

German Social Democrats feign opposition to fascist AfD

By Johannes Stern
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In this week's budget debate in the German Parliament, the Social Democrats (SPD) sought to fraudulently present themselves as opponents of the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD).

After AfD chairman Alexander Gauland opened the debate on Wednesday with one of his infamous tirades against refugees and left-wingers, former SPD chairman and chancellor candidate Martin Schulz came to the microphone. "Reducing complex political issues to a single issue, usually referring to a minority in the country, is a traditional means of fascism," he said. "We saw that presented again today. Immigrants are to blame for everything."

Then he added, "There has been a similar language in this House before, and it is time to fight back against this kind of rhetorical rearmament, which in the end leads to a disinhibition, the result of which is violence on the streets." Schulz commented on an earlier statement by the AfD leader, "Hitler and the Nazis are just a speck of bird shit in over a thousand years of successful German history," by saying, "Mr Gauland, a large quantity of bird shit is a dung heap, and you belong atop that in German history."

Schulz's performance, which was prominently featured in all media and news programs, has a transparent aim. Following the far right riots in Chemnitz, which prompted shock and outrage among workers and young people in Germany and around the world, establishment politicians and the media are trying to disguise their own responsibility for the provocative behaviour of the AfD and organized neo-Nazi gangs. Following Schulz's statement, representatives of the SPD, Left Party and Greens rose from their seats, along with parliamentarians from the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Free Democrats (FDP), and gave Schulz a standing ovation.

During the debate, leading politicians of almost all the establishment parties feigned outrage at the right-wing extremist attacks in Chemnitz and their incitement by the AfD. "No, there is no excuse and justification for incitement, use of violence, Nazi slogans, hostility towards people who look different, who own a Jewish restaurant, attacks on police," said Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU). In his speech, the SPD politician Johannes Kahrs thanked Schulz for his "clear message" and called out to AfD deputies, "Look in the mirror and see what led this republic into misery in the 1920s and 30s." In response, the AfD faction rose to its feet and left the plenary chamber en bloc for a few minutes.

All the posturing in the German Bundestag cannot hide a central political fact: The AfD is not being "combated" by the grand

coalition government, but consciously built up and politically promoted. The right-wing extremists can only behave so provocatively because the establishment parties have de facto adopted the AfD's policies, made pacts with the right-wing extremists and afforded them ever-greater influence in the state apparatus, the security forces and in the federal and state parliaments.

The SPD has played a leading role in legitimizing the AfD. With its decision to continue the grand coalition with the Christian Democrats, the SPD made the AfD the leader of the official parliamentary opposition, despite its receiving only 12.6 percent of the votes in last autumn's general election. This is the only reason Gauland and Co. can open parliamentary debates with fascistic tirades.

The AfD politician Stephan Brandner owes his post as chairman of the powerful parliamentary legal affairs committee to the SPD. It was Social Democrat Bundestag Vice President Thomas Oppermann who had nominated Brandner—a representative of the völkisch-nationalist wing of the AfD and a close confidant of the openly right-wing extremist Thuringia AfD leader Björn Höcke—in a secret ballot.

On Thursday, Brandner confirmed media reports that he had met with Hans-Georg Maaßen, the President of Germany's secret service (BfV), to discuss its annual 'constitutional protection report.'

"After my election as chairman of the committee, I received a letter from Mr Maaßen saying he would like to meet for a bilateral discussion," Brandner said. The meeting then took place on 13 June in Brandner's office. The discussion covered "not only the number of Islamist perpetrators, but political perpetrators, perpetrators as a whole" and also "the constitutional protection report." On the other hand, there had been "no discussion at all" about the AfD, he said.

What this means is clear. The constitutional protection report, issued by the grand coalition and with a foreword by interior minister Horst Seehofer (CSU), was prepared in close cooperation with the AfD. Already on Tuesday, Gauland boasted that Maaßen even met with him for talks three times.

While the AfD and its right-wing extremist periphery appear in the report merely as "victims" of alleged "left-wing extremists," all opposition to capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, and militarism is branded as "left-wing extremist" and "anti-constitutional." Among other things, the Sozialistische

Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is listed “left-wing extremist party” and “object of observation.”

All the hypocritical criticism of the SPD regarding Maaßen and the AfD cannot hide the fact that the Social Democrats not only fully supported this decision, but actively pushed it forward. Following the mass protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg last year, the SPD leadership participated in the smear campaign against left-wing opposition to the AfD. For example, former Social Democratic Justice Minister and current Foreign Minister Heiko Maas called for a “rock against the left” concert and the creation of a European database for supposed radical left-wingers.

At Berlin’s Humboldt University (HU), Social Democratic University President Sabine Kunst is seeking to suppress “left-wing extremism” in close cooperation with the AfD. Following a request by AfD Berlin state deputy Martin Trefzer, Kunst sued the HU Student Council in late July to obtain the full names of all speakers and their deputies. The lists required by her and the AfD would enable right-wing extremist circles to intimidate and attack students who speak out against them. In addition, Kunst seeks to defend the radical right-wing Humboldt Professor Jörg Baberowski against growing student criticism. Baberowski is an ideological standard bearer of the AfD who aggressively whips up hatred against refugees and minimises the crimes of the Nazis. In early 2014, he told news weekly *Der Spiegel*, “Hitler was not vicious.”

It now fits the picture that SPD leader Andrea Nahles agreed with Merkel and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer on Thursday not to dismiss Maaßen but continue government business, at least for the time being, with the de facto AfD man at the head of the secret service. It was “a good, serious conversation with the goal of further cooperation,” said a spokesman for the federal interior ministry. In other words, the grand coalition will further intensify its right-wing course!

Workers and young people seeking to confront the resurgence of fascism must understand their political and historical causes. The debate in the Bundestag shed light on why the formation and strengthening of right-wing extremist forces is once again becoming a political goal for the ruling class. Ultimately, the promotion of the extreme right is driven by the same issues that led to catastrophe in the 1930s. The German elites are reacting to the historic crisis of capitalism, the moves towards global war and growing tensions between the major powers by returning to an aggressive great power foreign policy and massive increases in military spending.

In the budget debate, the grand coalition presented a militarist program that can only be imposed by establishing a dictatorship. Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz justified his austerity budget with the need for the most comprehensive rearmament and war plans in Germany since the end of the Second World War. “It’s also about security policy. Here, in this budget, we are discussing the issues that we need to set in motion together so that development aid and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) are set up so that they can meet the international challenges.” He said he would use additional leeway to “organize further defence and development assistance.”

In her remarks, Merkel confirmed government plans for a

combat as the ~~military~~ ^{Syrian} government. ag~~st~~ st simply can look the other way when chemical weapons are used somewhere, and an international convention is not respected”, “cannot be the answer”. And “simply saying no from the outset, no matter what happens in the world, cannot be the German attitude, dear friends.”

The so-called “left” opposition parties in the Bundestag support the right-wing politics of the grand coalition. In their speeches, representatives of the Left Party and the Greens openly lined up behind Merkel and applauded her and other government spokespeople again and again. Their main criticism was that the government was not implementing its own program aggressively enough. “Take this responsibility at last! In each of your ministerial offices, hang up the headlines of your coalition agreement: ‘A new cohesion for our country’, ‘A new dynamic for Germany,’” Left Party leader Dietmar Bartsch shouted at the end of his speech.

The only social force that can stop the right-wing offensive by the ruling class and all its parties is the international working class. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei will organize events throughout Germany in the coming weeks to politically arm the massive opposition among workers and youth against the resurgence of fascism with a socialist program. Our demands are:

- Stop the conspiracy of the grand coalition, state apparatus and right-wing extremists!
- No more war! Stop Germany’s return to militarist great power politics!
- Abolish the secret service and immediately cease monitoring the SGP and other left-wing organizations!
- Defend the right to asylum! No to increased state powers and surveillance!
- End poverty and exploitation—for social equality! The wealth of the financial oligarchy, the banks and major corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control!

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