

Red-red-green Berlin state Senate continues deportations

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The new Berlin Senate composed of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Left Party and Green Party had promised a more humane refugee policy. The Left Party in particular insisted that coalition negotiations had initiated a fundamental shift in deportation practice and the inhumane treatment of refugees. The reality is starkly different. In practice, the red-red-green Senate is feverishly implementing the right-wing asylum and deportation policies of the federal government, a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the SPD.

In December 2016, the same month the new state government assumed power, 51 refugees were deported from Berlin. In response to an information request, the Berlin Senate made clear that “direct deportations without detention via group charter flights” would “continue to the West Balkans and Moldavia.”

The Berlin government has also failed to end deportations of refugees back to war-torn Afghanistan. According to *Tagesspiegel*, Interior Senator Andreas Geisel (SPD) emphasized at the end of February that “German federal law [is valid] in Berlin as well,” and that Berlin would tamely toe the line.

The Left Party has categorically refused to protect Afghan refugees in the states where it holds power. In the state of Brandenburg, where the Left Party heads the ministries of justice, social services and finance, it has behaved similarly.

In Brandenburg, the majority of state representatives rejected a motion lodged by the Greens, the opposition party in parliament, calling for a cessation of deportations to Afghanistan. As the *Potsdamer Nachrichten* wrote in March, the Brandenburg coalition is hiding behind the justification that “for the evaluation of the security situation in a destination country, the federal government, not the state of

Brandenburg is responsible.”

The German government has passed a motion permitting refugees to be deported back to war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Instead, the Brandenburg state parliament came to the meaningless decision with the votes of the SPD and Left Party, that “discretionary powers employed in right of residence cases” and a “special need for protection of the affected parties according to EU guidelines” should be checked prior to every deportation.

An Afghan refugee became a victim of this cynical policy shortly thereafter. He was abducted by police at his place of work in Brandenburg (Havel), transferred to Bavaria and then deported with 14 other Afghans from Munich to Kabul on March 27.

The Afghan, whose asylum application was rejected in 2014, had lived in Germany for seven years. The extension of his stay ran out on April 20. Another extension would have been possible and after another year he could have received a residency permit.

With the full participation of the Left Party, the governments in Berlin and Brandenburg are pursuing the measures outlined in the “15 Point Plans,” agreed by state premiers in February. They are implementing Chancellor Angela Merkel’s demand for “Deportation, deportation and once again deportation.”

Ministers from Berlin and Brandenburg raised no principled objections to the deportation policies at the ministers’ meeting. The Greens had already declared in a joint paper signed by 10 states that they were ready to participate in deportations to Afghanistan. This includes the Greens in Berlin.

At the end of February, Berlin’s Interior Senator Geisel visited the deportation centre of the federal police in Berlin-Schönefeld along with his counterparts,

Karl-Heinz Schröter (SPD) and Thomas de Maizière (CDU). Only a short time before this, 124 people were sent from this location to Moldavia and Albania. According to the federal police, such group deportations take place about twice a month.

The responsibilities of the individual stations at the deportation centre include the transfer of deportation documents from the state police to the federal police, the carrying out of identity checks, and investigations of those forced to leave. These humiliating “investigations” involve forcing victims to completely undress and submit to a full cavity search.

The “Centre for the Support for Returns” (ZUR) was opened by Federal Interior Minister de Maizière in Berlin-Wilmersdorf at the end of March. In May, the ZUR will begin its work. In future, between 40 and 50 federal and state officials will work under the leadership of the Federal Interior Ministry to send people as quickly as possible to Afghanistan, Morocco and Tunisia, even though the security situation in these countries is dire.

The federal government is counting on the collaboration of the red-red-green Senate in Berlin. In the new state government’s coalition agreement, this course was prepared with the formulation that refugees would be deported only as a “last resort” and that “voluntary returns” would be supported. This is, of course, deportation, merely in different packaging.

Last year, three-quarters of the approximately 25,000 deportations nationwide were to West Balkan states. In Berlin as well, most deportations have been to the Balkans.

More than 10,000 people who currently live in Berlin will be forced to leave. Many of these people have had traumatic experiences in their home countries or while fleeing. The threatened mass deportations from Germany have pushed many refugees to despair. A growing number have turned to suicide.

In recent days, sensational accounts of increasing prostitution among young refugees in the Berlin Tiergarten have been making the rounds. Human rights and aid organizations have confirmed that, along with drug problems, prostitution is on the rise. This is the result of overfilled emergency housing, the work ban, and harassment by officials and housing management.

According to RBB-Online, young men from Afghanistan and Pakistan are disproportionately

affected, that is, precisely those countries denied the recognition of protected status by federal government. Ralf Rötten, president of the association “Help for Boys Inc.” spoke on this point and said that this was one of the few ways they have of earning money. “They are for the most part not permitted to take a course on the German language, go to school or pursue any form of work,” Rötten said.

Some of the refugees are still minors and most of them have only just come of age. They prostitute themselves for “room and board,” according to refugee aid workers, and can neither write nor speak German and are not in a position to fill out a social assistance application.

They often become homeless after disputes with housing management or minor violations of the house rules, such as smoking.

The social senator of the Left Party, Elke Breitenbach, is responsible in the Berlin Senate for the lodging of refugees and their social protection. She is celebrated in the media because she is “releasing” refugees who were packed into cramped quarters in indescribable conditions in gyms. As a supposedly more “humane” alternative, she is now advocating placing these people in storage container areas, so-called “Tempohomes,” and separating them from the population in ghettos called “modular refugee lodgings (MUF).”

One of the gyms was not vacated, however, as the Berlin refugee council advocated. It is the gym in Berlin-Lichtenberg, which is a special camp for the easier deportations of refugees from Moldavia, mostly Roma.

In practice, the “refugee humanitarianism” of the Left Party means deportations of Balkan refugees back to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria and other war-torn countries after speedy procedures and a brief stay in Tempohomes and MUFs.



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