

Oppose the brutal police crackdown on refugees in Germany

By Christoph Vandreier
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The brutal police assault on a refugee camp in Ellwangen in the German state of Baden-Württemberg marks a step in the direction of a police state and undermines core democratic rights. The aim is to intimidate refugees and their supporters with police violence and a concerted campaign based on propaganda and lies.

The descriptions from the refugees who were brutally attacked by the police recall the darkest chapters of German history. On May 3, hundreds of masked police officers, many of them heavily armed, attacked the camp without warning. They broke down doors, tore innocent residents from their beds, placed them in handcuffs, and forced them outdoors. According to police sources, the military-style raid resulted in 11 injuries.

The barbaric attack was celebrated by all major media outlets and numerous politicians, and was accompanied by a disgusting, lying propaganda campaign. The police justified the operation with the claim that officers were violently attacked from the camp on the night of April 29. Four officers attempted to detain a 23-year-old man from Togo to deport him to Italy. However, 50 camp residents forced his release by means of “aggressive behaviour” and “violence.” The official press release from the police claimed that one police car was damaged, among other things.

Bernhard Weber, the vice-president of the Aalen police presidium, declared that the officers were confronted with an “aggressive emergency situation.” Weber said that “structures developed” among a group of Africans to prevent the authorities from carrying out measures. This effectively resulted in the “emergence of a lawless zone.”

Subsequently, the police even stated that residents were armed. At the “aggressive gathering,” according to the police, “serious statements” had been made about an “intention to arm in preparation for the next police intervention.” Baden-Württemberg’s interior minister, Thomas Strobl (Christian Democrats, CDU), referred to a full-blown threat “that future deportations are to be prevented by the resistance of armed refugees.”

All of this was embraced uncritically in the media and

embellished with yet more lies and exaggerations. Most media reports rapidly increased the number of alleged perpetrators to 150, even though this figure in the police report referred to a meeting of residents that took place after the detainee’s release.

Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) weighed in, describing the incident as “outrageous behaviour.” It was a “slap in the face to law-abiding citizens,” Seehofer said in Berlin last Thursday. “The right to hospitality cannot be trampled underfoot in this way.” Seehofer thereby adopted almost word for word what Alice Weidel, spokesperson for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), stated on Twitter.

In reality, the refugees were never responsible for creating an “aggressive emergency situation.” All evidence suggests that what took place was a legitimate protest against the deportation of a friend.

No violence was used against police officers during the initial operation, or during the raid on Thursday. The alleged damage to a police car turned out to be a small dent. The daily TAZ reported that a spokesman for the Aalen police presidium could not put a figure on the damage and told the newspaper that it was “not very substantial.” The vehicle was “dented,” the spokesman added.

A report from DPA alleging that three officers were injured during Thursday’s raid was corrected by the police down to one. This injury resulted “not from a third party, and without external interference,” according to the Aalen police.

The spokesman was also unable to explain to the TAZ how the police reached the conclusion that residents were capable of arming themselves. “No weapons in a technical or non-technical sense” were found, according to the spokesman. What does this mean? “Objects of daily life that could be used as striking weapons were found.”

The lies and exaggerations from the police were multiplied by the media and exploited to initiate a foul xenophobic campaign. The *Leipziger Volkszeitung* declared the event to be “a symbol for the actual and perceived powerlessness of

the state.” The *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* attacked from the right, complaining that the incident was “hushed up for days,” whereas the raid only took place on Thursday. In this way, “the right to asylum [is] increasingly being called into question.”

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* welcomed the police raid in its lead article on Friday, but complained simultaneously that the clashes were being blamed on the camp system and not the belief of refugees that they “can immigrate to Germany by means of violence if necessary.”

Even Heribert Prantl, who previously was considered a liberal and occasionally criticised police state measures, defended the police’s lies in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and referred to “vandalism” by the refugees. “The state should be allowed to enforce with masks the message that it makes the rules and wants to continue to do so,” he stated.

Politicians from all parties also fuelled the propaganda campaign. Baden-Württemberg’s Green minister president, Winfried Kretschmann, defended the police operation, which his government helped prepare. The refugees’ behaviour was “absolutely unacceptable,” he said. “We don’t tolerate lawless zones, and these attacks on police officers must be investigated,” he added. He received backing from Green Party leader Robert Habeck, who said the intervention was “logical and necessary.”

Free Democrats (FDP) leader Christian Lindner referred to a loss of trust in the state. “The state cannot allow itself to be intimidated by a mob seeking to prevent deportations,” he said. Federal Justice Minister Katarina Barley (Social Democrats, SPD) also demanded a tough crackdown, declaring, “Anyone who violates the law and resists the police must expect to face severe consequences.”

The isolated criticisms of the police operations by Left Party representatives were utterly hypocritical. In reality, the party is oiling the wheels of the deportation machinery in the states of Berlin, Brandenburg and Thuringia. Left Party parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht stated in the FAZ on Thursday that the Left Party advocates closing the borders and that it is necessary to recognise that problems have intensified with the arrival of refugees. “Competition for low-wage jobs and affordable housing, a lack of public security, the emergence of parallel worlds in which radical Islam is spreading,” she said.

The propaganda campaign over Ellwangen is part of a sustained and concerted campaign against refugees by politicians and the media. It began more than two years ago, when the actions of gangs of petty thieves on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, which often involve distraction techniques and sexual provocations, were massively exaggerated. All of the horror scenarios presented by the media later turned out to be inventions used intentionally to stoke racist sentiments.

the Accumulations of corruption were levelled against the asylum decision-making process in Bremen just last month to suggest that refugees are bribing officials on a large scale to obtain asylum. This report also turned out to be lies, as did the subsequent claim that the federal migration ministry fired 2,000 interpreters due to “cumulated violations.”

These campaigns have long been connected with the strengthening of the state’s repressive apparatus. But this has assumed new dimensions with the brutal police operation in Ellwangen. The pictures of masked squads of police officers wrestling defenceless refugees to the ground are not only intended to intimidate asylum seekers, but also the millions of people who declare their solidarity with the most vulnerable members of society.

Attempts to block deportations take place regularly. For example, 300 students in Nuremberg opposed the police’s attempt to deport a fellow student last year. In April, courageous neighbours in Witzenhausen in the state of Hesse resisted an attempted deportation. Demonstrations, protests and blockades occur often. At Frankfurt airport alone, pilots refused 237 times last year to carry out deportations. The goal is to terrorise and intimidate all of these people with the operation in Ellwangen.

The ever more aggressive crackdown on refugees and their supporters heralds a fundamental confrontation between the ruling elite and the vast majority of working people. To enforce their unpopular policies of social inequality, rearmament and war, the ruling class is increasingly resorting to authoritarian forms of rule. This is why they are strengthening the repressive state apparatus and seeking to mobilise the dregs of society with xenophobic campaigns. These measures are initially being directed against the most vulnerable sections of society, but are in essence aimed at the entire working class.

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