

German Social Democratic Party backs brutal offensive against refugees

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The Social Democratic Party (SPD) has approved the asylum package of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU). The SPD, which is part of the ruling three-party grand coalition government, has lined up behind the refugee programme of CSU Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, which lays out a policy of sealing off the country's borders, accelerating deportations and establishing closed refugee camps.

Late Thursday evening, SPD leader Andrea Nahles and SPD Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz appeared before the press. They claimed that the Seehofer plan did not mean the establishment of closed camps. The "transit procedure" will be carried out in already existing barracks of the federal police and "there are no legal changes necessary," said Nahles.

This is pure eyewash. Shortly before, the SPD, along with the CDU and CSU, signed the paper on an "accelerated border procedure" outlining the government's new asylum policy. It states that asylum seekers at the borders may in future be arrested by federal police and detained for 48 hours before either being deported or sent to "AnKER" (anchor) centres (AZs).

Legally, the fiction of "non-entry" creates a reactionary construct that opens the door to the arbitrary treatment of refugees. The coalition paper states: "As with the existing airport procedure, persons do not legally enter Germany." In other words, as part of the planned "transit procedure," extraterritorial zones will be set up in Germany that are not regarded legally as German state territory and thus create a legal vacuum.

Three years ago, leading social democrats rejected the creation of such zones, declaring that they were incompatible with the rule of law. Such proposals by the CDU and CSU had "more to do with Guantanamo than with the rule of law," said then-Berlin SPD Chairman Jan Stöß. Now the SPD has agreed to measures that create the practical and "legal" basis for prison and torture camps in

Germany.

After a meeting of the coalition committee, Seehofer exulted that the SPD had fully approved his reactionary plans: "This is everything from A to Z that one wishes as the minister responsible," he declared. There had been merely one linguistic change: "You know that our coalition partner has problems with the term 'transit centres,'" Seehofer explained. Therefore, he continued, it is preferred that they be called "transit procedures in police facilities."

The grand coalition government is driving forward the creation of closed camps for refugees, whatever they are called. A government paper published by the *Bild* newspaper on the conclusions of the EU summit at the end of June explicitly states that the AnKER centres will be closed detention facilities and that asylum seekers who are not covered by the new "transit procedure" will be imprisoned there.

"Those asylum seekers with a EURODAC [European fingerprint database] entry who do not fall under a border-related return mechanism or find their way to Germany, irrespective of border controls at the German-Austrian border, are to be included in special reception facilities," the paper said.

In the "special AnKER centres," an "extended, sanctioned residency requirement" applies. Distribution to the municipalities is "excluded."

The document leaves no doubt that the German government is preparing to intern large numbers of refugees: "Increased use of dragnet controls and other intelligent border police approaches can significantly increase the number of people detected near the border with a EURODAC entry, who can receive immediate processing in the Special Reception Facilities."

Most refugee reception centres are already the equivalent of full-time prisons. They are sealed off and isolated from the outside world. Often, barbed wire is

used. These camps exist in all federal states. They are in remote areas, beyond public access, and are guarded by security firms.

With the creation of the AnKER centres—there will be at least seven such centres in Bavaria alone as of August 1—the existing camp and detention system will be massively expanded.

In addition to Munich Airport, there are already Bavarian refugee and transit facilities in Bamberg, Manching/Ingolstadt, Donauwörth, Deggendorf, Waldkraiburg and Regensburg. Thousands of people from the Balkans, Ukraine, Russia and various African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria and Mali live in them. The Bavarian Refugee Council writes: “Many previously lived in Bavaria for months to several years, and the children went to school or kindergarten. Suddenly, however, they had to move to the special camps.”

As many reports have shown, these camps exist virtually in a legal vacuum. Access to independent legal advice and assistance is made very difficult for those living there. They are isolated from the outside world, are not allowed to work, and in some places must walk for miles to reach a village or shopping centre. Their children can rarely attend a school or kindergarten. Under the new Bavarian asylum law, people in these institutions are no longer to receive cash, but only in-kind benefits.

Moreover, they are exposed to arbitrary treatment by the state and private security services. Several days ago, rioting broke out at the initial reception facility in Waldkraiburg after guards removed all refrigerators. The measure was to “prevent people from hoarding food,” i.e., to make it impossible for people to prepare their own food. When it resulted in unrest, a large contingent of police moved in. There were casualties, arrests and transfers, and the security forces were doubled. Some 330 people live in the facility in a confined space.

Another case exposes how those detained are treated. Amadou Fofana from Senegal was brutally beaten at the Upper Franconia reception facility in the former US barracks at Bamberg. When he refused to remove his pants at the checkpoint on September 28, 2017, security guards shattered his teeth, knocked him down and kicked him. He fled that same night to Holland and on to Paris, where he told a film crew about his ordeal. Other residents of the Bamberg barracks have confirmed attacks by security staff.

The terrorization of refugees, now being intensified by the grand coalition in Germany, is part of an offensive by

the entire European Union. This was demonstrated again on Friday when leading EU politicians gathered in Vienna. Since July 1, Austria has taken over the EU presidency for the second half of 2018.

In Vienna, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker warmly welcomed the right-wing Austrian chancellor, Sebastian Kurz (Austrian Peoples Party—ÖVP), before announcing further drastic attacks on refugees and migrants. Juncker said at a press conference that within two years the EU would expand the border agency Frontex by 10,000 personnel beyond what had been previously planned. In September, moreover, the EU would decide on further measures to beef up border control.

The day before, Seehofer and Kurz announced in Vienna, in cooperation with far-right Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, plans to completely close the Mediterranean route. To this end, a meeting of the interior ministers of Austria, Germany and Italy will take place next week.

The terrible impact of EU policy was indicated by the UN refugee agency yesterday. In Rome, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Roberto Mignone pointed to the drastic deterioration in living conditions in Libyan refugee camps. There are currently an estimated 10,000 people being held in these prisons. By sealing off Europe, the Coast Guard had forcibly returned many more people to Libya than before. “Horrific conditions” prevailed in the crowded camps, Mignone said.

The policies of the EU make it complicit in the torture and murder of migrants. At least 1,405 people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean since the beginning of the year, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The estimated number of dead is about 40 percent higher than previously feared, and it is assumed that the real number is significantly higher, because not all deaths are recorded. “In the past two weeks, at least 34 bodies have been washed up on the shores of Libya,” said Julia Black of IOM's Data Analysis Centre.



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