

German “left” journalist Jacob Augstein comes out as a right-winger

By Peter Schwarz
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The regular column Jacob Augstein publishes for Germany’s leading news weekly Spiegel Online is called, “When in doubt, left.” It is, ironically, an appropriate title. It allows the multi-millionaire *Spiegel* heir to portray himself as a left-liberal, so long as he has doubts about the direction in which official politics is heading. But now the time of doubt is over. In the face of the growth of militarism, the strengthening of the state apparatus and anti-refugee agitation, Augstein has openly declared he is a right-winger.

In his latest column, he rails against dual citizenship for Germans of Turkish origin, belatedly accepting that Christian Democratic Union (CDU) politician Roland Koch, who stirred up xenophobic sentiments with a petition campaign against dual citizenship in 1998 to win the Hesse state election, was correct.

“Dual citizenship was once thought of as a progressive project. It was an error,” Augstein writes. “Dual citizenship should be reserved only for citizens from EU countries.”

To justify his about-face, Augstein cited the demonstration in Cologne on July 31, where 40,000 people protested the military coup in Turkey and solidarised themselves with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who only narrowly escaped the coup plotters.

The call to introduce the death penalty had been raised from the crowd, Augstein asserted. Then he cited at length Turkey’s economics minister Nihat Zeybekçi, who threatened the coup plotters with draconian punishments—however, not in Cologne, but at rallies in Turkish provincial towns—something Augstein did not divulge.

Based on this meagre construct, Augstein accused the Cologne demonstrators of paying homage to a dictatorship. “Regardless of how autocratic Erdogan portrays himself, hundreds of thousands in Germany

stand by him,” he wrote. “Among them are probably many who have a Turkish as well as a German passport. Germans screaming for dictatorship?”

Augstein laments the fact that there are now approximately 500,000 people living in Germany who have Turkish and German passports. The “well-meaning dual citizenship initiative” had made “the integration of some Turks more difficult” and “given 500,000 Turks living in Germany the opportunity not to have to decide.” Given the growth in migration, this can no longer be tolerated, Augstein continued.

Augstein wants citizens who “feel obligation to the state” and know to which ministers, presidents and premiers they “owe loyalty.” The claim that dual citizenship is “an accepted part of the German immigration society’s culture of recognition” is rejected by Augstein, who writes in contrast, “An immigration society accepts everyone who acknowledges it. Why then do such people require a second citizenship?”

This is not fundamentally different from the right-wing demand for a “leading German culture (deutsche Leitkultur)”. The idea that citizens must profess allegiance to a society (whatever that means), are bound to the state and owe loyalty to the government is deeply anti-democratic and authoritarian. It stands in the unwholesome traditions of the authoritarian German state. From here it only requires one small step further to demand loyalty to the fatherland and the accusation of betraying the fatherland bound up with this, which in Germany was used to target numerous socialists, opponents of war and other critical individuals.

Augstein’s rightward evolution is no isolated case. It is symptomatic of the members of an entire section of

the privileged upper-middle class who formerly understood themselves as left and liberal but who now give their full support to the state under conditions of deepening social tensions and the return of German militarism.

Heribert Prantl, the long-time head of the domestic affairs desk at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and partner of Augstein's sister Franziska, vehemently defended the decision of the German Supreme Court to ban a video message from Erdogan at the Cologne rally. And the Social Democrat and former president of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, Klaus Staeck, described the officers who led the Turkish coup as "rebels" and denounced the condemnation of the coup as "pseudo-intellectual babble."

In the United States, several "left liberals" are supporting Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the military, who has managed to attack her semi-fascist opponent Donald Trump from the right because he is allegedly too soft on Russia and China.

The rightward evolution of these layers underscores that the struggle against xenophobia, social cuts, the buildup of the state apparatus and militarism can only be waged on the basis of a socialist programme that seeks to mobilise the international working class.

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