

From the Nazis to the AfD: Big business finances the far-right

By Peter Schwarz
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According to an investigation by the weekly *Der Spiegel*, the rise to prominence of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was facilitated by huge financial contributions from 88-year-old billionaire August von Finck. His father, also named August von Finck, financed Adolf Hitler and made a fortune by confiscating Jewish property through the process known as “Aryanisation.”

Der Spiegel concludes that several million euros that flowed into the founding and development of the AfD originate from Finck’s business and financial empire. In 2013, Finck was placed 10th on the *Forbes* list of the richest Germans, with a fortune of \$8.2 billion. In order to avoid paying taxes, Finck has lived since 1999 in an old castle situated in Weinfeld, Switzerland.

Finck’s support did not take the form of public donations, but rather proceeded through middlemen and organisations that masked the real source of the money. For example, an organisation called the “Association for the Rule of Law and Civil Liberties” funded poster campaigns and free newspapers recommending a vote for the AfD to the tune of at least €10 million. *Der Spiegel*, which collaborated with the Swiss weekly *WOZ* in its research, clearly shows the close ties between this association and the director of Finck’s financial and property holdings, 74-year-old Ernst Knut Stahl.

Finck has been promoting right-wing parties advocating neo-liberal economic policies and opposition to the joint European currency since the 1990s. During that decade, he deposited €4.3 million with the League of Free Citizens, led by the Free Democratic Party (FDP) politician Manfred Brunner. The League was a forerunner of the AfD.

In 2003/2004, a group of anonymous entrepreneurs donated €6 million to the Association of Citizens’

Conventions. Sitting on the executive of the Association at the time was Beatrix von Storch, now a leading figure in the AfD. The largest part of this sum came from Finck.

In 2009, the hotel and restaurant group Mövenpick, which was owned by Finck, donated €1.1 million to the Free Democratic Party. Shortly thereafter, the FDP pushed through a reduction of the VAT tax in the hotel industry, which benefited Mövenpick directly. The “Mövenpick donation” developed into a public scandal.

Finck has promoted the AfD from the very start. Two of the founding members of the AfD, Bernd Lucke and Olaf Henkel, admitted to *Der Spiegel* that they met with Stahl or Finck in person. Hubert Aiwanger, chairman of the Free Voters and now deputy premier of the state of Bavaria, who was allied with Lucke for a short time in 2013, has also confirmed such meetings. A key role was played by Dagmar Metzger, who was the spokeswoman for the AfD after its foundation. Metzger provided the party with money via her agency Wordstatt, while maintaining contact with Finck and Stahl.

At a later stage, the AfD covered much of its spending by trading in gold coins. It was supported in this by Finck’s company Degussa, whose public relations were handled by Metzger. After the Bundestag at the end of 2015 put a stop to this trading in coins with an alteration to the laws governing party financing, the Association for the Rule of Law and Civil Liberties took over and provided millions to finance AfD campaigns.

The *Spiegel* report concludes that this secret and in part illegal financing played a major role in the ascent of the AfD. “Grey or black money is the starting point of most political scandals in the federal republic,” the

magazine concludes. “What is new is that a party like the AfD was able to get started with the help of dubious financing and then move into German parliaments.”

While such financing is perhaps new for the federal republic, it certainly has its precedents in German history. Finck’s father, August von Finck Senior, had already supported the Nazis when they were still far from taking power. He and other industrialists met with Hitler in the middle of 1931 at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin and promised to provide him with 25 million Reichsmark in the event of a left-wing uprising. This sum is equivalent today to about €100 million. At another secret meeting with Hitler on February 20, 1933, Finck and other business leaders provided the newly installed chancellor with €3 million for his upcoming election campaign.

August von Finck was one of the most influential business magnates of the Weimar Republic. His father, Wilhelm Finck, co-founded the bank Merck Finck & Co. and numerous other companies, including Allianz Insurance and the Munich Insurance Company. In 1911, Wilhelm Finck was elevated to the Bavarian peerage.

August von Finck’s support for Hitler paid off. He joined the NSDAP (Nazi Party) in 1933 and held numerous leading posts in business and politics. He benefited from the “Aryanisation” of Jewish property, and after the Nazi annexation of Austria took over the Jewish bank S. M. v. Rothschild in Vienna.

Following the collapse of the Nazi regime, Finck had to withdraw temporarily from some of his executive posts and hand over management of the family bank to a trustee. He was allowed to keep his fortune, however, which had increased in tandem with the crimes of the Nazis. In 1948, he was classified as a “fellow traveler” of the Nazis. Soon after, he returned to his leading posts. He then concentrated on warding off a planned land reform and increasing his property.

Today, the Finck fortune is based mainly on huge real estate properties in Munich, the most expensive city in Germany. The bank Merck Finck & Co was sold in 1990. In addition, August Jr. holds numerous investments in large companies, which he buys and sells off at short intervals. The companies in which he was or remains involved include the Munich Löwenbräu brewery, the Mövenpick restaurant chain, the machine manufacturer Von Roll, the armament

manufacturer Oerlikon-Bührle, the construction company Hochtief and numerous others.

In 2010, Finck bought the brand name “Deutsche Gold und Silberscheideanstalt” (Degussa) for €2 million and entered the gold trade, as part of his plan to support the AfD. The name Degussa is closely linked to some of the worst crimes of the Nazi regime. A subsidiary of the company supplied Zyklon B gas for the Nazi extermination camps. Degussa himself melted down the gold extracted from the teeth of the murdered Jews.

Now the Finck fortune, a product of the greatest crimes against humanity in history, is once again being used to promote a party that increasingly embraces Nazi politics. This underscores the warning that has long been made by the *World Socialist Web Site*: Faced with growing social tensions and conflicts between the major powers, the German ruling class is returning to the fascist and militaristic traditions of its past.

The revelations about the AfD’s financial resources again confirm that this far-right party is not some sort of rank-and-file movement. As the preface to the book *Why Are They Back?* points out, the emergence of the far right is “solely due to the support they receive from political parties, the media, the government and the state apparatus”—and, one should add, from representatives of the financial aristocracy.

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