

German government launches camp system for refugees

By Christoph Vandreier
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On Wednesday, seven reception centres for refugees in Bavaria were converted into so-called “anchor centres,” in which all those seeking protection will have to remain until they are deported or receive residency status. With this inhumane system of camps, the German government is implementing the racist refugee policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). According to the grand coalition agreement, the Bavarian camps are to be extended across the entire country.

“Anchor” stands for “arrival, decision and repatriation.” All the relevant authorities are represented in the camps and refugees must stay there until their asylum application has been decided. Adults could stay for up to 18 months, and the Bavarian state executive even wants to accommodate children in the mass camps for up to six months. The largest portion of those interned would then be deported directly from the camps.

Pictures of the anchor centres inevitably evoke the darkest chapters in German history. Surrounded by high fences reinforced with several rows of barbed wire, 1,000 to 1,500 people per camp are to be disciplined and separated from society. The gates are heavily guarded and no one can pass unnoticed. Even the Catholic charity Caritas speaks of a “prison atmosphere.”

Camp residents are denied basic rights. They are obliged to live in the camp and are not allowed to leave the district of the competent immigration office. The press is forbidden access, as are lawyers and friends. Volunteers from Caritas, relatives and even priests must apply to be admitted to the facilities.

So-called “accelerated” asylum procedures are to be carried out in the camps, characterized above all by shorter periods for lodging appeals. Obtaining legal assistance is made difficult. The aim is to prevent refugees from lodging objections to negative decisions with the Administrative Court, which have been 50 percent successful in the past.

“Without effective access to lawyers, without being accompanied at hearings, without independent advice after receiving the—often flawed—asylum decisions of the Federal

Office, the legal protection guarantee of the German constitution is de facto rendered null and void,” the aid organization ProAsyl has declared.

Refugees in the camps are deliberately mistreated and humiliated to force them to depart “voluntarily.” For example, instead of receiving cash benefits for food, clothing and hygiene articles, inmates are given only benefits in kind. This is more complicated and expensive for the authorities, but it is nevertheless being done in order to deter people. “There is a clear signal,” said the field manager responsible for the anchor centre in Manching, Daniel Waidelich. “It is not worth coming to Germany.”

Camp inhabitants are not allowed to work and are condemned to idleness and external control for months. The nearest shop is a 40-minute walk away. There are no local buses. The refugees are being deliberately isolated.

The inhumane set-up of the anchor centres reveals the character of the entire refugee policy of the German government, which relies on the sealing of borders, deportation and oppression. The newly opened anchor centres in Bavaria are the result of a systematic development.

As early as 2015, so-called arrival and return facilities were opened in Bamberg and Ingolstadt/Manching, where refugees from the western Balkans, and later many other refugees with allegedly poor prospects for remaining, were quartered until their deportation. Families who had previously lived in normal neighbourhoods, whose children had gone to kindergarten and school, were forced to relocate to the camps overnight.

In 2017, these facilities were renamed transit centres and supplemented by camps in Regensburg and Deggendorf. From then on, those who fled from a country with a recognition rate below 50 percent, which applies to the vast majority of countries, were brought to these centres.

As of Wednesday, in addition to these four, the three remaining reception facilities—in Donauwörth, Zirndorf and Schweinfurt—have been converted into anchor centres. This means that all refugees arriving in Bavaria must now live in

such detention and deportation camps.

A concrete picture of the new anchor centres can be gained by looking at the first two camps, in Bamberg and Manching, which now provide the template for all facilities throughout Germany.

Some 5,000 refugees have lived in Manching since it opened in 2015. Of these, 1,000 were deported, according to official figures. Twenty-five hundred more people were induced to agree to “voluntary” departure. Only about 100 have received a positive asylum decision.

“It’s like prison here,” complained Jeffrey to *Spiegel Online*. He has been living in the Manching camp with his wife and young son for ten months now. “You can’t do anything. You wake up in the morning and see the same faces. You can’t work, you have to hang around.”

A 19-year-old mother, who has been living with a toddler in the facility’s dorm rooms for seven months, said the situation was worse than in her native Nigeria and when she was on the run.

According to Caritas, nine out of ten women from Nigeria are fleeing because they have been victims of violence, forced prostitution and trafficking.

The Funke media group published a report on seven-bed dorms. “Seventy women, men and children share one bathroom and one toilet,” the newspaper said. “Almost every night, asylum seekers are woken up when police and security guards enter the dormitories in the early hours to collect rejected asylum seekers for deportation.”

In addition to the security service, the police were sent in 250 times last year to maintain order in the camp by force.

The anchor centres that are now being tested in Bavaria and will be extended throughout the country are part of much broader plans for a comprehensive system of camps to span Europe and North Africa. The master plan of German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer of the Christian Social Union not only envisages the expansion of anchor centres throughout Germany, but also the “extension of the hotspot concept” across Europe.

The so-called hotspots are camps on the outer borders of Europe. They are notorious for their inhumane conditions. Human Rights Watch reported several days ago that refugees in Greece are exposed to “appalling reception and detention conditions, with vulnerable groups not receiving sufficient protection.” Among other things, the human rights organization criticized the lack of medical care and said that Greece undercut “international standards” in the camps.

Seehofer’s master plan provides for the “development of a standard hotspot model” that can be transferred to other regions of Europe. To that end, the European Union is already working closely with the Libyan Coast Guard, which is accused of taking refugees to private prisons where

they are tortured, ill-treated and killed. In correspondence, the German Foreign Ministry described conditions there as “concentration camp-like.”

It is becoming ever clearer what the German government, and with it the whole of the European Union, is doing: Refugees who make it to inner European countries, and especially to Germany, will be quartered in the anchor centres and deported as quickly as possible either to their home countries or to the EU country where they were first registered, according to the Dublin accord.

There they will end up in the inhumane hotspots and be forced to leave or face deportation.

Eventually they will arrive back in North African countries, where they will end up in private prisons or be sold as slaves or sent on death marches.

This monstrous internment and deportation machinery evokes memories of the Nazi concentration camps, which initially interned political opponents, then Jews, Gypsies and Roma. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, these camps became the basis for the largest extermination machine in human history.

The grand coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) is already working on a camp system in which tens of thousands of people seeking protection are to be quartered and deported. This terrible apparatus is directed not only against refugees, but against anyone who opposes the right-wing policies of the government.

The opening of the anchor centres in Bavaria takes place in the wake of the mass demonstration last week in Munich against the witch-hunting of refugees and against poverty and war. It embodies the contempt of not only the CSU, but the entire grand coalition and all of the bourgeois parties in Germany for the sentiments of the vast majority of the population.

The only social force that can counteract this shift to the right and defend the rights of refugees is the working class. To act as an independent force it needs a socialist programme that counterposes to the nationalism of the ruling class the international unity of all workers.

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