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German government party steps up its anti-refugee agitation

By Ulrich Rippert

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The new year has begun as the old ended—with a sharp shift to the right by the German ruling elite.

A three-day party meeting of the Christian Social Union (CSU) began 6 January in Wildbad Kreuth, Upper Bavaria. The meeting of the Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) sister party in Bavaria marks the start of the political year. For the first time, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is also travelling to the small town situated between Lake Tegernsee and the Austrian border.

Prior to the meeting, CSU chairman Horst Seehofer once again sought to heat up the current debate over refugee policy. For the first time, he not only demanded an upper limit for the number of refugees coming to Germany, but also named a figure: 200,000 per year. Any additional refugees arriving beyond this number could not be coped with, Seehofer categorically stated.

In the main resolution presented at Kreuth, the CSU combined the upper limit with a series of provocative, anti-refugee demands: restriction of family reunification, benefits in kind instead of financial support, obligation to integrate and learn German, recognition of German values and traditions, accelerated deportations for all from so-called safe countries of origin, strengthening

of border security and the European border police, and the rejection of all refugees without valid papers immediately at the border.

The CSU leadership went a step further on Monday, demanding an electronic ankle bracelet for those deemed to represent an Islamist threat by the security agencies.

In the face of the one million refugees who have reached Germany over the last year, the upper limit of 200,000 would practically mean the closure of the border. The basic right to asylum would thereby finally be eliminated. Sending refugees back at the border would violate the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Geneva Convention on Refugees.

Speaking on behalf of Merkel, government spokesman Stefan Seibert said she would take part in the CSU meeting and was looking forward to an “open discussion.” But, as before, she opposed an upper limit for refugees. “We are convinced that a restriction of refugee numbers cannot be achieved nationally alone,” said Seibert. The refugee crisis was a European problem. It could be and had to be resolved by Europe.

The German government’s understanding of a “European solution” is the closure of the European Union’s external borders, confining refugees to so-called hot spots, “combatting of the causes for refugees” to flee their homes by collaborating with the authoritarian Turkish regime, and the distribution of a small number of refugees around the EU’s member states.

“All of this,” Seibert said, “should result in us making legal migration out of illegal migration, and permanently and noticeably reducing the numbers of those arriving here.”

Already last year, Seehofer played a leading role in demanding measures to deter refugees, urging the government to take action. Much of what he demanded at the time has since been implemented in Germany and Europe.

At the CSU party congress in mid-December, the dispute between Seehofer and Merkel on the refugee issue appeared to have been set aside for the time being. Seehofer stated at the time he was not concerned about words. “Quotas, upper limits...repatriation, reduction—we can employ linguists to explain the precise difference to us,” he said. The population was merely interested in whether a noticeable reduction in the number of refugees was achieved. He was thus less concerned about a numerical upper limit, but instead about the limit that could be coped with.

He thus accepted the line not only of the CDU, but also of the Social Democrats (SPD). SPD chairman Sigmar Gabriel and foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated last October, “We cannot permanently accept and integrate more than a million refugees in each year.” Both campaigned intensively to prevent refugees from the wars in the Middle East from travelling to Europe and for the mass deportation of asylum seekers from so-called secure third countries.

In spite of this, Seehofer is triggering the dispute once again. For this, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* accused him of spreading “the poison of easy solutions.” A “populist-diabolical desire” was driving him. His constant “anti-refugee agitation” was extremely dangerous because it strengthened aggressive anti-refugee sentiments.

But Seehofer is not simply acting out of a “populist-diabolical desire.” Throughout Europe, the ruling elite as a whole is moving rapidly to the extreme right. Policies that in the past were considered inconceivable have since been demanded and are now common practice: massive foreign and domestic rearmament, participation in wars in the Middle East, and the sealing of borders.

The reasons for this are the global crisis of capitalism and the international tensions which arise from it, as well as the explosive class contradictions existing inside Germany and Europe. As in the first decades of the 20th century, the capitalist elites are responding to the crises they have themselves provoked with war and dictatorship.

The brutal and inhumane treatment of refugees fleeing from the horrific consequences of wars, which have been waged continuously by the US and its allies for over fifteen years, anticipate the reaction of workers and youth rebelling against unemployment and poverty. Brussels and Berlin have already shown in Greece the brutal methods they are prepared to use.

The conflict between Seehofer and Merkel does not revolve around the issue of whether refugees should be accepted or deterred. Both are agreed on this point. But in contrast to Seehofer, Merkel fears that closing the German border would lead to the break-up of the European Union.

Merkel and the majority of the CDU, together with the SPD, share the view that German imperialism can best realise its global ambitions through a European Union which it dominates. But the more the German government acts as a “hegemon” and Europe’s “disciplinarian,” the greater is the opposition from other EU members.

This is shown in refugee policy. As long as the Dublin agreement continued to function and Italy and Greece were responsible for the majority of refugees, Germany firmly refused to accept refugees from these countries. But when the Dublin agreement fell apart and hundreds of thousands of refugees streamed towards Germany, other countries gave their demand for refugee quotas the cold shoulder. Even of the 160,000 refugees already distributed between EU members, only several dozen have travelled to their designated country.

In the meantime, even Sweden, which measured as a percentage of its population has taken in the highest number of refugees, has closed its border with Denmark. Denmark responded by intensifying border controls with Germany. In this way a chain reaction is emerging, which threatens to tear the EU apart and provoke armed conflict.

“The dangers arising from the break-up of the EU are very real,” the WSWS remarked two weeks ago. “New wars and dictatorships, even within Europe, loom. This danger cannot be prevented by defending the EU, but only in a relentless struggle against it and the capitalist system upon which it is predicated.”