

Demonstration in Germany against deportations to Afghanistan

Marianne Arens
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More than a thousand people protested last Saturday in Frankfurt against the German government's deportation of refugees to Afghanistan. After a rally at the central Opernplatz square, a growing number of people joined the peaceful demonstration in the downtown area.

On December 14, 34 Afghan refugees were deported in a special charter plane from the Rhein-Main Airport, and additional group deportations to Kabul are planned later this month. Last year, a total of 25,000 people were deported from Germany, primarily from the Frankfurt Airport.

The rally in front of the old opera house was called on January 7 by the Frankfurt Afghan Hindu Cultural Association and other associations of Hindus and Sikhs. Their placards read "Stop Deportation and Persecution," "We are human beings and not numbers!" "Equal Rights for Refugees," "Keep families together," and "I would like to live as a human being instead of dying as a Sikh in Afghanistan."

Before 1980, up to 220,000 Hindus and Sikhs lived in Afghanistan, according to a spokesperson of the organizers. However, their number has fallen to 1,300 because under neither the Taliban nor the current NATO-supported government has it been possible for them to live a peaceful life, free of physical threat. In reality, the country is highly unsafe for all civilians today.

"We came to Germany with high hopes," continued the spokesperson. "We have settled down and become a part of the society and support newcomers whenever we can. But that belongs to the past." The group deportations into a land of crisis have struck refugee communities from Afghanistan at the heart, he said: "The war in Afghanistan has caught up to us. Once again, families will be torn apart, we must once again

fear for our relatives."

Janine Wissler spoke for the Left Party in Hesse and called briefly and perfunctorily for a halt to the deportations: "The group deportations to Afghanistan must be ended," said the deputy Left Party president, who is also a member of the pseudo-left group Marx21.

She remained silent on an important issue: the Left Party supports deportations of refugees in Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Berlin, where it is in the government. In part, it supports these deportations in the form of the so-called "voluntary return." The "voluntariness" consists in forcing rejected asylum applicants to accept the offer of "voluntary departure" if they don't want to be forced to leave at their own expense and in some cases face separation from their families. The Left Party does not question the asylum laws of the federal government.

Immediately after Wissler spoke, two refugee aid personnel sharply criticized the practice of "voluntary departure," without mentioning the Left Party by name, however. Tina and Daniel of the Wiesbaden Refugee Council said that anyone who gives credence to the official line about "safe" countries of origin and pressures the refugees to return voluntarily is acting hastily and irresponsibly. This practice places the refugees in enormous danger, they said.

As several speakers emphasized, the security situation deteriorated massively in Afghanistan last year. The foreign office has warned German tourists and business people against even short-term travel in the country. Afghanistan is anything but a "safe country of origin": random raids by the Taliban and NATO air attacks endanger people day in and day out. A spokesperson reported that last week a Sikh representative in Kunduz was shot openly in the street: "Hindus and Sikhs are being sent to their deaths with eyes open."

Many German opponents of deportations, above all young people, took part in the demonstration. The mass deportation of refugees has provoked widespread horror and the plans for central deportation centres remind many of the Nazi concentration camps. If the unions and opposition parties had not systematically boycotted and isolated the opposition, then the rally and demonstration could easily have been 10 times as large.

But the Greens and the Left Party support the refugee deportation practice. Winfried Kretschmann, Green Party minister president from Baden-Württemberg, recently told the press that he supports the designation of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria as “safe countries of origin.” In the state of Thuringia, where the Left Party leads the state government under Bodo Ramelow, it has organized a refugee policy that is just as brutal as in the rest of the country. Last year, Thuringia was at second place in Germany with 1,762 “voluntary” returns between January and November 2016.

Since last fall, the German federal government, which has called Afghanistan a safe country of origin, has maintained a cynical agreement with the government in Kabul concerning rejected asylum applicants. Parallel to this, the federal parliament has prolonged the engagement of the federal army in Afghanistan.

Federal Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière is preparing new deportation centres near the large German airports as part of his plans to centralize the entire security apparatus, and Chancellor Angela Merkel is supporting this course with her injunction “deport, deport, deport.”

The Hesse Minister President Volker Bouffier (Christian Democratic Union) suggested several days ago that refugees picked up in the Mediterranean should be sent back to Africa. In addition, special intake centres should be built in Tunisia or Egypt, he said. Bouffier added that he completely supported a similar suggestion from the Christian Social Union, one of Merkel’s coalition partners at the federal level.

Federal President of the SPD Sigmar Gabriel criticized Thomas de Maizière’s police-state plans from the right, downplaying them as purely “symbolic politics.” And Federal Minister of Justice Heiko Maas (SPD) spoke of a “preventive offensive” and demanded changed laws, so that detention pending deportation would also be possible when the countries of origin do not cooperate.

Sahra Wagenknecht, head of the Left Party faction in the federal parliament, has adopted the rhetoric of the ultra-right Alternative for Germany’s opposition to Merkel almost word for word. In an interview with *Stern* magazine she accused the chancellor of “joint responsibility” for the attack on the Berlin Christmas Market and criticized her for her “uncontrolled opening of the border” and for hobbling the police with insufficient funds to expand personnel or equipment in the face of a “dangerous situation.”



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