohler. Now the state must, “especially with such a symbolic issue like the burqa, go to the limits of what is permitted by the constitution.” Kohler appealed for a “general ban on the veil,” as exists in France. But this could not be enforced with fines alone. When confronted with the burqa, “and the spiritual views for which it stands,” one can be truly safe only “when we don’t allow them in the country.”

Tomas Avenarius had already declared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “The burqa ought to be banned.” Unlike Kohler, Avenarius based his attack on basic democratic rights in a supposed struggle for women’s rights. The full veil was not a “legal problem,” according to Avenarius. It was the negation “of a modern Islam and the German model of society by one and the same piece of cloth,” and it reduced “the woman to eyes, uterus, and submission.”

The comments from Kohler and Avenarius underscore the real target of the hysterical agitation

against the burqa—which is only worn by a tiny fraction of Muslims in Germany. Both regularly call for a “strong state” and the expansion of German military deployments in the Middle East where there is a Muslim majority. The demand for a ban of the burqa, justified by Kohler with racism and by Avenarius on the basis of “women’s rights,” serves these reactionary ends.



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