

Berlin Senate authorises brutal deportation of refugee family before Christmas

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On December 15 the Ajazaj family was woken at three in the morning. Police officers stood at the door of their flat in the Berlin suburb of Lichtenrade and demanded the family pack essential baggage. A van was waiting on the street to transport the parents with their three daughters, Klara, 8, Lejman, 4, and six-month-old Carolina to the city's main airport Schöenefeld. At 8:30 a.m., a deportation plane then flew the family to Tirana, the Albanian capital.

The family has lived in Germany since February 2015. After rejection of their application for asylum, the family received a temporary stay in 2016. The father, 31-year-old Xhezo Ajazaj, had made a name for himself as a tiler in a local company. His 29-year-old wife Artjola planned to begin training as a geriatric nurse. Klara, in the third grade of the Käthe Kollwitz elementary school, and her sister Lejman speak more German than Albanian.

All of the family's efforts to integrate were fruitless. A vote by the Berlin Hardship Commission recommending a right to stay for the family was rejected out of hand by Berlin Interior Senator Andreas Geisel (SPD). He declared that "prevailing law" had to be implemented and went onto defend the nighttime raid on the family.

Neighbours and friends of the family, including the manager of the firm for which Xhezo Ajazaj worked, have angrily protested against the brutal action of the Berlin Senate—a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Left Party and Greens. A petition against the deportation on the Internet platform change.org, addressed to the Immigration Office and Interior Senator Geisel, received 2,000 signatures in the space of two weeks.

This latest deportation underlines the vicious nature of the refugee policy of the Berlin coalition. The Left

Party, which fills the post of Senator for Social Affairs and Integration (Elke Breitenbach), and the Greens play a particularly despicable role. They are quite prepared to criticise such deportations verbally but in practice play along.

Hakan Tas, Left Party spokesman for internal affairs, declared that even former Interior Senator Henkel, a Christian Democrat, had not organised such deportations in winter. Katina Schubert, the leader of the Berlin Left Party, tweeted succinctly that the deportation contradicts "the spirit of the coalition agreement" and a "human rights-based integration policy." The Interior Senator had failed to use his "room for maneuver," she complained.

Green MEP and immigration lawyer Canan Bayram complained that "getting someone out of their flat at three o'clock" was not allowed and "incompatible with the coalition agreement." Based on the crimes of the Nazis, when "people were picked up and deported at night," she said there was general agreement "not to undertake state action before six a.m."

The fact is that neither Left Party nor the Greens prevented the deportation. Their criticisms merely provide a fig leaf for the reactionary policies of the SPD and are aimed at silencing all opposition.

Between January and the end of October 2017, the Berlin Senate deported a total of 1,427 people, including 632 to Moldova, 150 to Albania, 101 to Kosovo and—despite protests from the refugee organisation Pro Asyl—19 to Iraq, where war still rages. In November, a further 122 were deported, bringing the total to 1,549. This figure will rise further when details of the deportations in December emerge.

Nationwide, more than 22,000 people had been deported by October. In addition, there were tens of thousands of "voluntary" returns. Asylum seekers from

so-called “safe countries of origin” were especially affected. The list of such countries include the Balkan states, including the NATO member Albania. Asylum applications of refugees from these countries are rejected out of hand.

Refugees have also been deported to Afghanistan, which has been repeatedly rocked by bombings and is not yet considered a safe country of origin. According to the federal Interior Minister de Maizière (CDU), those deported are regarded as “threats.” In fact, many of the deportation transports have included people who have been living productive lives in Germany for years and have not even committed minor traffic offences.

So far the Berlin state government, which has been in office for over a year, has refused to participate in mass deportations to Afghanistan. Currently, however, coalition leaders are discussing changing their policy to include deporting those alleged to be “threats.”

At the same time, the Berlin Senate is working closely with the Immigration Office to force as many refugees as possible to “return voluntarily” after their asylum applications have been rejected. This group includes Afghans. In the coalition program of the SPD, the Left and the Greens in Berlin, this policy of “voluntary return” was adopted as an allegedly more humane alternative to forcible deportation.

Taking into account the many people “persuaded” to return to avoid forced deportation, the number of “repatriations” from Berlin in 2017 has more than doubled.

The Berlin Senate is increasingly pursuing the same racist course as the current conservative- social democratic federal coalition, a deliberately targeted policy of “foreigners out.” This is confirmed by a document from the senate administration, reported on by the *Berliner Morgenpost* at the end of November.

Together with two social democratic senators from Bremen and Hamburg, Geisel wants to enforce an extension of residence requirements for refugees, which would ban refugees from leaving their assigned neighbourhoods. The legal regulation is due to expire in August 2019. The SPD senators claim that the abolition of the residence restriction would lead to an increased influx of refugees into cities and overload social services.

It is a blatant attempt by the SPD to incite impoverished sections of the population in Berlin,

dependent on Hartz IV and other social benefits, against those fleeing war and misery, who in the past have experienced considerable social solidarity in German cities.



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