

German candidate pushes suicide device for Hamburg elderly

By Dietmar Henning
15 September 2007

In an election campaign that includes a visit to a home for the elderly one would expect candidates, irrespective of party affiliation, to explain to residents their policies in support of older people. This is particularly the case when such a visit comes only a few weeks after the publication of a report by the health insurance companies' medical service that documented catastrophic and potentially lethal conditions in nursing homes across Germany.

According to the report, every third person in care failed to receive sufficient food and drink. More than 35 percent of those in care homes and more than 42 percent of invalid elderly people living at home received inadequate bed care, resulting in sores from lying too long in a single position. For many seniors their transfer to a home for the elderly does not represent the well-earned and dignified beginning of a new chapter in their lives based on adequate medical and psychosocial support, but rather a period of prolonged suffering. The lack of nurses is such that those active in senior homes are thoroughly overworked.

However, for Roger Kusch, head of the new party "Homeland Hamburg," which is standing in the Hamburg elections due to be held in February 2008, the solution to these problems is clear. Just two weeks ago he explained how he intends to deal with the suffering of the elderly brought about by cuts in health care. In the retirement home in the city suburb of Lokstedt, Kusch presented the prototype of a machine with which the inhabitants of the home can commit suicide.

According to Kusch, those ready to die could give themselves a deadly injection with merely the push of a small green button. In so doing they and their families would be able to circumvent German law, which prohibits assisted suicide.

What is one to make of such a provocation aimed at elderly persons and the infirm? A home for the elderly is not the same thing as a clinic in which incurably ill patients are cared for in the last days and weeks of their lives. Inhabitants of homes for the elderly are usually merely old and frail. If they do suffer, then it usually has a great deal to

do with the conditions prevailing in their care facility.

When Roger Kusch now proposes a scheme for the premature termination of the lives of the elderly, he is expressing his utter contempt for senior citizens. Behind such a conception is the notion that elderly citizens are unproductive, useless and an unacceptable burden on the welfare state.

Four years ago the chairman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) youth organisation, Phillip Missfelder, had already declared, "I am strictly opposed to 85-year-olds receiving artificial hip joints at the expense of society as a whole." Missfelder, who still leads the youth organisation and has been a parliamentary deputy since 2005, had made his calculations according to the current forms of free-market accounting.

Kusch's latest proposal is rooted in the same reactionary thinking, but goes one step further. It brings to mind the period of the National Socialist dictatorship in Germany, when so-called "unworthy lives" were simply eliminated.

The despicable appearance by Kusch in Hamburg cannot simply be described as the mutterings of a right-wing lunatic. Kusch was, after all, a member of the CDU for 34 years and only resigned from the party a year and a half ago. Between 2001 and 2006, he occupied the post of senator of justice in Hamburg, and he is not the only senator in Hamburg who has drawn attention with his right-wing activities.

Up until 2001 Hamburg had been governed for 44 years in succession by the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—in the last period in a coalition with the Greens. In the local elections in 2001 the SPD emerged as the party with the highest percentage of votes, but the CDU was able to form a ruling coalition with the free-market Free Democratic Party and the right-wing extremist Constitutional Offensive Party (*Partei Reichstaatlicher Offensive*—PRO) led by the former judge Ronald Barnabas Schill. In forming this coalition the CDU, led by Ole von Beust, helped lift an extreme right-wing party to power.

In 1996, Ronald Schill earned the name "Judge Ruthless"

after he condemned a mentally ill woman who had scratched some cars to two-and-a-half years in prison. He gave the same sentence to an Indian citizen who had tried to obtain a work permit with falsified documents. In 2000, Schill founded the PRO and one year later carried out an election campaign based on xenophobia and law-and-order politics.

Schill demanded among other things a drastic increase in penalties for youth offenders and immigrants, including further limitations to the right of asylum, the deportation of foreigners for the most trivial of offences, the arming of the police, cuts in cultural funding and a form of zero tolerance for petty offences such as spraying graffiti and travelling on public transport without a ticket. In the election campaign he also called for prison sentences for parents who failed to take proper care of their children and the castration of sex offenders.

Following the election Ole von Beust appointed Schill his interior senator and deputy mayor. Then in 2003 Beust broke with Schill, accusing the latter of attempting to blackmail him. According to von Beust, Schill had threatened to make public an alleged homosexual relationship between von Beust and his justice senator Roger Kusch. Following the sacking of Schill in December 2003 von Beust called new elections, in which the CDU emerged as the strongest party. He was now in the position to govern Hamburg on his own. Previous electoral support for the PRO slumped, the party later broke apart and its former chairman now lives in Brazil.

Ole von Beust appointed his long-time friend Kusch as justice minister in the new Senate. Kusch also made the headlines due to his law-and-order policies. In the summer of 2002, Kusch paid a visit to the prison run by the notorious sheriff Joe Arpaio in the US state of Arizona “in order to further the modernising of the Hamburg prison system,” as he told one paper. Arpaio has been called “America’s Toughest Sheriff” for his methods of operation in Maricopa County, where many prisoners—including both men and women—are required to work in chains. He is known to feed his guard dogs, which respond to commands in German, better than his prisoners, who are subject to round the clock video supervision.

Kusch also followed in the footsteps of Schill and implemented a unique law in Hamburg that allows youth offenders to be sentenced on the basis of laws applying to adult offenders—a long-time demand of Schill.

Then on March 27, 2006 von Beust sacked Justice Senator Kusch. Kusch’s department had passed on secret documents from a parliamentary committee of inquiry to Kusch’s own lawyer and another CDU deputy.

The task of the committee of inquiry was to investigate the conditions in a home for delinquent youth where gross

abuses had come to light. The youths’ post had been opened and read in secret and they were also subjected to drug treatments with severe side effects. There were repeated incidents of force and coercion used against the young offenders. More than a dozen youth had been incarcerated without the appropriate judicial recommendation. In addition, under-age youth were brought to the home in restraints.

Five hours after his dismissal Kusch resigned from the CDU. Later he explained his reasons in a newspaper interview, making the absurd claim that German Chancellor Angela Merkel (of the conservative CDU) was demonstrably leading “Germany towards a socialist society.”

On May 1, 2006, Kusch announced the founding of a new party with the name “Homeland Hamburg.” Like Schill, Kusch campaigned for tougher laws against drug dealers and the abolition of laws penalising various forms of discrimination and existing laws for youth offenders. Kusch also opposed restrictions on the restraint of fighting dogs, although two such animals had savaged a six-year-old Turkish boy in Hamburg a few years earlier.

In an interview with the right-wing extremist paper *Junge Union*, Kusch announced that his new party also had the support of the Bremen-based extreme right-wing group “Bremen Must Live,” led by the extremist Joachim Siegerist. Siegerist had been a member of the Hamburg CDU until 1987 and was later prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred. In 1992 Siegerist described “gypsies” as “an evil, criminal band” who “rob steal, extort and threaten” and “pounce about like the Jews persecuted by the Nazis.”

Kusch’s campaign visit to a Hamburg retirement home with his suicide apparatus cannot simply be dismissed as “immoral and scandalous”—to quote the remarks of Michael Naumann, the SPD’s leading candidate for the upcoming Hamburg election. It is also not the “confused mistake” of a right-wing populist, but rather the logical consequence of the reactionary and asocial policies carried out by extreme right-wing elements at the heart of the CDU—precisely the type of policies carried out in Hamburg by leading CDU members such as Ole von Beust.

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