Rent by crisis, German government adopts far-right refugee policy

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On Monday afternoon, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) gave two separate press conferences on the government crisis in Berlin. The statements of the two union party chairpersons made clear that there are no fundamental differences in the refugee policy between the CDU and the CSU, but that the grand coalition as a whole is adopting the policies of the far-right AfD.

Merkel assured journalists in Berlin that her so-called "European solution" of the refugee issue essentially pursues the same goal as Seehofer's "national solution." "We believe that the CDU and CSU have the common goal to better organize and control immigration into our country and significantly reduce the number of people arriving here so that a situation like 2015 will not and can not be repeated," she explained.

Then Merkel declared that her party also supported Seehofer's "master plan for migration." Further details of this reactionary and xenophobic scheme became known yesterday. In addition to the construction of so-called "anchor centers"—de facto concentration camps for mass deportation of refugees—cash benefits to refugees are to be cut sharply and converted to benefits in kind. In addition, the period during which asylum-seekers will be reimbursed only for bare necessities before being entitled to social assistance benefits will be extended from 15 to 36 months.

Merkel did not even rule out Seehofer's call, for stopping refugees directly at the German border who have already been registered in another country of the European Union, by the Federal Police in the future. Asked by a reporter, "if necessary, would you also support a policy which amounts to an implementation of Seehofer's plan," she replied smugly. "I do not answer any if-then questions." But we will meet each other "again on the first of July and then I can tell you what will happen."

The 14-day deadline for Merkel's agreement with Seehofer to achieve its "European solution" will expire after the European Council meeting at the end of June. Through bilateral agreements with other European governments, Merkel aims to ensure that refugees who have already been registered in another country are prevented from traveling to Germany.

As a model, she pointed to Berlin's refugee deal with Turkey in the press conference. This dirty agreement, which the German government negotiated with Ankara on behalf of the EU three years ago, obliges the Erdogan regime to ensure that refugees from the war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan will not make their way to Europe. Merkel is now seeking a similar deal with "countries of origin" such as Greece and Italy. Last night, Merkel negotiated with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, whose right-wing interior minister Matteo Salvini has announced plans to deport "all 600,000" migrants from the country.

Merkel insists on her "bilateral" refugee strategy, fearing that Seehofer's course could trigger a pan-European chain reaction and accelerate the break-up of the European Union. Merkel added, "we will no longer allow refugees who, according to the Dublin Regulation, have already been returned to the country in which they were first registered in agreement with the country in question."

But it would be "in the German interest to achieve the order and control of migration in good partnership with our European neighbors. Therefore, we believe that uncoordinated rejection at our borders as a country in the heart of Europe could lead to negative domino effects, which would also be to the detriment of Germany and ultimately could lead to the questioning

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of the European settlement."

Seehofer, who by threatening to blow up the grand coalition created the conditions for a massive shift to the right by Merkel, boasted that the CDU now supports "62½ points out of the 63 points" of his "master plan."

He said he is also for a "European solution." He expressed his support "for the Chancellor's efforts for bilateral agreements" and the "efforts of the future presidency of Austria." If "at the European level or through bilateral agreements, the same effect can be achieved as through the rejection at the border, then we would be pleased about it." But in case this does not succeed, the CSU "sticks with our position, that rejection must be possible immediately at the border."

The dispute between Merkel and Seehofer is over far more than different strategies in refugee policy. Following the collapse of last weekend's G7 summit and the developing trade war with the US, the ruling class is looking for ways to best enforce its dominant role in Europe and to pursue the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism internationally.

In a guest contribution in the Monday edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Seehofer himself made this very clear. "The existing order that we all know and love, it comes to an end and it creates a new order," he explained. He then quotes the right-wing conservative historian and journalist Michael Stürmer, who declared: "America's century is not yet over, the Chinese century has not yet begun. An interregnum is imminent. All experience shows that, such times are full of danger, drama and conflict. A proper amicable transfer of power would be a novelty in world history."

While Seehofer wants to work closely with the extreme right-wing governments in Italy, Austria and Eastern Europe to prepare for the "new order," Merkel and a large part of the CDU are in favor of closer cooperation with France. Their goal is to turn the EU into a military bloc against the US, Russia and China.

Speaking at a TV talk show just hours after the breakdown of the G7 summit, Merkel said she supported "the intervention force proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron." The "core question" was: "Will the European Union be able to advocate a joint foreign policy? Or will one always have one discussion with the United States, one with China, and perhaps another with a third country?" If Europe fails to become a "strong pole bound by loyalty," it will be "crushed in a world where there are very strong poles: China, Russia, and America," she added.

Influential voices in politics, business and the media have been warning the CDU and CSU in the last few days not to provoke a government crisis that could jeopardize Germany's great power ambitions. Commenting in the *Tagesspiegel*, former Social Democrat Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel expressed his understanding of Seehofer's position, but warned the Union against "behaving like opposition parties." It is "unbelievably irresponsible to lead Germany into a government crisis right now [...] where Europe is in the midst of a major crisis and faces unprecedented challenges: the end of the West as we knew it so far... and new powers that are challenging us economically, politically and militarily."

Left Party and Green party officials expressed themselves in similar fashion. "It is a kind of irresponsibility that we have not yet experienced," said Green Party Chairman Robert Habeck. "That a party makes a country and thus stability in Europe the plaything of their own interests. It undermines the ability of the Federal Government to act" and is a "very dramatic weakening of German politics." The leader of the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch, lamented the "chaos" in the CSU. It was "very bad that the CSU thinks only of their election goals in Bavaria and not the big picture."

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is the only party to oppose the right-wing offensive of the grand coalition from the left and to politically develop the growing opposition among workers and youth against the policies of militarism, anti-refugee xenophobia, attacks on democratic rights and austerity. The necessary response to the capitalist barbarism that has plunged Europe and the world into two terrible world wars over the past century is the building of a powerful movement of the international working class based on a socialist program.

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