

Germany in 2016: Mass deportations and brutality toward refugees

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The ruthlessness and brutality of Germany's authorities against refugees now knows almost no bounds. In 2016 alone, some 25,000 desperate people were deported. Again and again, families are torn apart, children repatriated despite serious illness to war-torn homelands and refugees snatched from their beds without warning in the middle of the night.

The number of so-called "voluntary returners" is even higher, reaching some 55,000 in 2016. The "voluntary" nature of the return lies in the fact that following rejection of their asylum claims, refugees are given an ultimatum: either leave the country within a specified time period and receive some minimal support for their departure, or be forcibly deported and often bear the cost of it themselves. Those in this category are then banned from re-entry to Germany.

Not infrequently, part of a family is deported, so the remaining members follow them. This too is recorded as a "voluntary" return.

The Left Party celebrates this particularly insidious form of brutality as a "humane" alternative to deportation. Thuringia, the only German state under Left Party rule, with 1,726 so-called voluntary returns between January and November 2016, ranks second among the states behind Saxony.

In addition to these ruthless deportation practices, *Der Spiegel* recently published a survey revealing that refugees are treated badly as soon as they arrive in Germany. In nearly 1,500 cases over the past two years, property was confiscated from refugees. The sums involved totalled "at least 863,000 euros [\$US 903,000]", according to the news weekly.

The leader in this practice is the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-Social Democratic Party (SPD) coalition ruling Saxony, which has seized a total of 328,432 euros in 411 cases. This act of mass theft occurred

despite the fact that Saxony only accepted five percent of asylum seekers under the Königstein formula, which forms the basis for the distribution of refugees in Germany.

This operation is based on Paragraph 7a of the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act. According to this law, "a surety can be demanded from those entitled to benefits". An exception is made for "an allowance of 200 euros". Bavaria and Baden Wurttemberg each permit a higher allowance.

Patrick Irmer, spokesman for the Saxony Refugee Council, told *Der Spiegel* he knew of at least four cases in which those affected were only allowed to keep a minimal 50 euros, although the relevant regulations on the allowance were already in force.

Under the current legislation, the confiscation of money from refugees can take place forcibly and without warning. In Bavaria, North Rhine Westphalia and Schleswig Holstein this means that asylum seekers are routinely searched if they are suspected of having any items of value on their person.

While most German states only confiscate cash, Rhineland Palatinate and Middle Franconia impound automobiles too. This imposes a massive curtailment of freedom of movement on refugees and increases the pressure on them to "voluntarily" return. The vehicles are only returned upon their leaving the country.

Hamburg, by its own account, is the only state where no such actions are carried out. According to *Der Spiegel*, Brandenburg, Bremen, Saxony Anhalt and Lower Saxony dispense with the seizure of assets, but in return they provide accommodation and meals on account or pay out lower benefits.

These confiscations bear startling similarities to the Nazi regime's actions against the Jewish population in the 1930s. Before the construction of the large

extermination camps, Jews were forced to sell their property well below its value, or it was simply taken from them. They were excluded from social life, through being denied access to public buildings and events, and their children were not allowed to attend state schools.

Eighty years later, the same politicians who solemnly declare in speeches that the memory of the “rupture of civilization of the Shoah” must be maintained, now rail against asylum seekers.

The list of vile measures taken by the authorities and reactionary media campaigns is growing: it includes the hysteria over alleged mass sexual attacks by asylum seekers in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015-16, for which no serious evidence has yet been produced; the restriction on access to public pools in Bonn; the inhumane accommodation in gyms, former hangars and container villages; the demands for a *burqa* ban; and the seizure of the already minimal assets of asylum seekers. These actions can only be understood as a fundamental attack on the rights of the entire working class.

This deeply anti-democratic and authoritarian trend has culminated recently in the first mass deportations to Afghanistan. On its website, the German foreign ministry “warns against travel to Afghanistan”. Whoever still travels there, it explains, must be aware of the risk from terrorist or criminal acts of violence. Naturally, the ministry does not mention that for 15 years Germany has been a belligerent power directly responsible for this “violence”. Now German authorities are forcing people fleeing the war and terror to return to Afghanistan, thus again endangering their lives.



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