

# Germany: The Left Party's fraudulent refugee policy

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Two poles of society have been revealed ever more clearly in recent months in the conflict over refugee policy in Germany. On one side, the persistent solidarity within the population for people forced to flee from devastating wars in the Middle East and the intolerably miserable conditions in Africa; on the other side, the state, government, media and established parties, which day after day campaign for the tightening of asylum laws and incite hatred against refugees.

In this atmosphere, the stance of the Left Party has become increasingly apparent. After the events of New Years Eve in Cologne, Left Party deputy chairperson Sahra Wagenknecht publicly advocated a cap on the number of refugees to be admitted into the country and with the approval of Alternative for Germany (AfD) deputy chairman Alexander Gauland declared: "Those who abuse our hospitality have forfeited the right to hospitality."

Wherever the Left Party is in power it implements the inhumane refugee policies of the German government. That goes for the state of Brandenburg, where the Left Party has governed with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) since 2009, as well as Thüringen, where Left Party member Bodo Ramelow is premier in a coalition government with the SPD and the Greens.

According to a survey by *Focus* magazine, with around 1,080 deportations from January to April of this year, Thüringen is, along with Bavaria and Saxony, one of the three German states with the highest repatriation rates. In Thüringen, 30.5 percent of refugees with rejected asylum applications were deported. The national average is 17.9 percent.

Increasingly seen by the population as a right-wing party, and having suffered a defeat in the last state elections, some Left Party politicians are now attempting to pose as friends to refugees prior to the Berlin state elections.

Katja Kipping, Petra Pau and others organize publicity-friendly on-site aid missions such as the fundraising campaign of Berlin state chairman Klaus Lederer at the Office of Health and Social Affairs in January. They are also allowing the offices of leading candidates to be used for the coordination of aid and fundraising campaigns. Petra Pau, the Left Party candidate in the Marzahn district of Berlin, arranged a meeting with representatives of the advocacy group *Alle Bleiben* (Everybody Stays), which supports the right to residency for Roma.

In mid-June, representatives of several refugee initiatives and anti-racist groups gathered at a "Welcome2stay" congress in Leipzig, largely initiated by the Left Party's parliamentary fraction. At the congress, party chair Katja Kipping called for "a societal awakening against social indifference and racism." She appeared alongside a trade union representative from Ver.di and a "Solidarity4all" grouping from Greece, which is the byproduct of the discredited Syriza party.

The party paper *Neues Deutschland* states that they had attempted to "disseminate harmony and not bring up existing differences in the first place." After the election setback in Baden-Württemberg and Rheinland-Pfalz, and above all in Sachsen-Anhalt where the Left Party was pushed into third place by the AfD, it could use some publicity. "Why not get the vote of every last refugee aid worker?" the paper wrote.

In their Berlin election platform, the Left Party put forward this vague demand: "Defend refugees and open up a perspective." They hoped that younger Berliners would no longer be reminded of the period from 2002 to 2011 when the Left Party governed with the SPD under Klaus Wowereit and held the positions of the senator for social issues, work and integration as well as the senator of economy.

In their first year of governing, the Red-Red coalition continued unabated the deportation policies of the CDU-

SPD senate under Eberhard Diepgen (CDU). As a May 5, 2006 Christian Democratic Union (CDU) inquiry in the house of representatives found, approximately 6,000 asylum seekers were deported from Berlin in the years 2002 and 2003 alone and a large number of them were imprisoned beforehand. It was not until 2004 that this number fell, due to the European Union's eastward expansion. Many refugees came from Eastern European countries and that meant they now had to be dealt with under European law.

Like Diepgen's senate, the "Red-Red" (SPD-Left Party) coalition coldly carried out the deportations. They allowed those affected to be taken away in the middle of the night in police raids without regard to minors or sick people and separated families. Dozens of refugees attempted to commit suicide, started hunger strikes or died on the run from police and border guards. Many of those deported were imprisoned in their homelands, tortured or murdered.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), and later the Left Party, did not even close the deportation prison in Grünau that became infamous under Diepgen. In the coalition contract, they only agreed to the removal of the bars inside and better visiting rooms. The deportation detainees had to pay for the cost of their barracking themselves.

When demonstrators gathered at the prison in May 2006 to protest the "inhumane deportation policy of the Red-Red senate," including members of the WASG, which in the same year merged with the PDS to form the Left Party, the Red-Red senate sent the police.

At no point did the Left Party consistently advocate for the right to stay of Roma who fled to Berlin during the war in Yugoslavia, or for protecting the Kurds who sought to escape Turkish attacks on their villages.

Protests by Roma, which culminated in the occupation of party headquarters in various cities at the end of 2002, led to nothing but empty promises from PDS social senator Heidi Knake-Werner. In the end, the Roma were ruthlessly sent back to Belgrade without winter clothing despite cold temperatures.

In mid-May 2009, more than 100 Romanian Roma again attempted to escape to Berlin when right-wing pogroms erupted in their homeland. They spent the summer months in Görlitzer Park in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, until police drove them out by force. The Red-Red senate brought them to a camp in Spandau, Berlin, which was also used as a deportation centre for other refugees. Left Party senator Knake-Werner offered them

€250 for travel expenses if they would leave voluntarily.

After her departure from the government in 2009, the former German Communist Party (DKP) member Heidi Knake-Werner became chair of the Berliner Volkssolidarität (Berlin People's Solidarity organisation) and heads a refugee home in Marzahn-Hellersdorf.

In 2013, the current social senator Mario Czaja (CDU) appointed Heidi Knake-Werner to a cross-party "council for cohesion." Along with ex-government head Diepgen, former SPD social senator Ingrid Stahmer and others, she will review the planned container village for refugees as part of the "Masterplan for Integration and Security."

When in 2011 the Left Party was voted out on the basis of their right-wing politics, she justified the deportation policy on the grounds of political "pressure." The then economic senator Harald Wolf wrote in his book *Social Democrat-Left Party coalition in Berlin: A (self) critical balance sheet*: "The political room to manoeuvre in regional politics for a humane refugee policy is extremely limited by the federal government. That's why there were also deportations under the Red-Red coalition."

Wolf is right when toward the end of his book he calls the Left Party a "party within the state apparatus." The danger that the population also recognises this truth and turns against all of the established parties, including the Left Party, is something he and other Left politicians are all too aware of. That explains his cynical call for the organization of a "smart and deliberately calculated division of labour" between the "parties in the state apparatus" and the "parties outside of the state apparatus."

In other words: the latest activities of the Left Party in refugee initiatives and anti-racist and social protests are aimed at containing the growing opposition of workers and youth and preventing them from turning against the ruling parties.



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