

Berlin police shoot Iraqi refugee

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On Tuesday evening, police shot dead a 29-year-old Iraqi refugee in Berlin. According to reports, police responded when the refugee sought to attack a fellow refugee from Pakistan with a knife. Apparently the Iraqi suspected his Pakistani roommate of sexually abusing his six-year-old daughter.

The police were called in the evening to a shelter for refugees in the Kruppstrasse in Berlin Moabit, as the confrontation raged between the Iraqi father and a 27-year-old Pakistani. The fatal shooting is alleged to have taken place as the suspected Pakistani already sat handcuffed in a police car. The Iraqi refugee suddenly stormed the car and, according to witnesses, shouted: “You will not survive.”

Martin Steltner, the speaker for the Berlin public prosecutor stated that “several shots from a number of service weapons” had been fired. Investigations are being conducted of the officials concerned. The young Iraqi father of three children died during the night from his gunshot wounds.

On Wednesday morning the refugee aid organization “Moabit helps” posted a message on Facebook stating. “It is becoming ever more tragic...The refugees are subject to one humiliation after another. Inhumane accommodation, no privacy, untreated ... this family has fled to us and now has to experience such a thing.”

Initially the affected refugees were to have been temporarily housed in an inflated structure situated in the middle of Berlin. Now, over a year later, the use of the hanger has been extended by the Senate until 2017. “These cabins cannot be locked by the refugees. No protection, no security. In summer unbearably hot, in winter the air, it is a nightmarish soundscape.”

Diana Henniges, director of “Moabit helps,” roots both the conflict between the two residents and the alleged sexual assault of the Iraqi child in the prevailing conditions.

“Actually such structures are suitable for tennis,” Diana Henniges told the WSWS, “and not for storing people.” The City Mission that operates the accommodation

opened it at the end of 2014 as a refuge for the homeless in winter. In the meantime, it has been packed with refugees living in two barely separated spaces—one for families with children, the other for single men.

The appalling conditions in the refugee structure are similar to those prevailing in the airplane hangars of former Tempelhof airport, where there have been a series of suicide attempts.

The refugees are also subject to resignation and depression, having waited many months for the processing of their asylum applications without housing, without work, without training and integration and under the constant threat of deportation.

“This long, long time of waiting, so many months, is what breaks people's hearts,” said Christiane Beckmann of “Moabit helps.” One should imagine what it is like to spend a year living in such an undignified mass accommodation, in a cabin without a roof, having to stand in a queue every day for food, along with hundreds of other people from different countries and speaking different languages.

“Recently, a Syrian said to me: With Assad there was murder, there was filth, there was persecution—but we had our dignity as human beings. Here I lose my dignity!”

A proper review of the police shooting of the young Iraqi can only be undertaken after the investigation, according to the two speakers from “Moabit helps.” “It was certainly not the intention of the police to shoot someone,” Diana Henniges told the WSWS. However, the law-and-order campaigns of the Berlin Senate and the demands for better-armed police have led to a situation in which “the police intervention is ever more massive.”

When two refugees fought with one another at LaGeSo (now called LAF, State Office for Refugee Affairs) six policemen appeared immediately, they reported. “You only have to mention the word refugee and there is immediately a huge contingent of police.”

On Wednesday the state chairman of the German police union, Bodo Pfalzgraf, defended the police action to the state broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg, arguing

that the police had prevented vigilante justice and a life-threatening situation for themselves. He stated that the “very dynamic situation” in which there was a reaction time of fractions of a second, meaning that the police could not fire a non-lethal shot. In such situations the entire body of the attacker was deemed a target area.

At the same time, Pfalzgraf and the CDU took advantage of the event to demand a quicker introduction of potentially deadly tasers. The former Interior Minister, Henkel announced a test run with these weapons in two downtown districts shortly before being voted out of office in the recent Berlin election.

The death of the refugee in Tuesday night is an indictment of the Berlin Senate and the federal government. Against a background of deplorable anti-refugee tirades in the media, the government and all of the established parties have responded to the rise of the far right AfD (Alternative for Germany) with ever sharper attacks on refugees and their right to asylum and by beefing up the state.

The Left Party and the Greens, who are currently discussing forming a coalition with the SPD in Berlin, have made their own thinly veiled appeals for arming the police. On Wednesday the interior policy expert of the Left group in the Berlin House of Representatives, Hakan Tas, made no basic criticism of the fatal shooting. Instead he merely called for a check of whether the police officers had regular shooting practice and whether the shots were justified.

A few days ago, the parliamentary group chairman of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, told the FAZ newspaper, “We have always criticized cuts in police personnel. We are not the party of the weak state but want a state well equipped to fulfill its tasks.” In the same breath Wagenknecht spoke out in favour of a limit on refugees.



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