

Incoming Berlin senate plans more deportations

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At the beginning of November, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the Green Party in Berlin held coalition negotiations over refugee policy. The three parties are expected to form the new state administration in the German capital of Berlin.

According to media sources, the parties have agreed on a change of course in refugee policy. The parts of the agreement that have been made public read like a humanitarian wish list. In most cases, however, they amount to nothing more than a statement of intent that will not cost any money or place in question the asylum laws of the federal government.

The attitude of the future “red-red-green” state government is already clear on one essential point: it will continue and intensify the existing deportation policy. However, it will take place under a new guise.

Under the heading “right of residence,” the Left Party reported in its Newsletter: “The coalition will rely to a greater extent on assisted return instead of a policy of deportation and will ‘strengthen’ existing programmes through a state programme as needed.”

The term “assisted return” is a typical Left Party smokescreen. The so-called “voluntary return” has already been put into practice and is an especially two-faced method of deportation.

In cases of “voluntary return,” refugees who have been turned down for asylum are informed that they must leave the country for a period of time, usually 30 days. Then, if they do not leave “voluntarily,” they are threatened with forcible deportation for which they are forced to pay, as well as a re-entry ban of ten years. If they agree to leave, then they are rewarded with the cost of departure, a small amount of cash, and possibly also entry into a reintegration program in their home country. This has become the favoured procedure of the authorities. The number of people who return

“voluntarily” has increased throughout the country.

The “red-red-green” coalition favours this method of sending refugees back to their home countries. However, the Left Party claim that its humanitarian motivations are false. Instead, this policy is favoured for concrete monetary reasons. As Bettina Jarasch, the state president of the Berlin Greens said after the coalition negotiations at the beginning of November, deportations are “more expensive.”

However, a red-red-green government will not advocate for an end to deportation and the right of refugees to stay in the country, even though this was an election promise made by several Left Party politicians. “In the end, this coalition will also have to deport in cases where nothing else is possible,” Jarasch said in a radio interview. However, this would supposedly be only a “last resort.”

An examination of the record in Thuringia, where the Left Party has already ruled along with the SPD and the Greens since 2014, shows the reality behind this supposedly humanitarian concept of “return.” Minister President Bodo Ramelow and Dieter Lauinger, the Green Party minister for migration, justice and consumer protection, have overseen a large number of “voluntary” repatriations. At the same time, they are notorious for brutal deportations.

According to the radio station *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk*, by the end of July of this year, over 1,400 refugees, 41 percent of those obligated to leave, went “voluntarily.” Ten percent were forcibly deported. At 30.5 percent, Thuringia had the third highest percentage of migrants who were declared “obligated to leave” in the first half of 2016. In the conservative-ruled state of Bavaria the number was 39.9 percent. In Saxony, it was 35.2 percent.

Lauinger justifies the policy of “voluntary return” by

saying: “We are convinced that the voluntary departure is also cheaper, faster, easier and more humane; these are all reasons why we should follow the way of voluntary departure before we—and I will say this quite clearly, if this way is not chosen—before we reach for deportation as a method.” It is noteworthy that “humane” comes last in the list of adjectives he uses to describe the policy.

The red-red-green coalition in Berlin shares this perspective. Above all, refugees who are denied asylum must leave the country. The only thing that distinguishes their policy from that of the far right Alternative for Germany slogan, “foreigners out,” is the humanitarian pretext. The fact that Sahra Wagenknecht, the head of the Left Party faction in parliament, demanded an upper limit on the number of refugees who can enter the country was no coincidence.

The other points of agreement that have come out of the Berlin coalition talks on refugee policy are nothing but window dressing. Supposedly, they want to house refugees more quickly, integrate them into the labour market and, in this way, exploit “latitude within state law.” They do not want to introduce the “residence requirement,” which is ineffective in Berlin anyway. In addition, they want to advocate for deportation custody “on a national level,” and “in the Federal Council” they want to advocate for more naturalization, the expansion of family reunion and against the expansion of the list of so-called safe countries of origin.

Who is supposed to take this seriously after the experience with the red-red government between 2002 and 2011? The government coalition of the SPD and the Green Party, which was led by Klaus Wowereit (SPD) also deported refugees and has not even closed the deportation prison in Berlin-Grünau.

In addition, every time asylum law is tightened, the SPD provides its support. In the case of the most recent expansion the list of so-called safe countries of origin from which refugees are not granted asylum, the Greens—with whom the Left Party wishes to rule—have given their support.

The Left Party and Green Party propaganda that claims they are preparing a change of course in refugee policy is intended above all to deceive those among their voters who actively support refugees and serve as a left-wing fig leaf for the federal election due in 2017.

Meanwhile, a new massive wave of deportations has

been initiated. At the beginning of October, the federal government came to a readmission agreement with Afghanistan for rejected asylum applicants. Shortly afterwards, it also implemented a similar agreement in the EU. CDU Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziére claimed that there were “safe zones” in war torn Afghanistan. As demonstrated by the most recent attacks in Kunduz, this is pure cynicism. “This is the beginning of a brutalization of the deportation process,” commented Günther Burkhardt of the refugee advocacy organization Pro Asyl.

The Afghanistan agreement also carries the signature of the SDP, with whom the Left Party and the Greens want to enter a coalition. There is growing fear among Afghani refugees, and there have been protest demonstrations in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

In this context, the announcement of an increase in “voluntary” returns by the red-red-green government takes on an especially cynical coloration. The Left Party, the Greens and the SPD are offering to manage future mass deportations better and more efficiently.



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