

After the Berlin state election

# German government steps up anti-refugee agitation

Johannes Stern  
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The established parties are responding to their catastrophic result in the Berlin state election Sunday with a sharp shift to the right. While the SPD, Left Party and Greens are preparing to continue the programme of austerity, anti-refugee agitation and a build-up of the state apparatus at home and abroad within the framework of a red-red-green coalition, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) is ever more explicitly adopting the programme of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

On Monday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) used her party's historic low election result to distance herself from the position of a "welcoming culture" for refugees, which was falsely attributed to her. Speaking to media representatives in Berlin, she made clear that her statement "We can do this" never had anything to do with solidarity towards refugees. "Much" was "interpreted or even decoded from this common statement of daily life. So much that I would almost prefer not to repeat it again," the chancellor said.

Referring to the right wing of her own party and the constant criticism from the Bavarian sister party CSU (Christian Social Union), Merkel added, "Some felt themselves provoked by the sentence—and that was of course never the intention with the short sentence." Then she went on, "This situation should never be repeated like we...had last year, with an at times uncontrolled and unregistered influx—I am fighting precisely to prevent that from being repeated... Nobody wants this situation to be repeated, myself included."

Merkel openly acknowledged her disappointment that the government had proven incapable of preventing the refugees from the war zones in the Middle East from

reaching Germany from the outset. If she could, she would have liked to turn back time by many, many years, "so that I, together with the whole government and all of those in positions of responsibility could be better prepared for the situation that hit us in the late summer of 2015," Merkel stated. Then she provocatively added that she wanted to make an offer to the AfD voters.

Merkel has increasingly adopted the rhetoric of the far right within and outside the CDU/CSU over recent weeks. According to a report in *Die Welt*, she told a parliamentary group meeting at the beginning of September that the most important thing now was to deport asylum seekers whose applications had been rejected. "Over the coming months, the most important thing is repatriation, repatriation and, once again, repatriation," the conservative paper cited the chancellor as saying. A few days later, Merkel was cited as having stated, "Germany will remain Germany. With everything that is dear and valued to us."

While the bourgeois press is talking of "a new tone" from the chancellor (*Tagesschau*), or even a "change of course" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), Merkel in reality represented a right-wing, inhumane refugee policy from the outset. Merkel and the grand coalition have been working feverishly with the support of large sections of the Left Party and Greens over the past year for a "joint" European solution in order to prevent new refugees from reaching Europe and brutally deport those who have already arrived.

Significantly, the CDU Bundestag (federal parliament) Berlin deputy and Merkel supporter Karl-Georg Wellmann boasted in an interview with Deutschlandfunk on Tuesday, "The flow of refugees

has stopped. Why is nobody saying that already this year over 60,000 refugees have returned to their homes? Why is nobody saying that 100,000 deportations have taken place?”

The “Bratislava Declaration,” passed last Friday at the EU summit, gives an indication of Merkel’s reactionary refugee policy. The section titled “Migration and external borders” calls for a strengthening of fortress Europe, denies refugees from wars the right to asylum and demands further mass deportations of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. The paper calls on the EU “Never to allow return to uncontrolled flows of last year and further bring down the number of irregular migrants” and to “ensure full control of our external borders.”

As concrete measures, the paper calls for a “full commitment to implementing the EU-Turkey statement as well as continued support to the countries of the Western Balkans.” In addition, a number of EU states had promised “to offer immediate assistance to strengthen the protection of Bulgaria’s border with Turkey, and continue support to other frontline states.”

In a summit in March, the EU states secured commitments from the Turkish government to completely close the borders for refugees and intercept boats before they can even leave Turkey in exchange for money and diplomatic concessions. The right-wing Balkan governments built border fences and mobilised the military so as to hermetically seal off the so-called Balkan route to refugees.

This apparently does not go far enough for Merkel and the EU. By the end of the year, the EU must ensure “full capacity for rapid reaction of the European Border and Coastguard” and negotiate agreements with third countries “to lead to reduced flows of irregular migration and increased return rates.” In other words, the notorious border protection agency Frontex and other state security forces will launch even more major operations against refugees on Europe’s external borders. At the same time, the EU intends to expand its collaboration with the authoritarian regimes in North Africa and Turkey to deter refugees and to deport them immediately without any bureaucratic hurdles if they manage to reach Europe.

Merkel’s statements and the EU paper underscore the dishonesty and hypocrisy of the German government and the EU’s claims to defend “European values” such

as freedom and democracy against racism and nationalism. In reality, they pursue an anti-refugee policy that is hardly distinguishable from that of France’s National Front, the UK Independence Party or the AfD and plays directly into the hands of the far right.

The brutal approach to refugees by the ruling elite is directly bound up with the militarisation of Europe at home and abroad, which is above all being pushed by Berlin. The Bratislava Declaration also included “concrete measures” for the imposition of Europe’s geopolitical and economic interests against its global competitors. “In a changing political environment” the European Council should “decide on a concrete implementation plan on security and defence” at its December meeting, the declaration stated.

Already prior to the meeting, German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen and her French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian called in a six-page paper for an implementation of the new “EU global strategy for foreign and security policy.” This required “a stronger Europe in security and defence affairs, European strategic autonomy and a credible, rapid, effective and reaction ready” European military policy, which must “now be rapidly translated into concrete plans of action.” Among other things, the German-French paper proposes the construction of an autonomous “European defence industry,” as well as “a permanent EU HQ for military and civil missions and operations.”

The European working class must decisively reject the agitation against refugees. It must counterpoise to the politics of nationalism, militarism and war, which enjoy the full backing of the entire ruling elite, their own independent strategy: the construction of an international movement against capitalism and war and the unification of Europe on a socialist basis.



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