

German parties move further to the right after AfD's electoral success

By Johannes Stern
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The same parties that are ideologically and politically responsible for the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) are exploiting the right-wing extremists' success in Sunday's federal elections to shift the political climate even further to the right. They are preparing the way for a government that will launch a major military buildup, slash wages and benefits, and establish the framework of a police state.

Within the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the forces that have long been calling on Angela Merkel, the party chairwoman and German chancellor, to crack down more aggressively on refugees are seizing the offensive. "We urgently need more programmatic breadth within the CDU," said Bundestag (parliament) member and finance specialist Klaus-Peter Willsch. "We have to cover our right wing. That is the only way we can once again achieve the level of support we need to be a people's party."

Bavaria's Christian Social Union (CSU), sister party to the CDU, which already during the election campaign raised the demand for an upper limit on refugees, responded to its vote decline of more than 10 percentage points by largely adopting the AfD's programme. CSU Chairman Horst Seehofer, who is under increased pressure from the right, said that the AfD gained votes because the CDU/CSU "left open its right flank." The party would now correct this and adopt a "clear stance." Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt concurred, saying, "We have understood that we have to close our right flank."

The Greens, who are preparing to enter a so-called "Jamaica" governing coalition with the CDU/CSU and the neo-liberal Free Democrat Party (FDP), are heading in the same direction. Green politician Boris Palmer said on Deutschlandfunk when asked about Seehofer's statement, "From the CSU's standpoint, he is right.

They are facing a state election soon and they don't want the AfD to get 12 percent again."

The Green mayor of Tübingen left no doubt that his party is ready to support the CSU's repressive refugee policy. "The people trust us to solve the refugees' problems," Palmer said. "What they are not so sure about is whether we can solve the problems with the refugees. We have to be tougher on that. We will probably have to make compromises with solutions offered by the CSU. Otherwise, there will be no government."

Palmer, who recently published a book titled "We can't accept everybody," boasted that his essentially far-right refugee policy enjoys broad support within the party. He has obtained a great deal of agreement for his radical-pragmatic stance on the issue, he said, "from the party base, from municipal politicians, from everywhere where people are concretely experiencing the problems that arise when a million refugees come to Germany."

The Left Party, which, like the Greens, represents the interests of privileged sections of the middle class, is playing an especially despicable role in the rise of the AfD. As a party of government in the states of the former East Germany, the Left Party is responsible for creating the social catastrophe that has driven workers into the arms of the AfD. In 1990, the party supported the reintroduction of capitalism into East Germany and has pursued right-wing, pro-capitalist policies under the cover of left phrases ever since. This has produced the political frustration that right-wing demagogues are now exploiting.

As the social and political crisis intensifies, the Left Party is adopting the far-right's programme ever more openly. Significantly, Left Party lead candidate Sahra Wagenknecht was praised by AfD deputy leader

Alexander Gaulland during the last televised debate. “What Mrs. Wagenknecht said is right,” said Gaulland. “People feel that what they have worked for is being lost due to the refugee policy, and sometimes this culminates in anger.”

The comment came after Wagenknecht attacked the government’s refugee policy from the right, saying, “We made some things too easy in the initial stages of the refugee issue and did not speak about problems.”

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), following an election debacle in which it obtained its worst result since the Second World War, absurdly sought to present itself as the party leading the fight against the AfD. The AfD is “an organisation of hate” and “a disgrace for Germany,” said SPD lead candidate Martin Schulz. At the SPD’s concluding election rally in Berlin, he stated, “We are standing in your way.”

However, Schulz oriented towards the right-wing extremists’ programme during the campaign, calling incessantly for more police, a bigger military, and tougher measures against refugees. The SPD did not seek to mobilise opposition to the AfD, but sought instead to suppress and silence it.

In this context, the SPD’s reaction to the events in Hamburg surrounding the G20 summit in July must be taken as a warning. First, as the governing party in Hamburg, the SPD organized violent police repression against overwhelmingly peaceful protesters. Then, the party launched a witch-hunt against the left, appealing explicitly to those around the AfD.

SPD Justice Minister Heiko Maas demanded the creation of a European extremist database for the radical left and declared his support for a “rock against the left” concert. The SPD’s party executive came up with the concept of “protest terrorism” to criminalise all left-wing opposition to social cuts and imperialist war.

The SPD played the same role in the conflict with the right-wing extremist professor of history at Berlin’s Humboldt University, Jörg Baberowski. When the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) and its youth and student organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, criticised Baberowski for his agitation against refugees and his downplaying of Nazi crimes, the SPD backed Baberowski. The SPD president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, went so far as to publish a

statement threatening critics of the far-right professor with criminal prosecution.

The SGP is the only party that publicly opposed Baberowski’s right-wing extremist positions from the outset and warned of their consequences, which are now becoming clear with the entry of the AfD into parliament and the shift of all the established parties further to the right.

The urgent task now is to intensify the struggle to build a mass socialist party in the working class. In Germany of all places, the horrific experiences of the Third Reich demonstrate that the only way to vanquish the dangers of war and fascism is through the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme.

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