

German parliament follows in the tracks of the far-right Alternative for Germany

By Peter Schwarz
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On the evening of the general election, when it turned out that the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was the third largest party in parliament, its chairman, Alexander Gauland, threatened to “hound” the other parties. The debate over the government programme this Wednesday gave the impression that this threat had come true. The central theme was the limiting and deportation of refugees. But the AfD did not hound the other parties before them, it ran with them in the pack.

Chancellor Angela Merkel devoted more than a third of her one-hour government statement to the refugee issue. She claimed that “the many people who have fled to us” were the main reason for the division and polarization of the country, which was “economically at the best it has ever been since reunification.” She announced an extensive list of measures to ensure that an exceptional situation such as 2015 would not happen again: the sealing off of the European external borders, voluntary and state-ordered repatriations and the establishment of so-called anchor centres, where refugees are interned.

One speaker after another joined in the witch-hunting of refugees. Christian Democratic (CDU/CSU) parliamentary leader Volker Kauder said the internment and rapid deportation of people without right of residence was, “in the deepest sense, humane.” CSU state parliamentary leader Alexander Dobrindt combined the “clear commitment to a strong state” with the demand for a “genuine European border police.” Like Merkel, he stressed that Germany was “clearly a Christian country” and had “a Christian-Jewish tradition.” He said, “Islam is not part of Germany.”

The Free Democratic Party (FDP) leader Christian Lindner assured the new interior minister, Horst Seehofer (CSU), that he would protect him from any

criticism if he made good on his announcement to force deportations and ensure border controls. Green Party leader Anton Hofreiter expressed his respect for the new government and offered it his cooperation. His colleague from the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch, attested that the grand coalition undoubtedly pursued “projects worth supporting” and lamented it lacked “momentum.”

AfD chief Alexander Gauland then put the icing on the cake when he blathered against “illegal immigration,” saying it cost 50 billion euros annually, brought migrants into contact with “assassins, knife murderers and rapists” and rambled on about a Syrian “with two wives and six children” who “was given a whole house and lavish social benefits in Pinneberg,” while “more and more Germans are homeless.”

Gauland’s malicious tirade culminated in the statement that there was “no obligation to [support] diversity” and also “no obligation to share my space with strangers.”

No one in the Bundestag (parliament) protested against this racist filth. Yet it is not even 80 years since Adolf Hitler argued in a similar vein in the Reichstag (parliament)—you merely have to replace the term “German” with “Christian” and “Jewish” with “Islamic.”

In his notorious speech of January 30, 1939, in which he threatened “the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe” in the event of a world war, Hitler declared: “Above all, German culture is, as its name implies, a German and not a Jewish one, and therefore its administration and care are placed in the hands of our people.” He was “determined to stop the infiltration of a foreign people ... and to deport this people.”

Why is the Bundestag adopting this xenophobic course, which would have aroused strong indignation

some years ago, or is at least accepting it without contradiction? The AfD is obviously not the cause, but only the harshest expression of this development.

Merkel herself, in her policy statement, gave an indication of the real motives, when again and again she conjured up the division of society. “Although our country is doing well,” she explained, “many people are worried about the future, as the tone of the argument has grown rougher, and the concerns about the cohesion of our society have increased.”

Society is indeed deeply divided—but not because of refugees, but because of the policies of Merkel and her Social Democratic predecessor Gerhard Schröder. Tax cuts for the rich, the Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV welfare and labour “reforms,” bank rescues and austerity measures have allowed the number of poor to swell, while a small minority lives in unimaginable wealth. Added to this are millions whose lives are marked by growing stress and insecurity and who face an old age of poverty.

The new government will intensify this development. The billions in assets of the super-rich are not affected; Merkel could not even ensure a wealth tax passed. The few billion euros that she is providing for education and care from the budget surplus, and praises as great social benefits, are nothing more than a drop in the ocean. They will inevitably fall victim to the next recession and rising military spending, and initiate further cuts. The appointment of a Goldman Sachs banker and the architect of Schäuble’s austerity measures to senior positions in the Finance Ministry underlines that the austerity programme will continue unabated.

In response to mounting international tensions and conflicts, the grand coalition is responding with an unrestrained military build-up that is devouring gigantic sums. “The biggest tasks for Europe today are security, military capability, protected borders and the common enforcement of our economic and political interests in the world,” CSU state leader Dobrindt summed up these plans in the Bundestag. In order to “play a role on the world stage” and “act on equal terms with the US, Russia and Asia, Europe must be ready to act on this world stage.”

Both social inequality and militarism are widely rejected by the working class and youth. Millions hate and despise the AfD, but this opposition finds no

political expression. Although there are now seven parties in the Bundestag for the first time, the gulf between the masses and all the establishment political parties is wider than ever.

This opposition cannot be suppressed forever. It will inevitably find expression in protests and violent class struggles. That is the main reason for stirring up racism and xenophobia.

The propaganda against refugees pursues the goal of diverting social anger and indignation against the weakest in society. “What should be done to make things better? Above all, kick the ones that are below,” wrote Leon Trotsky in 1933 on the methods of the Nazis.

At the same time, incitement against migrants serves to eradicate democratic rights, to justify increasing state powers and strengthens right-wing extremist forces, which can then be used to suppress social and political protests.

It is time to oppose this development. This requires the construction of a new socialist party that pursues an irreconcilable political struggle against the establishment parties and unites the working class in its fight against fascism, war, social inequality, and capitalism across all national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. This is the goal pursued by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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