

Der Spiegel columnist adopts slogans of the far right

By Ulrich Rippert
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In his latest comment for *Der Spiegel*, Jakob Augstein, son of the founder of the news magazine and publisher of the weekly newspaper *Freitag*, has adopted positions associated with the far right: identity and homeland.

Addressing Martin Schulz, the new chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Augstein writes: “A dignified life requires more than just social justice. Another condition is identity. Social justice must be won from capitalist interests and corporations, just as identity must be won in opposition to migration.”

He goes on to say that the task of a “left-wing” government includes “protection of the homeland.”

The declaration that “identity” must be won against refugees and migrants is a slogan of the so-called “identity movement,” a modern variant of right-wing extremism. It defines “the people” (das Volk) in terms of culture rather than biology. It presupposes a hermetically sealed national culture, the “identity” of which is threatened, above all, by “Islamization.”

Augstein knows this very well. He writes: “This topic is dangerous for the left.” After all, “in theory, the foreigner should be a friend.” But in reality, he continues, “immigration is a source of concern.”

He then declares “Heimat” (homeland)—another favorite term of the extreme right to which the Nazis claimed adherence—to be a “human right.” He writes, “And it is not only AfD (Alternative for Germany) demagogues who are worried about their homeland due to the huge influx of migrants.” Immigrants are “competitors for housing and jobs.” They are also “competitors when it comes to lifestyle.”

Augstein publishes his regular column under the headline “When in doubt, go left,” and supports red-red-green (SPD-Left Party-Green Party) politics in his paper *Freitag*. To back up the assertions in his latest piece, Augstein refers to leading representatives of the Left Party and the Greens—the chair of the Left Group in the Bundestag, Sahra Wagenknecht, and the Green mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, both of whom have repeatedly agitated against

refugees.

Augstein complains that it is nonsense to accuse Wagenknecht of the type of racism associated with the xenophobic AfD for her assertion: “Whoever abuses the laws of the host country has forfeited the right to live in the host country,” and her declaration that “too much immigration” creates many problems.

With his praise for Wagenknecht, Augstein joins company with Deputy AfD Chairman Alexander Gauland, who also lauded the speech by the leader of Left Party. Gauland wrote: “Frau Wagenknecht summed up the situation very nicely. Anyone coming to us voluntarily has to behave like a guest or has to leave.” Gauland stands on the right wing of the far-right AfD.

In words that could be taken from the program of the AfD, Augstein writes: “The problems of tomorrow are maturing in immigrant classes.” He then demands: “In no German school classroom should the proportion of children for whom German is not their mother tongue exceed 25 percent.”

These disgusting and racist positions have provoked reactions even within *Spiegel* itself. The Polish-born journalist Margarete Stokowski, another regular columnist, wrote: “Of course I’m pissed off. I grew up in an immigrant district in an immigrant class where the same problems arose” to which Augstein referred in his appeal for a 25 percent limit.

Augstein’s adoption of far-right nostrums evokes indignation and revulsion. Jakob junior is a highly privileged member of the upper-middle class, who inherited millions from his publisher father and crops up regularly on TV talk shows to give sermons on all sorts of issues.

It is necessary, however, to view Augstein’s racist tirades in a broader political context. He is not alone in his turn to the right. His views are symptomatic of a social and political layer around the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party that saw itself and was seen as liberal or leftist.

This layer includes cultural and social officials who have well-paid posts in municipal and state administrations, as

well as in party and trade union apparatuses.

Not everyone in these well-heeled circles, who have settled mainly in wealthier suburbs of the big cities, is a millionaire like Jakob Augstein. Many, however, have benefited from the stock market boom of recent years and are keen to maintain and defend their privileged lifestyles.

They react to the global crisis of capitalism and the intensification of class struggle with a marked turn to the right. They regard growing social conflicts and increasing resistance to exploitation, militarism and war as a threat to their social status. In response, they demand a strong state and become increasingly amenable to far-right slogans.

The election of Donald Trump has accelerated this process, revealing the extent of the crisis and putrefaction of capitalism. For its part, the German government has responded to American trade war and preparations for open war with its own protectionist measures and militarism.

The relative stability of the postwar order has come to an end. Seventy years after the collapse of Hitlerite fascism, the ruling class in Germany is once again seeking to play the role of hegemon in Europe and stake its claim as a world power.

As long as German imperialism was forced to play a secondary role in previous decades and pursue its foreign and economic policy under the wing of the US, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologues and propagandists such as Augstein stressed their humanism and praised multiculturalism.

However, no sooner does German imperialism return to the world stage than key layers of Germany's bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie fall into line—just as they did during Bismarck's Kaiserreich, and again in the early 1930s in support of Chancellor Brüning's emergency decrees in the twilight of the Weimar Republic, and once again in smoothing the path for the Third Reich. The bombastic speeches praising humanism are quickly transformed into poisonous barbs directed against refugees and immigrants.

In language borrowed from the lexicon of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who extolled the virtues of the "preservation of Germanism," Augstein reproaches refugees for jeopardizing German identity and destroying "our homeland." In the manner of far-right demagogues, he fosters xenophobia and combines it with the glorification of all things German.

Last summer, Augstein responded to a demonstration of 40,000 Turkish migrants in Cologne denouncing the failed military coup in Turkey by calling for the abolition of the "double passport for German Turks." Any solidarity with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was unacceptable, he declared, because every citizen had to feel "committed to one state."

Such an argument parallels the far-right demand for recognition of a "leading German culture." The view that the citizen is committed to the state and owes allegiance to the government is profoundly undemocratic and authoritarian. It stands in the ominous tradition of the individual's complete subordination to the German state. It is only a small step from pledges of allegiance to the nation to the charge of treason against those not prepared to make such a pledge. Many socialists, opponents of war and social rebels have been persecuted in Germany on this basis.

Wagenknecht and the Left Party are moving further and further to the right. The Left Party leader was one of the first to applaud Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte when he stoked up anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim sentiment in order to out-do the far-right Geert Wilders in the Dutch election campaign. She praised Rutte's decision to refuse entry to Turkish government members and accused Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Gabriel of not showing "the same backbone."

Augstein and Wagenknecht make clear what can be expected from a red-red-green government. This would not be some sort of "left-wing alliance," but rather a right-wing government that moves directly against the working class.

Augstein's attacks on refugees trying to escape the hell of imperialist war in Syria and other countries show his contempt for the working class as a whole. His call for defense of "our homeland" is part of the fanfare proclaiming the return of German militarism.

Last year, the Hitler parody *He's Back* ran in cinemas. It is becoming increasingly topical. Those who are back include above all the layers Hitler could best rely upon: the typical representatives of the German petty-bourgeoisie, with their inveterate narrow-mindedness, xenophobia, nationalism and spinelessness.

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