

German federal and regional governments extend refugee camp system nationwide

By Marianne Arens
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Since August 1, there are officially eight “anchor centres” in Bavaria and Saxony where refugees are quartered. According to the federal government, the camps are to be extended to the whole of Germany. Although several federal states officially oppose them, they already operate similar facilities.

The construction of anchor centres with 1,000 to 1,500 refugees each had already been stipulated by the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) in the coalition agreement. The name “AnkER” stands for arrival, asylum decision, repatriation. The federal and state governments are thus establishing a sealed-off and guarded system of camps in which tens of thousands of people are being locked up without a court decision.

The Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann (CSU) claims that the anchor centres are “not detention facilities,” and that “no one is imprisoned.” But that is a lie. The camps are sealed off with walls and barbed wire, and the entrances are guarded by security personnel. They can be closed at any time, as happened in Ellwangen in a police raid.

The people living in the camps can only leave and re-enter with a special pass and are subject to an “enhanced residency requirement.” This means they are only allowed to leave the district where their facility is located with the consent of the authorities, otherwise their asylum claim can be suspended. If someone spontaneously stays somewhere else, they lose all rights and claims and are considered as having gone “underground” and as fair game for the police.

In addition, the camps either have an integrated closed prison area—such as the anchor camp in Hamburger Street in Dresden, where a strictly sealed-off detention centre is being built—or they cooperate with a detention centre. Almost all state governments operate detention centres, such as the one in Buren, North Rhine-Westphalia. The SPD-Left Party-Green Party state government in Berlin is just about to build one.

Even the federal states that still officially oppose anchor centres have long operated similar facilities, which are usually called by a different name. The master plan of Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) envisages a total of 40 anchor centres distributed across all federal states.

Originally, 11 camps were to be launched as part of the “Anchor Centres Pilot Project” from August 1. This emerged from an internal job advertisement by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). It was looking for “interested” BAMF staff

who were “prepared to work in an anchor centre as part of a pilot project” from August 1.

As well as the known centres in Bavaria (Bamberg, Deggendorf, Donauwörth, Manching, Regensburg, Schweinfurt and Zirndorf) and the centre in Dresden, Saxony, the BAMF advert also names Heidelberg (Baden-Württemberg), Giessen (Hesse) and Lebach (Saarland). The BAMF branch office in Donauwörth is also mentioned as the twelfth place of deployment.

Publicly, the state governments of Baden-Württemberg and Hesse attach great importance to maintaining a distance to the anchor centres. In Hesse, ruled by a coalition of the Christian Democrats and Greens, state Premier Volker Bouffier (CDU) declared, “It remains the case that we have our own way of doing things here in Hesse.”

What Hesse’s “own way” looks like can be seen at the Hesse Initial Reception Centre (HEAE) in Giessen. On June 21, city councillors from all parties, including the Left Party, decided, at the request of the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), to reject Seehofer’s anchor centres on the grounds that there was already the “successful model in Giessen of the initial reception centre,” making the anchor concept unnecessary.

The HEAE, with 800 places, is the focus of a widespread camp system in Hesse, in which the treatment of refugees is just as inhumane as in Bavaria. This is shown by the fact that in the first four months of 2018, almost 600 men and women were deported from Hesse alone—twice as many as in the previous year.

The state premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann (Greens), has officially distanced himself from the concept of anchor centres and promised that there will be none in Baden-Württemberg under the Greens. His deputy, Interior Minister Thomas Strobl (CDU), clarified, saying that Baden-Württemberg already had a “successful model” in Heidelberg that would speed up registration and asylum hearings and “return refugees with no right to remain as quickly as possible.”

According to Markus Rothfuss, head of the Patrick Henry Village Arrival Centre in Heidelberg, the only difference to anchor centres was that “only rarely” did deportations take place directly from this facility.

However, the Green-CDU state government deported almost 3,500 people in 2017 alone, writes the Baden-Württemberg Refugee Council. “In addition to the high number, drastic individual cases continually shock,” it says. “Families are

separated, people undergoing education have been deported, and the state government does not want people who have been living in Germany for decades anymore.”

This development shows that none of the parties represented in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and the Landtag (state legislatures) defend elementary fundamental democratic rights. This also applies to the Greens and the Left Party. They are all involved in locking people away without a court judgment and isolating them from the population simply because they lack certain German papers.

The SPD had signed up to the anchor centres in the coalition agreement and gave its blessing to Seehofer’s “accelerated border procedures” at the beginning of July. In Brandenburg, the Social Democrat state premier Dietmar Woidke pushed strongly in spring 2018 for the establishment of an anchor centre.

In Hamburg, the hypocrisy is breath-taking: While the Interior Senator (state minister) Andy Grote (SPD) criticized the concept in public, the arrival centre in Hamburg’s Rahlstedt district is currently being expanded into a deportation detention centre for Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein, with places for over 2,000.

In Berlin, ruled by a coalition of the SPD, Greens and Left Party, Senator Andreas Geisel (SPD) and the integration commissioner, Elke Breitenbach (Left Party), are jointly responsible for the arrival centre at Tempelhof central airport. The largest institution in Germany and its structures are similar to the anchor centres, which does not prevent Breitenbach from claiming that there will be no such centres in Berlin.

In Thuringia, under Left Party state premier Bodo Ramelow, the authorities are brutalizing people in the camps. For example, residents at the Rudolstadt collective accommodation facility cannot sleep through the night because the authorities have ordered regular room inspections. Night after night, at 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., checks are carried out to see who is present.

Of course, residents fear each time that it could be the police who want to deport them. According to the Thuringia Refugee Council, refugees who sought to escape this grueling tactic and slept in a safe and undisturbed place outside the accommodation facility had their benefits immediately cut by the district.

Nightly terror and the threat of deportation are also constant in the Bavarian camps. The mother of a Roma family from Serbia who was forced to move to the Bamberg anchor centre told the Bavarian Refugee Council, “Last week, the police were there and picked up our neighbours. Since then, we no longer sleep, but are only afraid.”

In the camp system currently being built in Germany, refugees are isolated from the rest of the population and are cut off from normal life. Access to impartial legal advice and medical assistance is made much more difficult and children’s school attendance as well as social contact with German children are prevented. Officially, families with children can be housed for up to six months in the camps.

According to UNICEF, almost one third of the refugees in Germany are minors. An open letter from 24 refugee associations and organizations last year said it was as high as 45 percent. The letter, published by the *Berliner Tagesspiegel*, states, “Anchor

centres are not suitable places for children and adolescents.”

Even for adults, a decent life in the camps is impossible, especially because they are not allowed to work and are condemned to doing nothing for months. Shopping malls and public places are often miles away. Conversely, access to the camp is severely restricted for friends, volunteers, medical professionals and private legal advisers.

“We all suffer under the circumstances,” reported Jennifer, a spokeswoman for the women in Bamberg centre, to the student radio “Uni-Vox.” Four families shared an apartment with a toilet and a kitchen. There was no privacy and the guards treated people like garbage, she said. One yelled at her boyfriend, “You are slaves, and that’s how we treat you.”

The worst thing, according to Jennifer, is being locked up with nothing to do. “The government is depriving us of identity cards so that we cannot move freely, and we are not allowed to work.” People were deported in the middle of the night.

The camp system seeks to establish “accelerated asylum procedures.” All state authorities are represented locally, from the judiciary and BAMF to the youth and employment office, to the health authority. Inmates, however, are denied basic rights.

The camp system is not limited to Germany. Seehofer’s master plan includes not only the Anchor Centres Pilot Project but also the development of a “hotspot standard model” for the European Union and North Africa. Some “hotspots” already exist—in Libya, in the southern Sahara and on the border between Eritrea and Sudan. Brutal dictators and civil war militias, who are notorious for their human rights violations, take on the task of holding refugees, with financial support from Germany and the EU.

This gigantic camp project is directed against the entire working class. It creates a precedent. First, tens of thousands of refugees who have done nothing wrong are crammed into camps. Who is next? Protesters, striking workers, rebellious youth, opponents of the government?

If a nationwide, potentially sealed-off camp system is created, in which perfectly innocent people are “concentrated,” this is aimed at all class-conscious workers in the long-term. The Anchor Centres Pilot Project is also the reaction by those in power to the mass demonstrations against the neo-fascist AfD and against anti-refugee agitation, poverty and war.

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