

Germany deports Roma family to Moldova despite life-threatening conditions

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On 2 August, the International Day of Remembrance, the European political establishment commemorates the murder of between 500,000 and 600,000 Sinti and Roma by the Nazis. However, discrimination against Sinti and Roma in Germany continues to this day.

On July 15, in the run-up to this year's International Day of Remembrance, the Berlin state government, a coalition of the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens, deported over 200 members of the Roma minority to Moldova, where COVID-19 is running rampant.

The Berlin Refugee Council complained that those targeted were seized by police officers in the dead of night, at 3 a.m., before being placed on a chartered flight to Moldova. A further night-time deportation occurred on 30 July.

The deportees include several families with young children as well as people with chronic illnesses (including a woman with cancer) and disabled people. As the Refugee Council noted in its press statement, "The deportations were planned and carried out under the sole authority of the SPD/Left Party/Green state government."

The state government, led by Mayor Michael Müller (SPD), Interior Senator Andreas Geisel (SPD) and Social Affairs Senator Elke Breitenbach (Left Party), provided a powerful demonstration of its ruthlessness towards people without a German passport or residency permit, even under conditions of the coronavirus pandemic.

Müller hypocritically claimed to be outraged by federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer's ban on Berlin accepting 300 refugees from Greek refugee camps, claiming that the decision "outraged everyone in the Senate." Yet officers under the control of his party ally Geisel were at the same time forcing entry into the living quarters of "hundreds of especially vulnerable members of the Roma minority" and deporting them.

"The outrage over the opposition (by the federal government) to the state refugee acceptance programme

appears to have been so much hypocrisy at the expense of refugees," commented Georg Classen, spokesman for the Refugee Council.

Refugees who had signed a voluntary departure order at the State Office for Refugee Affairs and who planned to return soon to their home countries were also forcibly deported. Nora Brezger from the Refugee Council Berlin attacked the government, declaring her doubts about "whether the voluntary return programme can be taken seriously if forcible deportations are carried out in violation of promises made."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned since the coming to power in Berlin of the SPD/Left Party/Green coalition, the Left Party and Greens implement the federal government's ruthless refugee policy wherever they are in government. Forcible deportations carried out at night are part of their standard operating procedure.

Moldova is one of the poorest countries bordering the European Union. One in five of its 3.5 million inhabitants is estimated to live below the poverty line.

The Roma minority there is exposed to state-organised exclusion and discrimination. Bitter poverty due to a disproportionately high unemployment rate, housing problems and homelessness, and extreme difficulty in accessing education, are all part of daily life for the Roma minority. Over half of them have no access to state medical insurance, meaning they can be refused health care treatment.

However, in the view of the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees (BAMF), the "discrimination and marginalization" in their homeland does not amount "generally speaking to anything that is relevant for refugee law," remarked Martina Mauer from the Refugee Council Berlin to the *Berliner Morgenpost* in December of 2019.

Only 80 of the 10,500 Moldovans who applied for asylum to the BAMF between 2015 and 2019 obtained a

(temporary) residency permit. Applicants were overwhelmingly members of the Roma community.

The further impoverishment and deaths of Roma are seen by the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens as a price worth paying. Their deportation to Moldova, which, according to the Robert Koch Institute and Germany's Foreign Ministry, is a coronavirus risk area, amounts to a death sentence.

Even prior to the pandemic, it would have been totally unclear how the woman with cancer, who has an artificial anus and was in the middle of a course of chemotherapy, could have continued her treatment or even had her stoma bag changed. "The police ought to have abandoned the repatriation at the point of the deportation at the latest," wrote the Refugee Council. With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the woman is now part of a high-risk group.

The health care system in Moldova has been on the verge of collapse since May. The government extended a state of emergency for the health care system until the end of August. According to the Refugee Council, around 2,000 new infections are registered each week. The World Health Organisation reported last week a rate of new infections of 400 per day, but added that a much higher number of unreported cases was likely. According to official figures, around 27,000 Moldovans have been infected by the virus.

"While solidarity is always pledged in Berlin during the coronavirus pandemic," the SPD/Left Party/Green government "could not wait to get going with deportations again," complained Nora Brezger of the Refugee Council. Two mass deportations had already been carried out in June, one to Georgia and the other to Serbia.

According to the 6 August edition of the *Berliner Zeitung*, 300 people were deported during the first six months of the year in spite of the pandemic. The Berlin Interior Affairs Department reported that the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees began issuing asylum rejections again in mid-May, and repatriations have been "carried out on an unrestricted basis and regardless of the pandemic since mid-June." A total of 188 people have been deported from Schönefeld airport, including to Georgia, Moldova and Serbia.

Irrespective of the hypocritical lip service they pay to the need to protect refugees and oppose discrimination, neither the Left Party nor the Greens have condemned the deportations, let alone done anything to prevent them.

Roma and Sinti are among the minorities facing the

worst forms of discrimination in Europe. This is also the case in Germany, according to the latest report from the Central Council of Roma and Sinti "On the equal treatment of Sinti and Roma and the fight against anti-gypsy sentiment."

While job centres, the Office for Work, Department for Foreigners, social services and youth support providers practice systematic discrimination, according to the report, there has also been a persistent manifestation of "anti-gypsy sentiments in the speeches of far-right, conservative and social democratic politicians, in articles and reports... and in hate speech online."

Four years ago, when the SPD governed in Berlin in coalition with the Christian Democrats (CDU), Interior Senator Frank Henkel (CDU) ordered a brutal crackdown by a unit of police officers against Roma families protesting at the Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe against their threatened deportation.

The Left Party and the Greens, who were in opposition at the time, appealed to the protesters to end their demonstration at the memorial. Less than a year later, the newly installed SPD/Left Party/Green coalition has enforced the inhumane asylum and deportation policy of the federal government, including against the severely persecuted Roma minority.

Seventy-five years after the downfall of Hitlerite fascism, the ruling elite's nationalism is once again rearing its ugly head. State-sponsored racism and xenophobia are the inevitable products of this development. Under conditions of deepening crisis, all of the established parties, the Left Party and Greens included, defend the repressive state apparatus and the property interests of the ruling class.

The deportation of defenceless sick, disabled and aged Roma, and the systemic discrimination against minorities, is just as much a part of this class policy as the brutal reopening of worksites and schools amid a raging pandemic.



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