

Green Party hypocrisy over protests by refugees in Berlin

By Berndt Reinhardt
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A drama is currently unfolding in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. Between 40 and 80 mainly African immigrants have been on the roof of the Gerhard Hauptmann School for several days. They have no access to energy, are desperate and prepared to do anything, including jumping to their deaths, if their demand to be given the right to live and work in Germany is not met.

Last Tuesday, in the words of Green Party local city councillor Hans Panhoff, the “voluntary move” of more than 200 refugees began. They had been occupying the former school for a year and a half, surviving under terrible conditions. Most of them went into the emergency accommodation arranged by the state Senate. The Senate evidently ordered the transfer of the refugees in order to create more favorable conditions for their swift deportation.

The “voluntary move” involved 900 police, including units from other states, such as Bavaria and Brandenburg. The federal police also provided the Berlin state Senate with manpower. The police from Thuringia were particularly conspicuous, brandishing guns as if about to put down armed resistance. A large area around the school has been blocked off by the police using barricades, and the media has been denied access.

The refugees on the roof are demanding permanent residence rights from interior senator Frank Henkel (Christian Democratic Union), who has opposed all negotiations. He referred to earlier agreements made by the senator for labour, integration and women’s affairs, Dilek Kolak (Social Democrats), to move the refugees to emergency accommodation. He said they should await the results of their asylum applications there, which in most cases will result in deportation.

“The right for all to stay!” was one of the demands of

the broad refugee movement, which began in southern Germany two years ago. People who in many cases had fled civil wars for which NATO was ultimately responsible, left their refugee centres and marched through Germany. The protests reached a high point with hunger strikes in Berlin and a camp on Oranienplatz in Berlin Kreuzberg. A number of refugees who had survived the perilous sea journey to Lampedusa off the coast of Italy also reached Berlin.

In Hamburg, the brutal policies adopted by the city authorities to the protests led to popular resentment and clashes between sections of the population with the police. The police declared areas in Hamburg no-go zones where they had special powers. The authorities and police feared even stronger resistance in Berlin. This produced disputes within the senate and open disagreement between the senate and the Kreuzberg district.

The Green Party mayor of Kreuzberg, Monika Herrmann, refused to allow the police to clear the refugee camp on Oranienplatz and even supported some of the refugees’ demands. A district representative from the Greens stayed overnight with the protesters for months in solidarity. However the refugees’ main demand, for the right of all to reside in Germany, was just as unthinkable for Herrmann as it was for interior Senator Henkel. This was clearly the line drawn between solidarity and friendly support. The Left Party had previously demanded merely a temporary residency right for refugees in Hamburg.

In April this year, the refugees “voluntarily” moved from Oranienplatz to emergency accommodation provided by the Senate, after the living conditions had become unbearable. Kreuzberg apparently did not have the resources to meet the needs of the refugees on Oranienplatz for food, medical care, a means to keep

warm and psychological care, which was desperately required by many refugees traumatised by civil war.

Last Saturday, 3,000 protested in Berlin in support of the refugees at Gerhard Hauptmann school, with the daily *taz* citing 6,000 in attendance. The local Green Party deputy Hans-Christian Ströbele then delivered an offer to the refugees from the district aimed at avoiding the use of police. In an interview with *taz*, Mayor Herrmann demanded later that day that Henkel provide the remaining refugees with a guarantee that their deportation would be halted.

The demand is fraudulent. A halt to deportation proceedings is something quite different from an unrestricted right to reside. And one undertaking by the authorities has already been broken. All of the refugees on Oranienplatz were promised their asylum proceedings would take place in Berlin, including those registered in different states in Germany. Now this is no longer mentioned.

The Greens are also in principle in favour of getting rid of the refugees, albeit without the resort to violence. The refugees should understand the hopelessness of their situation and “voluntarily” disappear of their own accord. Herrmann expressed disappointment that the refugees did not have an “exit strategy”. How could they? Those on the roof are overwhelmingly Africans, who have the inhumane ordeal of a voyage across the Mediterranean and a trek through Italy to Germany behind them. Some already know that their applications for asylum have previously been rejected.

It is quite possible that the police could soon help the Greens out of their dilemma. Following the implementation of no-go areas in Hamburg, the Berlin police have also declared “crime problem areas”, i.e., zones with special police powers, where basic democratic rights are ignored.

Now the police in Berlin, who officially were only requested to provide “legal assistance,” have closed off the area around the school to the press and do not even allow parliamentary deputies through the barricades.

Around 1,000 police are on duty around the school building, and repeated rumours have appeared in the press that the refugees had petrol and could set light to the building. At the moment the police are threatening to pull out if the district does not make a decision quickly. The police operation was expensive, according to police chief Klaus Kandt.

The leader of the Greens in Berlin, Bettina Jarasch, views the actions in Berlin as a test for the future. “The issue of refugees will increasingly affect cities,” she told the *Berliner Zeitung*. The district had made the mistake of not asking for support from the Senate earlier. Everyone had to come together, district, state, citizens’ organisations and the church. “We Greens are ready for joint action, because the issue of refugees is not suited to party political grandstanding.” In the interview, Jarasch, a member of the German Catholic Church’s central committee, attacked left-wing defenders of the refugees. “They have got the refugees into this mess and accepted that the situation would heat up because it would serve their political goals.”

In the past, the Greens were seen by the public as defenders of migrants and refugees against arbitrary treatment by the authorities. Many connected the idea of a multi-cultural society with the Greens. There is nothing much left of that now, other than the annual “carnival of cultures” which takes place in Kreuzberg.

The refugees are demanding the democratic right to be free to choose where they live, work and raise a family. The Greens’ humanitarian posturing, their hand-wringing about municipal politics being subordinate to EU law, is political hypocrisy. The Greens defend the EU. Their opposition to a general right of permanent residency is no less brutal than the policy of allowing refugees to drown in the Mediterranean. If, tragically, there are victims among the refugees, the Greens will bear full responsibility for this.

In the realm of foreign policy the Greens support the type of German military interventions that have forced refugees to flee in the first place. Now, under the pretext of humanitarian aid, they are prepared to brutally impose the interests of the German state against the weakest in society, under a humanitarian cover.

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