

German politician proposes “final solution” of the refugee question

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The current backroom talks between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Union parties—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU)—are aimed at establishing another grand coalition government pledged to carrying out further attacks on democratic rights. In this respect, attacks on the rights of refugees are a linchpin for undermining the basic democratic rights of the entire working class.

To this end, German politicians are reviving the vilest traditions of National Socialism (Nazism). This was confirmed most recently by a statement made by a leading CSU politician, Manfred Weber, who heads the conservative European People’s Party faction in the European Parliament. On January 5, at a closed-door meeting of the CSU parliamentary group, Weber declared, “In 2018, the central European issue will be a final solution to the refugee issue.”

The parallel to the phrase “final solution of the Jewish question” used by the Nazis to describe the murder of millions of Jews was so obvious that several newspapers felt obliged to comment.

In order to “solve” the “problem” at a European level, Weber called for closer cooperation with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who attended the CSU meeting as an honoured guest. Orbán is notorious for his brutal treatment of refugees, who are systematically deprived of basic human rights in Hungary.

Following a massive backlash on social media, Weber responded by claiming that his statement had been subject to “deliberate misinterpretation.”

The projects currently being discussed in relation to refugee and asylum policy testify to a rapid lurch to the right across the entire political spectrum. The CDU, CSU and Greens, in their previous negotiations with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), had already agreed on a tightening of asylum policy. However, the proposals and demands that are now being discussed for a future grand coalition go much further.

To date, the following measures have evidently been agreed:

* A maximum of 200,000 refugees are to be admitted to Germany each year. Thomas Strobl (CDU), deputy to the premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann (Greens), has gone so far as to plead in a local newspaper for a

limit of just 65,000 annually.

* The Maghreb states (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) are to be definitively classified as “safe countries of origin.” This means that all refugees from these countries lose their status as “tolerated” migrants and can be deported immediately. The CDU-CSU is even calling for deportations to Syria and all parties are already organising deportations to Afghanistan, in open disregard of the assessment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of the situation in these war-torn countries.

* The suspension of family reunification for refugees with limited protection status is to be extended indefinitely. The previous suspension is due to expire in March.

* For all newly arriving asylum seekers, “decision-making and repatriation centres” are to be set up, in which people are required to remain in one centre until their case is settled. Such centres already exist in Bamberg, Ingolstadt and Heidelberg. The immigrants there receive basic material benefits as well as a social allowance of 120 euros (adults) and 67 euros (children) per month.

CSU parliamentary leader Alexander Dobrindt is also demanding that asylum seekers be restricted to the lowest level of social assistance for three years. Up to now, this restriction has applied to asylum seekers for a period of 15 months. Those refused residency and “tolerated” refugees will be denied any sort of financial assistance.

This last demand clearly contradicts a judgment of the Federal Constitutional Court, which decided two years ago that the resulting 30 percent lowering of payments to refugees was unconstitutional.

The proposals are accompanied by a vicious media campaign. In the first week of January, a study by the Lower Saxony criminologist Christian Pfeiffer, commissioned by the Ministry for Family Affairs, was used to this end. It alleged that there was a “link between refugees and crime,” declaring that there had been an increase in violent crime of 10.4 percent between 2014 and 2016. According to the study, 92 percent of this increase is due to felonies committed by refugees.

The study was promoted heavily by the media to demonstrate that young male refugees were more prone to crime and therefore more likely to be deported. In reality, the study

permits a very different interpretation: it is precisely the neglect and lack of prospects for young people vegetating in overcrowded camps and “without any perspective to stay” that leads to desperation and sometimes criminal acts. The causes are social, not ethnic.

The entire political establishment, from the right to the so-called left, is now pursuing an xenophobic course that largely corresponds to the line of the far-right Alternative for Germany. This is confirmed by statements made by leading politicians.

Left Party leaders Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine recently stated in *Die Welt* that they did not support their own party’s draft paper on immigration. Any demand for “open borders for all people,” declared Wagenknecht, was at most a “vision of the future,” but “not a demand for today’s world.”

Lafontaine added, “Right of residency and 1,050 euros for all who come to us are unrealistic proposals.” Wagenknecht heads the Left Party faction in the German parliament and Lafontaine is a former chairman of the party.

But it is above all the SPD that has emerged as the advocate of the reactionary asylum legislation. The former interior minister of the state of North Rhine Westphalia, Ralf Jäger introduced a decree in December 2016 whereby asylum seekers or tolerated refugees who cannot be found at a specific time can be hunted down and detained immediately.

In the previous grand coalition government, the SPD launched Asylum Package II in March 2016, which opened the door to the destruction of basic democratic rights for refugees. Today, SPD ministers often boast of their efficiency in carrying out deportations. At the end of November 2017, Berlin Interior Senator Andreas Geisel boasted that 1,500 people had been deported from Berlin since the start of the year.

As for the Free Democratic Party, its refugee policy increasingly resembles that of its fellow neo-liberal Austrian party, the Freedom Party, which is pursuing a blatantly far-right course. FDP Chairman Christian Lindner is now in favour of deporting minors. He hypocritically limits his demand to “underage criminal asylum seekers,” but the deportation of children in Germany sets an abominable precedent.

It is not just the rhetoric of politicians calling for a “final solution to the refugee question” and calls for the “bundling” (the Nazis called it “concentration”) of asylum seekers in “repatriation centres” that recall the criminal activities of the Third Reich. The link is also evident in the reactionary, police-bureaucratic manner with which government authorities act against refugees. Entire families are torn from their beds in the early hours by armed police for deportation. Their entire lives are destroyed.

According to official figures, 22,190 people were deported from Germany between January and November 2017. This corresponds approximately to the number of deportations in 2016, when 25,000 people were deported in twelve months.

The number of immigrants deported to the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia has risen sharply since last

year. This is especially true for the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where the new CDU-FDP administration led by Premier Joachim Stamp (FDP) has created a specific “refugee minister.” Stamp bragged that with the deportations, “We have achieved our first remarkable successes.” Last year, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia deported more than 6,000 refugees, almost 1,000 more than in 2016. In addition, there were almost 11,000 so-called “voluntary returnees.”

Many people have been deported to the Balkans. Entire families who have been living in Germany for many years are deported so suddenly that they are unable to say their farewells or properly pack their belongings. This is especially the case in the state of Thuringia, governed by the Left Party. According to the Ministry of Migration, there were 600 deportations in Thuringia up to November. Over the same period, 582 refugees left the small state as part of its so-called “voluntary” repatriation scheme.

Most of the deportations from Thuringia were to western Balkan states, above all to Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. Recently, the Refugee Council of Thuringia drew attention to the deportation of the Rustemi family. Although the young father was involved in a training program and learning German, the entire family, including two small children, was deported to Kosovo.

Another brutal deportation, from North Rhine-Westphalia, was reported shortly before Christmas. Family B. with four children was awakened on December 13 at 5 in the morning and deported from Dusseldorf Airport to Pristina. Only the eldest son (17), who was not at home, was spared deportation. In January, a committee of the North Rhine-Westphalia parliament was formed to decide on the status of the family.

The parents had grown up in Germany but had been denied a residency permit and had to leave for Kosovo at the turn of the millennium, where they experienced the pogroms carried out against Roma in the country. They returned to Germany and, after a year-long odyssey, arrived in Münsterland, where the five children attended school.

Today, the children speak only German and some Romanesque, but not Albanian. Since Kosovo is considered a “safe country of origin,” the remaining six family members were expelled to a Roma neighbourhood in the city of Gjakova, where there is no accommodation, work or social benefits.



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