

Germany: Right-wing mob hounds refugees in Bautzen, Saxony

Katerina Selin
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The right-wing policies of the establishment parties and the incessant incitement against refugees are encouraging right-wing forces to open violence. This was evident in the last few days in the town of Bautzen in Saxony. On Wednesday evening, about 80 far-right hooligans gathered on the Kornmarkt in Bautzen and provoked a violent confrontation with 15 to 20 young asylum seekers.

Eyewitness Andrea Kubank, who is active in “Bautzen is colourful,” told the *Tagesspiegel* that the refugees were gathered on the square, as always in the evening, when a right-wing mob formed. When police officers then asked the refugees to leave the Kornmarkt, they resisted. According to Kubank, the right-wingers then attacked the refugees, shouting racist slogans such as “Foreigners out,” “This is our Bautzen” and “This is our Nazi-hood.”

The situation escalated into violence and there was a pogrom atmosphere. The young refugees were chased through the city by the right-wing mob as they ran back to their asylum accommodation. In the ensuing fight, Mehdi, an 18-year-old Moroccan, was injured with a knife and needed to be taken to hospital. Brawling right-wingers pelted the ambulance with stones, forcing the paramedics to abort their rescue mission. The injured could only be taken away under police protection.

The next day, Mehdi told *Zeit Online* that the right-wingers had hurled abuse at him, and other refugees had opposed this. “The police attacked me with pepper spray, suddenly I couldn’t see anything.” Then he was injured with a knife.

Zeit Online also interviewed some of those belonging to the right-wing mob. “We just wanted to make them [the asylum seekers] a bit afraid and show that this town belongs to us,” one of them said openly, while another lamented that he had “arrived too late at the

chase yesterday.”

According to eyewitness Kubank, police escalated the situation. Other statements by witnesses, who refused to identify themselves for fear of right-wing violence, described a similar situation.

The official version of events presented by the police and most of the media, however, is quite different. The Bautzen police director, Uwe Kilz, said the refugees were responsible and downplayed the violence of the right-wing mob. He spoke of “circa 80 persons who were mainly of German origin, made up of younger age groups, women and men, including those who had come specifically into the town in advance and who had already drunk this or that amount of beer.”

There had been a “sort of conflict” with the “UMAs” (unaccompanied minor asylum seekers). “The UMAs, who then threw stones and beer bottles in the direction of this group, were then, understandably, also verbally attacked from the other side and the attempt was made to take control of these unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.”

The police and politicians responded to the events not by taking action against the provocative extreme right-wingers, but by immediately punishing the underage asylum seekers with a ban on alcohol consumption and a curfew from 7 p.m. Four so-called “ringleaders” of the refugees were relocated to other accommodation outside Bautzen.

On the other hand, the police took no personal details from any of the neo-Nazis. A spokesman for the authorities justified this on the grounds that “the operation was fully designed for security purposes.”

In this context, the statement by Görlitz Director of Police Klaus-Jörg Mehlberg, that “our message” is now to show “zero tolerance” and not to allow “a legal vacuum,” can only be understood as a warning to the

refugees. Representatives of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) declared that action must now be taken against violence on all sides—left, right and foreigners—and to ensure “security and order” through a greater police presence in Bautzen.

A comment in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* also presented the events as if there had been merely an overheated atmosphere, which was stirred up by all sides. A climate had arisen “in which years ago the NSU [neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground] came into being,” wrote Jasper von Altenbockum. It was not only the “radical right” who let themselves be incited, but also asylum seekers. “Even the prejudices that come from cultures that do not stand for de-escalation encourage violence—not only on New Year’s Night,” he claimed.

Leniency towards Nazis has something of a tradition in Saxony. Right-wing networks and neo-Nazi groups such as the National Socialist Underground have been built up and funded for years by the state apparatus. Especially in Saxony, the security agencies are riddled with right-wing forces.

For German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU), Saxony serves as a “forward-looking model” for the new “police watch force.” By the end of this year, some 250 members of this police watch force are due on duty, recruited on a lower standard than normal police officers, and who are given a baton, pepper spray and service pistol after just three months’ training. Among other things, this police watch force will take over guarding asylum seeker centres and could quickly become a horde of right-wing elements. The training centre for the new police watch force is located in Bautzen, of all places!

According to a secret service report in December 2015, the Bautzen district was a “regional focus” for extreme right-wing meetings last year. Until June of this year, former German National Party member Daniela Stamm sat on the Bautzen Town Council for “The Right Party.” The far-right scene has acted increasingly more provocatively and confidently this year. In February, 20 to 30 right-wing onlookers had watched with undisguised pleasure as a planned refugee camp in Bautzen burned down.

Long-time employee of the Saxony Cultural Office Markus Kemper has closely observed the development of the far-right scene. In an interview with the MDR, he

explained that in Bautzen, “an organised neo-Nazi structure” existed, “which has shown itself to be very militant for quite some time.” Far-right and sometimes relatively new groups such as Stream BZ, the National Front Bautzen and an offshoot of the Aryan Brotherhood are active there.

On Thursday evening, a day after the violence against the refugees, 350 right-wing extremists again gathered for a demonstration on the Kornmarkt. Kemper assumes that this involved “not only those from Bautzen, but also probably [people] from other regions such as Sächsische Schweiz or from Dresden.”

Drunk and aggressive demonstrators shouted down the mayor, Alexander Ahrens, and chanted right-wing slogans. Three people are said to have given the Nazi salute and one journalist was injured. About 25 counterdemonstrators were also there, but the situation did not escalate into violence. The police afterwards expressed satisfaction that there had been “no ugly scenes.”

There are currently 2,600 asylum seekers accommodated in the Bautzen district, including about 180 minors, of whom only 30 live in Bautzen, a town with a population of nearly 40,000 people.

The state of Saxony is ruled by a grand coalition of the Social Democratic Party and CDU, which has dramatically tightened its asylum policy in recent months. So-called voluntary departures are promoted, and the number of deportations has increased significantly compared to last year. While in 2015 a total of 1,725 people were deported from Saxony, in the first seven months of 2016, 2,398 refugees had already been expelled.

The Saxon State Interior Ministry also announced a number of measures to make “forced deportations more efficient in the future.” These include the “creation of a detention centre and a departure custody facility in Saxony” and “increasing the staff available for the Central Immigration Authority.”



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