

German town builds four-metre-high wall in front of refugee shelter

By Anna Rombach
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The building of a four-metre (13-foot) high wall in front of a refugee shelter in a Munich suburb has provoked consternation and outrage. Criticism has been directed not only against the Munich politicians responsible, but also the reactionary refugee and war policies of the grand coalition (Christian Democratic and Social Democratic) government in Berlin.

For two years, seven residents of an owner-occupied development in the Neuperlach district of Munich have been blocking the construction of a refugee shelter. They justified their actions by citing expected noise nuisance due to the 160 unaccompanied minors and young asylum seekers who would move into the home.

The sinister “compromise solution” of the Administrative Court is the construction of a massive stone wall that separates the residential area from the refugees.

Its huge mass is reminiscent of a prison wall. Even for a sound-protection barrier it is over-sized. Nearby there is another facility for refugees, which, despite being only 50 metres from the autobahn, has just a three-metre-high noise barrier.

Guido Bucholtz, a member of the Ramersdorf-Perlach district council and former Green Party member, said he was shocked when he saw the wall at the beginning of November. He uploaded a video clip of it onto the Internet, triggering a wave of protests. “How can things be like this here, that we have to build a wall between refugees and residents using the transparent argument of noise protection,” Bucholtz told the *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*. “This is a signal: The refugees are sealed off because we don’t want to have them anyway.”

Media interest rapidly developed. Thousands criticized the building of the wall on social media, which runs diametrically against previous practices in Munich. Many Neuperlach residents were also shocked.

“Madness,” “It looks like what happened under Hitler,”

“Like the Berlin Wall,” “Like World War II,” “Terrible,” “Horrible” and “Impossible,” were some comments made by Neuperlach residents on YouTube.

Many have pointed out that the wall is higher than the Berlin Wall (3.6 metres). Others have noted that the trees and bushes next to the refugee home provide enough sound damping, and that a cycle path and footpath also separate the home from adjacent properties. The houses are approximately 25 meters from the boundary marked by a planted embankment.

Numerous media outlets have reported on the dispute in Munich, including newspapers (and also right-wing web sites) in England, France, Austria, Italy and the US. Some of them have used the xenophobic example for their own propaganda purposes. For example, Russia’s *Pravda* drew a link between refugee criminal statistics and the building of the wall.

The broadcaster *Bayrische Rundfunk* took the anti-immigrant residents’ side, and argued that the value of their homes could fall as a result of the new shelter. Security was also at risk: “An elderly woman expressed grave fears because she was walking alone on the pavement at night.”

By contrast, an online petition against the wall on Change.org received thousands of signatures in no time. It is addressed to Mayor Dieter Reichert (Social Democratic Party, SPD), the Munich City Council and the Bavaria Higher Administrative Court. It says: “The wall 2.0 is a disgrace for Germany and even more so for the otherwise cosmopolitan and multicultural Munich.”

In 2015, many Munich inhabitants welcomed harassed and exhausted refugees, spending days and nights at the city’s main railway station to greet the new arrivals and providing them with whatever they needed after their long journey. These residents were subsequently disappointed that their assistance and efforts were not better utilised and the authorities soon sent them home.

Munich's City Council saw heated debates. The Greens have responded to the protests and are now calling for the demolition of the wall. The SPD is torn on the issue, since its leader in the state legislature, Markus Rinderspacher, described the wall as "a symbol of separation and isolation."

Thomas Kauer (Christian Social Union, CSU), chair of the Ramersdorf-Perlach district council, claimed that it was merely a matter of noise abatement and was not an attack on refugees: "I won't let our district get a bad reputation."

Politicians of all parties are seeking to conceal the real cause of the refugees' misery. For example, none of them point to the obvious connection between the large numbers of refugees and the imperialist war policies of the Western powers, including Germany, in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa.

The official discourse also covers up the role played by the establishment parties and media when it comes to stoking up fears and hostility toward people fleeing war and poverty. The media throws up examples like New Year's Eve in Cologne, and the false allegations of criminal activity by immigrants, to whip up divisions in the population. The wall in Neuperlach is an opportunity for the establishment mouthpieces to shift responsibility for the government's xenophobic policies onto the backs of the population.

In reality, the resentment against refugees stems first and foremost from the operations of Germany's establishment parties. They consciously stoke chauvinist sentiments and are responsible for the rise of right-wing movements. For example, Merkel said in September: "For the next few months, the most important thing is repatriation, repatriation and again repatriation."

The SPD is singing the same tune, and attacks Merkel from the right. Ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) attacked Merkel for her supposed welcoming culture earlier in the year. The SPD party chair, Sigmar Gabriel, sought to play off workers in Germany and refugees against each other when he commented: "We must be careful that there are not people in Germany who feel that the politicians in Berlin always have money when, for example, it is a matter of rescuing the banks, *or now to help refugees.*" (Emphasis added)

The two so-called opposition parties, the Greens and the Left Party, are primarily seeking to become part of a government coalition. The Green state premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, agreed to the abolition of the right of asylum for refugees from

Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the Bundesrat (Upper Chamber of the federal parliament), Kretschmann will also vote against asylum for Tunisians, Moroccans and Algerians. His party colleague Boris Palmer, mayor of Tübingen, declared that it was necessary to deport "violent" refugees even to Syria. "There are also areas in Syria that are not at war," Palmer said.

As for the Left Party, it is a master at presenting a public face supporting the "humane" treatment of refugees, while simultaneously and more decisively supporting the right. Its duplicitous means is a "smart and calculated division of labour" between the "party inside the state apparatus" and the "party outside the state apparatus," as advocated by Harald Wolf.

As a state premier, Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) has ensured that Thuringia, with more than 30 percent of deportations of rejected asylum seekers at the beginning in 2016, stood in the top three states nationwide alongside Bavaria and Saxony in terms of hostility to refugees. His party comrade Sahra Wagenknecht advocates a ceiling on refugee numbers, and with her statement "Those who abused [our] hospitality, have precisely forfeited that hospitality," accommodated to or adopted an ultra-right-wing position.

None of the established parties is committed to the humane treatment of refugees. On the contrary, these parties are responsible for a political climate that incites people against each other.

On Thursday last week, a meeting of the Ramersdorf-Perlach district council took place—this time under police protection, as several houses belonging to those supporting the wall had been daubed with slogans such as "Nazi filth." The CSU representatives Kauer and Markus Blume used this and tried to ostracise Bucholtz, the critic of the wall. In a foul attempt to silence opponents of the wall, they claimed he was responsible for setting the ball rolling and disturbing the peace and quiet of law-abiding citizens.

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