

The German ruling class fears the spectre of socialism

By Johannes Stern
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“Socialism haunts the American ruling class,” commented the *World Socialist Web Site* in early April. The same applies to Germany. Since the beginning of April, as tens of thousands have demonstrated in Berlin against high rents and for the expropriation of the stinking-rich hedge funds and real estate sharks, the official parties and media have become obsessed with the spectre of socialism.

“Expropriations are really socialist ideas and have nothing to do with bourgeois politics,” said Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Markus Söder at that time. Deputy Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Chairman Thomas Strobl spoke of a “completely unsuitable instrument.” The “deep red spectre” of expropriation was scaring off investors. The CDU Economic Council ranted about “grasping for a relic of socialism.”

After publication of an interview with the Juso (Young Socialist) chairman Kevin Kühnert in the current issue of *Die Zeit*, headlined “What does socialism mean for you?” the campaign has reached a new peak. Although Kühnert’s “utopia” of socialism, as he himself states, means nothing more than the “restoration of the welfare state promises of the seventies, eighties in an updated form,” the media, leading politicians in government and opposition, as well as the trade unions, have responded with raging anti-communist tirades.

“A spectre returns,” ran the headline of an editorial in *Die Welt*. In it, Karl-Heinz Paqué, CEO of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, which is close to the Free Democratic Party (FDP), warns against “falling back into the grey past of Marxist ideology.”

In a letter to Kühnert, *Bild* tabloid rails, “In the versions of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot to Castro, Ceausescu or Honecker [all Stalinist regimes that had nothing to do with socialism] what once has been comprehensively and quite bloodily refuted, needs no new test.”

New FDP Secretary General Linda Teuteberg

announced *Bild*, “Free Democrats will indefend social market economy against such socialist excesses.”

And the Green Party and the unions also opposed Kühnert’s timid nationalization plans. “A collectivization or nationalization of the auto industry solves none of the problems,” the parliamentary group leader of the Greens told *Spiegel Online*. And the head of the BMW general works council, Manfred Schoch (a member of the IG Metall union), rumbled in business weekly *Wirtschaftswoche*, “For workers of German enterprises this SPD is no longer electable.”

In fact, Kühnert is being attacked most aggressively within his own party. “What gross nonsense. What has he been smoking? It can’t be legal,” tweeted Johannes Kahrs, spokesman for the right-wing Seeheimer Circle. The president of the SPD Economic Forum, Michael Frenzel, demanded, “There is only one reaction: expulsion from the party.” The co-founder of the SPD in the former East Germany and former deputy chairman of the SPD parliamentary group, Stephan Hilsberg, said, “Whoever dreams of this [socialism] ends up in hell.”

In her statement, Alice Weidel, parliamentary leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), made clear the fascist winds blowing in the ruling class 86 years after the transfer of power to the Nazis. “The Christian Democrats would be ‘laughing’ at ‘a fine coalition partner,’” she sneered. It was “not the first time that the Young Socialists had distinguished themselves with a frontal attack on the central values and legal principles of our constitution and legal system. Slowly but surely Kevin Kühnert and the Jusos will become a case for the secret service.”

The threat to suppress socialist propaganda with the help of the state apparatus must be taken seriously. The current annual report of the secret service already bears the handwriting of the AfD. While it only mentions the AfD and its right-wing extremist periphery as “victims”

of supposed “left-wing extremists,” any opposition to capitalism, nationalism, imperialism and militarism is criminalized as “left-wing extremist” and “anti-constitutional.” The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is taking legal action against being placed under surveillance by the secret service.

What drives the ruling class in its war against socialism is not the somewhat innocuous demands of Kühnert and his supporters in sections of the Left Party, whose loyalty to bourgeois rule is beyond question. They talk about socialism to prevent a truly socialist programme, as advocated by the SGP, from gaining influence. What the ruling class fears is the growing social and political opposition of workers and young people, which is breaking out in Germany, Europe and around the world.

Significantly, in one of its recent editions, *Die Zeit* took the “power of the streets” as its title theme, stating, “All the great revolutions of history began on the street. It is the place where the dissatisfaction of the people shows itself; on the street, citizens demand what they miss in politics. And now, the people seem to be missing a lot. Almost everywhere in Europe, and also in Germany.”

The paper referred, among other things, to the recent mass protests against internet censorship and for climate action, in which several hundred thousand people participated. “The protests are getting bigger and their numbers are increasing,” it cautioned. In 2008, there were 2,345 demonstrations registered in Berlin, and there were already 4,446 in 2018, the article states. In Frankfurt, too, the number of demonstrations has doubled, and even tripled in Cologne.

Above all, what concerns *Die Zeit* is that the protests are developing outside the control of the establishment parties and the trade unions, and are being organized primarily through social media. “The new protesters do not draw their strength primarily from traditional camps or alliances, parties or unions. They organize themselves in WhatsApp groups, mobilize friends and classmates via Instagram or YouTube.” With apprehension, the paper adds, “Demonstrations are often the first signs that something new is coming.”

The “new” coming is the growing support for socialism around the world. Since the end of World War II, never has the entire social and economic system been more hated by masses of workers and young people. Capitalism is seen for what it is: the cause of screaming social inequality and the return of fascism and war. Thirty years after German reunification and the dissolution of the

Soviet Union, celebrated by the ruling elite as the “end of Marxism”—although, in reality, it meant the collapse of Stalinism—socialist ideas are regaining mass support.

A representative survey at the beginning of the year conducted by polling agency Civey, on behalf of *Tagesspiegel*, found that 54.8 percent of respondents supported expropriations. As early as 2016, a YouGov survey revealed that in Germany “significantly more people have a positive opinion of socialism than of capitalism.” The polling institute writes, “45 percent of respondents in Germany have a positive opinion on socialism, 26 percent a negative one. Regarding capitalism, the situation is the other way round: one in four (26 percent) has a positive opinion, and just under half (47 percent) of respondents have a negative opinion.”

The SGP provides these sentiments and the evolving struggles with a clear socialist programme. It is the German section of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, which defended the Marxist programme of international socialism against Stalinism and social democracy. Unlike left windbags such as Kevin Kühnert, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, Alexis Tsipras and their pseudo-left adherents, we insist that socialism can only be built by an independent, international movement of the working class.

Our statement on the European elections says, “We are not trying to alleviate the symptoms of a diseased system but advocate the overthrow of capitalism. ... Humanity is once again faced with the alternative formulated by Rosa Luxemburg in the midst of the First World War: Socialism or barbarism. Only if the working class unites all over Europe and fights for the United Socialist States of Europe can disaster be prevented.”

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