

Berlin's "Red-Red-Green" Senate steps up deportations

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In the first quarter of 2017, the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Left Party-Green Senate ("red-red-green") in Berlin deported more people than its predecessor over the same period a year ago. The former Senate was a coalition of the SPD and the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Following a request for information from the CDU opposition in the Senate, officials revealed that Berlin, one of Germany's 16 constituent states, deported 712 refugees from January through March 2017. This is 191 more than in the same period last year. When asked whether Berlin was fulfilling the demands of the federal government for more deportations, the SPD-run interior administration replied: "The number of deportations has already steadily increased."

The program agreed by the SPD, Left Party and Green coalition referred to encouraging "voluntary return" instead of deportation, but this policy was never aimed at protecting refugees. Although Germany has a nominal policy of banning expulsions to countries where deportees' lives would be placed in danger, Interior Senator Andreas Geisel (SPD) told the media that there would not be a halt to deportations to Afghanistan—a country devastated by war and one of the most dangerous places on earth.

The Berlin administration is using fraudulent and reactionary claims about "potential threats" to security as a pretext for its deportation policy.

This is clear from a recent incident involving five young Afghans who scuffled in the subway, causing a woman to fall from her bicycle. The media and the SPD-led interior administration instantly took up the issue and spoke of a "brutal act" by a group of young Afghan men who "attacked and injured" a woman. For her part, the cyclist, who was shocked but only slightly injured, reported to a Berlin radio station that one of the men had kicked her, but "the others remained in the group had looked to see whether I was hurt" and then picked up her bike for her.

Despite this, Martin Pallgren, the spokesman for the interior administration, threatened: "If the men are found

guilty they will be deported to Afghanistan." The Berlin Refugee Council described his reaction as "double punishment": "First, punishment according to the German Criminal Code, and second, a much worse punishment, deportation to a war zone where there is acute threat to life and limb, to a country full of violence, anarchy, hunger and death!"

A recent report by UNAMA (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) pointed to the high number of war victims in Afghanistan, including increasing numbers of women and children. In the first quarter of 2017, for example, 735 children died or were injured, three percent more than in the previous quarter. From January through the end of March this year, 76,640 people fled the country due to the security threats. Some 27 of 34 provinces in Afghanistan are considered dangerous, according to the report.

The red-red-green Senate is also deporting people back to so-called safe countries of origin, especially in the Balkan and Eastern European region. Particularly affected are refugees from the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, including many members of the persecuted Roma minority.

Canan Bayram, the refugee spokesperson for the Berlin Greens, justified this policy by declaring that the city had a "special authority" for this refugee group. Moldovans from throughout Germany are sent to Berlin and repatriated in collective deportation actions.

Bayram added, "I find every deportation wrong, but it is difficult to find a solution at a state level in the case of Moldova because Berlin assesses the security situation in the same manner as the federal government, as is also the case with Afghanistan."

In order to implement federal policy, Elke Breitenbach (Left Party), Berlin's social affairs minister, has made available a run-down gymnasium in Berlin's Friedrichsfelde suburb as accommodation for the refugees. It was originally set up in 2015 as a "collection point for people with a little chance of obtaining residency" by the then social affairs senator, Mario Czaja (CDU).

Breitenbach recently boasted that every gym in the city

used to house refugees had been vacated. In fact, there are still around eighty people, including many children, residing in an old gym in Friedrichsfelde.

In response to a protest from the refugee council, Senator Breitenbach claimed on Facebook: “We have first cleared those gyms that are used for sports.” The social affairs department argues that the gym in Friedrichsfelde is not fit for sports. The Left Party, however, has no reservations about housing refugees destined for deportation in a gymnasium that needs repairs.

The miserable role played by the Left Party in regard to refugee policy was made particularly clear toward the end of April, when the city’s social affairs department tried to expel the volunteer refugee aid group “Moabit hilft” [“Moabit helps”] from its site at the premises of LaGeSo, Berlin’s office for health and social affairs. The department sent a eviction notice to the organisation which has assisted thousands of refugees since 2015, and has become a symbol of the solidarity of the population of Berlin.

After public protests, the social affairs administration declared it was prepared to tolerate the presence of the organisation until the end of 2017. Christiane Beckmann, on behalf of “Moabit hilft,” told the WSWS that the rent payment for the premises it occupies still has to be worked out and the future beyond 2017 is entirely unclear.

Anger is growing at the red-red-green Senate’s refugee policy. In a May 2 “Open Letter,” Berlin refugee initiatives complained about the wretched conditions prevailing for refugees. The letter’s catalog of sixteen complaints is a severe indictment of the “left” Senate’s politics.

For example, refugees are not receiving residency permits from the authorities even if they have been officially recognized. Unable to apply for their own accommodation, refugees must continue living in emergency housing, where they receive shoddy pre-cooked food and miserly aid payments. Under-age refugees are denied official recognition, there is not enough space in supervised housing communities to accommodate them and they are not integrated into regular classes in schools. The emergency shelters are inadequately equipped and there is repeated “violence by security and personnel,” in addition to vindictive penalties meted out to young refugees because of petty breaches of the rules.

The initiatives called for free movement for those in emergency accommodation, “no containers to be allowed on the grounds of the former Tempelhof airport” and more accommodation in proper housing. In Berlin, 13,400 refugees still live in mass accommodation, some of them having lived there for more than a year. The newly built alternatives such as Tempohomes (containers) or Modular homes (MuF), which the Left Party claims are an

improvement, in fact offer no relief. Recently, a family of seven was squeezed into one such MuF apartment 46 square meters [495 square feet] in size.

In conclusion, the relief organizations demanded a “clear commitment by Berlin to stop deportations to Afghanistan” and full rights for families to arrange for their children and relatives abroad to join them, as well as a “discussion between the Senate and voluntary organisations on terms of equality.”

Regarding the last point, a spokeswoman for “Moabit hilft,” Diana Henniges, complained in the online magazine Luxemburg.de: “In the [SPD-Left Party-Green] coalition agreement a ‘citizens’ dialogue’ was promised, an exchange ... But the sad truth is: nothing has happened.”

Compared to the situation under the former SPD-CDU Senate, it was even more difficult now to talk to the authorities “and get information.” Previously there had been possibilities to discuss refugee issues at state conferences and with various committees. “This no longer exists. Now the message is ‘We’ll solve it for you, just trust us....’” At the same time the administration was riddled with the “same people we argued with furiously two years ago.”

The warnings made by the WSWS during and after the Berlin election campaign have been confirmed: the renewed involvement of the Left Party in the Berlin Senate has not led to a more social or humane policy in the interests of the population. The special role of the Left Party in the administration is to implement a right-wing, pro-capitalist policy in all spheres of policy that affect not only refugees, but every section of the working class—dressed up in empty left phraseology.



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