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German Left Party mayor orders deportation of refugees

The German Left Party mayor of Frankfurt on the Oder, René Wilke, has initiated a deportation order against seven refugees from Syria, Pakistan and the Palestinian territories.

Wilke's pretext is a brawl at the end of August in the city's Le Frosch disco involving young refugees from Syria. He is using the case to incite xenophobia and bypass current regulations that bar the deportation of Syrians back to their homeland because of the war raging in the country. His action is another demonstration of the Left Party's embrace of the far-right policies of the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

It takes place only days after neo-Nazis rampaged through the cities of Chemnitz, Köthen and Dortmund, encouraged by the anti-immigrant policies of the grand coalition government and its interior minister, Horst Seehofer. Commenting on the stance of the Left Party in Frankfurt-Oder, the chair of the AfD in the state of Brandenburg, Andreas Kalbitz, who is on the extreme right of the party, stated, "We feel confirmed in our demands."

Representatives of the Brandenburg administration, a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party, including Premier Dietmar Woiwke and Interior Minister Karl-Heinz Schröter, gave Wilke their express backing, as did members of the Green Party.

Wilke is regarded in the Left Party and its periphery as a young, unconventional “shooting star.” He is doing all he can to blame the still murky incident in the Frankfurt-Oder club on “violent refugees.”

The “serious misconduct” of the alleged perpetrators harms refugees and the efforts of the city’s citizens to provide them with help and hospitality, Wilke said. “On the other hand,” he added, “we want to set an example and make full use of the legal framework. Hatred and violence, no matter from whom, have no place in our city.”

His statements bear no relation to what is known about the incident in Le Frosch. So far, it has been reported only that there was a fight in the discotheque between one patron and two Syrians. The latter are alleged to have called a dozen friends to come to the club, which was damaged in the subsequent fray.

Such outbreaks of violence among young people are not uncommon in the club scene. What exactly caused the dispute remains unknown.

But for Left Party politician Wilke, the culprits are already identified. He is not waiting for the completion of the investigation and initiation of legal proceedings. He is ignoring basic legal principles.

He has already agreed to “initiate the administrative process of expulsion from the federal republic of Germany” with the police, prosecutor and Ministry of the Interior in Potsdam. To be applied is a passage introduced in 2016 to the Residency Law—a law that until now has been used only in exceptional situations such as a “terrorist threat.” According to this law, a foreigner can be expelled “if his stay impairs the public safety and order or other significant interests of the Federal Republic of Germany” (§55 Discretionary Code).

Wilke claimed on local German radio that the young men involved in the incident were responsible for many more crimes, but gave no evidence. “The interrogations revealed a complete absence of them admitting they had done anything wrong. None at all!”, Wilke said. “They said what they did was correct and they would do it again.”

He apparently has information from the investigating authorities. Upon being asked, he informed the radio station in writing: “There has been close cooperation and coordination between the city and the regulatory and security authorities in connection with the events of recent weeks.”

The radio broadcaster stated that Wilke was not entitled to inspect the investigation files. Nevertheless, he has made public content from the preliminary investigations. Thomas Bode, a lawyer at the Viadrina University in Frankfurt-Oder, maintains that this amounts

to a violation of data protection. Such information should not be made public and should not be passed on to third parties, Bode said.

The broadcaster suspects a deliberate effort to fuel racism against refugees. “Was Mayor René Wilke cited correctly as speaking of ‘unruly Syrians?’ If so, the Left Party politician may have drawn conclusions about an entire group based on the behaviour of a single person. Such assumptions are often made regarding groups on the other end of the political spectrum.”

Speaking to the tabloid *BZ* newspaper, Wilke inflated the incident at Le Frosch, declaring: “I do not want to wait until there are deaths.” He repeated his remarks to the magazine *Cicero* and specifically called for the expulsion of Syrians who enjoy protection status. He complained about the “high hurdles” in immigration law.

“The main culprits are from Syria,” he said, “a country that is currently considered problematic. Therefore, they cannot be deported back there at the moment. But I want to make a decision now, so that we can go ahead when the classification changes.”

In order to be able to deport “speedily,” Wilke is demanding a further build-up of state forces. “The judiciary and police urgently need adequate equipment,” he said. “The rule of law must be able to act swiftly at any time.”

He expressed his contempt for legal procedure and demanded the establishment of camps. There must be something “between a potential danger and imprisonment,” he said. For example, “trauma centres” in which it is clear that “dangerous people are not permitted to run around freely until something worse happens.”

Wilke joined the forerunner of the Left Party, the Party of Democratic Socialism, at the age of 16. In 2014, he entered the Brandenburg parliament and held several offices in the parliamentary group. He was sponsored by former Left Party leader Gregor Gysi, who encouraged Wilke to stand as mayor in the 2017 election in Frankfurt-Oder. He joined the list “Frankfurt’s getting better,” an alliance of the Left Party, the Greens and non-aligned figures.

In May of this year he was sworn in as mayor. Frankfurt (Oder) is thus the first city in Brandenburg as well as the largest city in Germany with a Left Party mayor.

Wilke is not the only leading Left Party member to agitate against refugees in the manner of the AfD and evidently make public secret police files in order to further a xenophobic campaign.

The parallels between the political program of the Left Party and that of the far right have recently been made clear by the former Osnabrück AfD representative Tanja Bojani. She joined the faction of the Left Party after resigning from the AfD.

Cooperation between the Left Party and far-right forces is already a fact in a number of municipalities in eastern Germany. The state of Thuringia, led by Left Party leader Bodo Ramelow, has been at the forefront when it comes to deportations.

The “Stand Up” movement recently launched by Left Party parliamentary faction leader Sarah Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine also resorts to the reactionary program of nationalism, directed against foreigners and refugees. It is no accident that Wagenknecht’s initiative has been praised by AfD Chairman Alexander Gauland.

Under conditions where more and more people are protesting against the AfD and neo-Nazi marches, the Left Party is openly turning towards the nationalist policies of the far right.