Alleged corruption scandal in Bremen used to restrict right to asylum in Germany

Martin Kreickenbaum
26 April 2018

Rumours about alleged cases of corruption in the German city of Bremen during decisions on applications for asylum have been used over recent days to launch a right-wing campaign against supposedly unlawfully-issued asylum decisions and to further curtail the already heavily restricted right to asylum. A closer inspection shows that the accusations are groundless.

The floodgates were opened by a report published last Friday morning in the daily *Süddeutsche zeitung*, and broadcasters NDR and Radio Bremen. Under the sensationalist title "Suspicions of wide-ranging corruption scandal at the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees," the nominally liberal *Süddeutsche* reported in its online edition that the head of the Federal Office's Bremen division "allegedly granted asylum in around 2,000 cases" between 2013 and 2017 "although the legal prerequisites were not present."

The incident, which the *Bild* tabloid blew up into a "major corruption scandal," was not even a storm in a teacup. In reality, the case does not involve any corruption, since the head of the Bremen office neither received money nor benefits in kind for herself or a third party, or any "unlawfully" issued positive asylum decisions.

Those involved in the overwhelming majority of the cases being called into question are members of the Yazidi religious group who were forced to flee Syria and Iraq, and are guaranteed a right to protection under German asylum law.

The Yazidis, who lived in northern Syria and Iraq, were brutally persecuted during the early stages of the advances of the so-called Islamic State, which was initially backed by the imperialist powers, particularly the United States. They were systematically enslaved, raped, abused, and executed. Yazidis were recognised as having refugee status in Germany according to the Geneva Convention and European Convention of Human Rights in well over 90 percent of the cases.

The civil servant is therefore merely being accused of taking control of the decision-making process, even though the Bremen office was not responsible for the cases, and of failing to inquire systematically as to whether the applicants had previously filed asylum applications in another European Union state.

Nonetheless, the Bremen state prosecutor is investigating the civil servant, as well as three lawyers and an interpreter, for alleged bribery and conspiring "as a criminal gang to encourage the filing of abusive asylum applications." Private apartments and lawyers' offices were raided, and the *Süddeutsche* rushed to report that a weapon with ammunition had been found, as if the group under investigation was a bunch of mafia gangsters.

In reality, the civil servant in Bremen acted out of humanitarian considerations. She had been closely following the fate of the Yazidis and positively cited reports from the refugee aid organisation ProAsyl on Twitter.

This humane reaction to the plight of refugees is now being turned into a criminal offence. The goal is to make an example of her to prohibit similarly humanitarian responses to those seeking sanctuary. It is significant that the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees became aware of the case when the Bremen office was able to stop the deportation of a Kurdish family to Iraq at the last minute.

Boris Pistorius, the Minister for the Interior in the state of Lower Saxony, wrote a sharply-worded letter to the Federal Office's then head, Frank-Jürgen Weise, in which he bitterly complained about the failure to carry out the deportation because the Kurdish family had received a positive asylum decision from the state of Bremen. "The procedural manner of the Bremen office's decision is totally incomprehensible," raged Pistorius, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Yet the scandal is not the recognition of asylum claims from people who are fleeing war, persecution, and misery. Rather, the scandal is that German authorities, and state and federal governments refuse to grant these desperate people refugee status and ruthlessly deport them.

According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer was "deeply affected" by

© World Socialist Web Site

the case. He announced the formation of an investigative commission to find out if there are “systemic shortcomings” in asylum decisions. In other words, the aim is to apply even more pressure to asylum decision-makers so that they issue as few positive decisions as possible.

The manufactured corruption scandal was accompanied by a report in the *Bild* newspaper that the Immigration and Refugee Office had stopped working with 2,100 interpreters because “accumulated violations” had taken place “in many cases.” Others had their employment terminated due to a lack of expertise.

The report was intended to suggest that the interpreters, by providing false translations, caused the authorities to make incorrect asylum decisions. This gross accusation is utterly false from a technical standpoint.

In reality, only 30 interpreters will no longer participate in asylum hearings because they violated the Office’s “code of conduct,” although it remains entirely unclear what they were accused of doing. All other cases result from the wave of job cuts currently being implemented across the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees.

The interpreters are not employed directly by the Federal Office, but are hired from a pool on an hourly or daily basis. When thousands of asylum applications were being processed in 2016 and 2017, the authorities expanded the pool and reduced the qualification requirements to join it. However, interpreters must now produce evidence that they have sufficient knowledge of the German language. On this basis alone, the number of interpreters dropped by around a third to roughly 5,200.

The sensationalist articles calling positive asylum decisions into question and spreading lies that are being enthusiastically adopted by the nominally liberal media serve a definite political purpose. A systematic propaganda campaign against refugees and immigrants is being whipped up. While the 1,200 cases from Bremen fill the newspapers and commentators demand a “tough clampdown” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*), or that the “relaxed mentality” towards asylum seekers “must fundamentally change” (*Westfalen-Blatt*), the high number of wrongly-rejected asylum applications is barely being reported on.

It was revealed a month ago that in 2017, the courts upheld appeals from asylum seekers against the rejection of their application in 32,000 cases. Appeals by Syrian and Afghan refugees were upheld in around 60 percent of cases.

The Bremen case is being used as a pretext to establish a commission to review positive asylum decisions. By contrast, the government commented on the high number of appeals upheld by the courts against negative asylum decisions with the laconic remark that they represented “no indication of the correctness or incorrectness” of the Federal Office’s asylum decisions. However, the high number of successful appeals to the courts can only lead to the conclusion that negative decisions are being intentionally produced by the Federal Office.

This is also in keeping with Seehofer’s urging, during a visit to the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees earlier this month, to move towards the creation of arrival, decision-making, distribution, and repatriation (Anker) centres. He summed up their purpose with the statement, “Arrival, decision, repatriation.” The concept apparently does not allow for the refugees to “remain.”

Officials of the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees will work closely with federal police officers and administrative court judges in the Anker centres, even though such collaboration between executive and judicial branches violates the constitution. The up to 1,800 refugees confined in the camps will be denied basic rights during the decision-making process. They will not be permitted to receive unrestricted legal representation for their asylum case, will not receive a work permit, and children will generally not be allowed to attend school. Instead, they will be permanently watched over by security forces, subjected to unannounced searches, and thus constantly bullied and intimidated.

In the coalition agreement, the Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, and Social Democrats largely adopted the demands of the far-right Alternative for Germany on immigration policy, and they are now taking steps to implement them. The attack on the right to asylum, and the propagandising against Muslims, refugees, and immigrants is part of a comprehensive programme to strengthen the state’s repressive apparatus directed at the working class.

Germany’s ruling class is ever more explicitly resorting to the fascistic traditions of its past. Germany is rearming its military and pursuing an aggressive great power policy. This foreign policy transformation is being accompanied by the construction of a police state and the destruction of democratic rights, which initially impacts the most vulnerable sections of society.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site