

Social Democrats back conservative parties' plan for concentration camps in Germany

By Johannes Stern
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On Tuesday, leading Social Democratic Party (SPD) politicians welcomed the reactionary agreement reached between the conservative parties in Germany's grand coalition, which provides for the erection on German soil of concentration camps for refugees. The SPD is part of the coalition government along with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU).

SPD leader Andrea Nahles said Tuesday morning: "The reason we find this good is because we are once again at the stage of getting down to business. This has been sorely lacking over recent weeks."

The SPD vice chancellor and finance minister Olaf Scholz praised the agreement between the CDU and the CSU, stating, "Now we have moved beyond psychology to the facts."

Although the coalition committee representing the three parties in the grand coalition government adjourned its meeting Tuesday evening until Thursday without reaching a final agreement, both Scholz and Nahles spoke positively about the discussion. According to Nahles, the coalition is on the right path and significant progress has been made in all areas. "But we are not quite fully united," she said. "We need a bit more time to iron everything out," added Scholz.

The SPD leadership thereby gave its implicit backing to the refugee policy of CSU Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, which proposes the creation of concentration camps for refugees in Germany. On Monday evening, the CDU and the CSU agreed that refugees already registered in another European Union country would be arrested at the German border and interned.

Concretely, the plan is to establish border-area "transit zones," i.e., camps and prisons, to hold tens of thousands of refugees on territory deemed to be outside of Germany. They will thus be held in a law-free zone à la Guantanamo Bay.

In the autumn of 2015, the Social Democrats were still opposing the creation of such camps, citing the example of the American prison. The conservative parties' proposals had "more to do with Guantanamo than with a state based

on the rule of law," stated Berlin SPD leader Jan Stöß at the time.

Former justice minister and current foreign minister Heiko Maas spoke along similar lines. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, he spoke of "an attempt to detain tens of thousands of refugees at the border." Anyone wanting to transfer the idea of transit zones from airports to state borders would, he said, create "mass internment camps in a no-man's land."

But today the Social Democrats justify these very same measures—ones that recall the darkest chapters in German history.

Former SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel stated that the camps proposed by the conservative parties have now to be judged differently than when they were proposed two-and-a-half years ago. "With the 2015 transit zones, we were talking about 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 refugees per day," stated Gabriel ahead of an emergency meeting of the SPD parliamentary group in Berlin. "At the time, we said we don't want to fill stadiums and detain people. Today, we are talking about an entirely different scale."

Gabriel's argument is cynical and repugnant. In reality, tens of thousands of refugees will be detained under the proposal. According to reports, up until June of this year, Germany accepted 18,349 asylum seekers who had been previously registered on the European fingerprint database Eurodac. Based on current figures, an average of 110 people daily would be detained and held in the so-called transit zones.

It comes as no surprise that Germany's Social Democrats, together with their hangers-on in the Left Party and Green Party, have backed the conservative parties' reactionary plans, bringing all factions of the ruling elite behind the immigration policies of the far-right Alternative for Germany.

At last week's European Union summit in Brussels, Germany's grand coalition and other governments with social democratic participation agreed to establish similar camps in North Africa and elsewhere in the EU. In the summit statement, the camps were euphemistically referred

to as “debarcation platforms” and “control centres” for “resettlement and new settlement.”

In Greece, the pseudo-left Syriza government, which also signed on to the summit deal, has for months been operating so-called “hotspots” for refugees. An article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* about the Moria “hotspot” established by the Syriza government in 2015 on the island of Lesbos described it as a heavily fortified “hell.” The newspaper said that from the outside, the Moria facility looked like a concentration camp, with “wire interwoven into cubes 4 or 5 metres high.”

The article continued: “Barbed wire is stretched out over the fences, all entries to the camp have watchtowers and guards with guns fixed over their breasts. Anyone who wants in must show his ID. The media, in particular, should not be allowed easy access behind these gates.”

According to the grand coalition’s plans, similar camps are to be established throughout Europe. In Seehofer’s so-called “immigration master plan,” which has virtually become official government policy following the agreement between the CDU and CSU, point 22 states:

“Strengthening of the structures at the external borders: support for the hotspots in Greece and Italy with sufficient personnel from the member states. Expansion of the hotspot concept in Italy.”

Point 23 states: “Development of a standard model for European reception centres: drafting of a German proposal to the EU Commission for the development of a hotspot standard model. Ensuring thereby the transferability to other regions as required.”

The development of such a network of camps in Europe is a warning. As under fascist regimes, they will be employed against political opponents and ultimately against the working class as a whole.

The first concentration camps were established in the 1930s immediately after the Nazis came to power to detain communists, trade unionists and other opponents of Hitler in a law-free zone. In a second phase, from 1936 to 1938, people who did not correspond to the Nazis’ racist worldview were added: Jews, Sinti and Roma, the allegedly “asocial” and “work-shy,” the disabled and prisoners of war. Only in the third and fourth phases, from 1939 to the end of the war in 1945, were the extermination camps established.

Seehofer’s “master plan” stands in this fascistic tradition. As in the 1930s, the policies of social counterrevolution and the preparations for war can be carried out only by employing dictatorial methods.

The passages in Seehofer’s plan read like the bureaucratic prescriptions for the Nazis’ reign of terror. For example, point 36 demands “the comprehensive use of the already

existing legal obligations for a medical examination, particularly in cases of transferable diseases, as well as other obligatory investigations of people who are not obliged to live in reception centres or communal accommodation.”

Point 37 calls for the “expansion of the Central Register of Foreigners into an independent foreigner database.” In addition, the “minimum age for taking fingerprints should be [lowered] to the end of a child’s sixth year,” and the “construction of a central European data system for the verification and review of identities” should proceed.

Point 10 calls for the establishment of a virtual police state, demanding “the expansion and strengthening of international cooperation in policing,” as well as the “expansion of networks connecting officers in the federal police forces in the transit states and countries of origin.” In addition, there is a need to “further develop the civilian UN and EU police missions in countries of origin and transit states to stabilise the security situation in affected states.” This will “form a personnel pool to expand German participation in international policing missions, thereby making deployments in foreign interventions easier.”

The declared “political goal” is the total sealing off of fortress Europe and mass deportations to war zones in the Middle East. “Those proven to be obliged to leave must swiftly leave our country,” it states in the section titled “Return.”

It adds, “The negative conclusion of an asylum application must simultaneously mean the beginning of the deportation procedure. The numbers of voluntary departures and repatriations must be significantly increased.”

The grand coalition’s “master plan” leaves no doubt that it plans to use surveillance and police state measures against the working class so as to impose Germany’s new great power militarist policy against widespread social and political opposition. “This master plan is based on the conviction that our country can realise its obligations abroad only if cohesion is at the same time retained at home,” states the preamble.

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