

# How the German government and parties pave the way for the extreme right

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After the surprising success of the DVU (German People's Union) in recent local elections in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt, all of the political parties in Bonn formally dissociated themselves from this ultra-right-wing party and its hostile slogans towards foreigners. But the real position of the parties became clear a short time afterwards.

The Christian Social Union (CSU), one of the parties in the ruling coalition based in the southern state of Bavaria, allowed the right-wing demagogue Peter Gauweiler to re-emerge from the shadows and give a policy speech on the issue of foreign workers at a party conference. The text could just as well have come from the DVU itself. Gauweiler declared that Germany and Bavaria had 'reached the limits of their integrating capacity.' He reviled the 'thought police in the left-wing camp,' who opposed a discussion on the limitation of immigration, and spoke of 'our population' as 'those who were there first.'

In Berlin, the Minister of the Interior, Schönbohm, a leader of the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) stirred up hatred against 'foreigner ghettos' which he said should be disbanded. 'Already there are areas where you can say: 'we are no longer in Germany there',' he explained to the Berlin tabloid *BZ*. In recent days he has organised the forced expulsion of 74 refugees from the civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

But not only the CSU and CDU are competing with the DVU--the Social Democratic Party (SPD) is doing the same. Recently the German parliament, the Bundestag, passed a bill to cut the social support for those immigrant workers whose request for asylum has been dismissed, as well as for 'illegal' immigrants. The legislation was introduced by the state of Berlin, which is governed by a coalition of the CDU and the SPD.

The bill has been supported by the SPD-ruled states of Lower Saxony and the Saar, whose state premiers, Gerhard Schröder and Oscar Lafontaine, are the two most prominent leaders of the SPD. The SPD-led states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Brandenburg also supported the legislation. The bill effectively seeks to starve out of the country sections of the immigrant population.

One cannot make too much of the pledges by the parties in Bonn declaring they would never make common cause with the ultra-right, as is revealed by the most recent developments in Europe.

In the European parliament, Chancellor Helmut Kohl has now personally seen to it that the MPs of Forza Italia, the party of the Italian media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, are allowed into the European People's Party, a bloc of conservative parties to which

the CDU is affiliated. This is not only an affront to Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who himself sympathises with the Christian Democratic People's Party, but also represents an indirect rapprochement with the neo-fascists who are allied with Berlusconi and who were in a coalition government with Forza Italia in 1994.

In France, too, the conservative bourgeois camp co-operates more and more closely with the fascist Front National (FN). After the UDF (Union démocratique française, French Democratic Union) formed alliances in several regional parliaments with Le Pen's supporters, the Gaullists also followed suit. The last Gaullist prime minister, Eduard Balladur, spoke out in favour of summoning a commission which should lay down 'national preferences' under which certain public services would be made available to French citizens but not to foreigners. According to Balladur, the Front National, which has also introduced such discriminatory practices in the town of Vitrolles where it controls the municipal government, should also be represented in this commission.

The SPD, the Greens, the former Stalinists of the PDS and the trade unions in Germany like to blame the population for the racism which their own policies encourage. The SPD agreed to an effective end to the right of asylum in 1993, citing the supposed limit of tolerance in the population. A further influx of people seeking asylum would promote xenophobia and that would strengthen the right, the social democrats argued.

When Klaus Zwickel, chairman of IG Metall, the metalworkers' trade union, demanded a 'fixed quota for foreigners' in an interview with the magazine *Focus* in January 1997, he justified this by saying it was necessary to 'relieve the German job market and defuse the social explosive.' And the Green Joschka Fischer even claimed in his latest book that the opposition of the labour force to the negative social consequences of globalisation has led 'to a mass potential for a new aggressive nationalism.'

It reminds one of the burglar who, when he is caught, starts shouting 'Stop! Thief!' Wide layers of the population have demonstrated time and again their willingness to help the politically persecuted, wartime refugees and victims of natural catastrophes. But rather than appeal to this deeply rooted sense of solidarity, the SPD, the Greens, the PDS and the trade unions purposely conjure up the most backward prejudices to direct the widespread fear over unemployment and the dismantling of social benefits into reactionary channels.

All talk about a 'limit of tolerance of the population' is an obvious attempt to direct the growing anger concerning the social crisis, for which the parties are responsible, against foreigners and refugees who can least defend themselves. Far from defending 'democracy' against the extreme right-wing DVU, the established parties have created the political climate in which it can flourish.

This is also evident in light of the efforts by the minister of the interior Kanther, who has developed the formerly regionally organised Bundesgrenzschutz (Federal Border Guard) into an all-powerful federal police force. Arbitrary identity controls, which were until now only possible at state borders, will then be allowed within the framework of the so-called 'blanket search' across the entire federal territory.

Already the most elementary basic and human rights are now annulled for a large part of society. Entire families are deprived of their work, apprenticeship and social support and deported although they can no longer live in their country of origin, which has been devastated by civil war. The Bavarian Minister of the Interior Beckstein has even made entire families liable for the criminal actions of their members, deporting the parents of young immigrants who commit an offence.

Whilst those members of the Stalinist bureaucracy responsible for the border regime in the former GDR still have to defend their actions in court, a new border regime in the East, which is just as inhuman, has been created along a stretch of 300 kilometres. The border between eastern Germany and Poland is combed day and night by the Federal Border Guard with tracker dogs and infrared monitors which originate from stocks of the NVA (the national people's army of the GDR).

According to the Polish *Gazeta Lubuski*, around 40 people drowned between 1993 and Autumn 1996 attempting to cross the border over the Oder and Neisse, the rivers marking the divide between Germany and Poland.

At the moment, over 3,500 people are in custody prior to deportation nation-wide and are treated like serious criminals, although their only 'crime' consists in their having no valid residence permit. According to the list of the refugee organisation *Pro Asyl*, between October 1993 and August 1995 alone, 34 people in custody prior to deportation committed suicide.

One of the first prisons purely for those awaiting deportation was opened in 1994 in old army barracks in Offenbach. Behind the initiative was Rupert von Plottnitz, minister of justice for the SPD-Green coalition state government in Hessen and a prominent member of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens).

The unscrupulousness of the politicians of all parties with regard to democratic principles is shown most clearly in examining the fate of Germany's law regarding the right of asylum. Following the experience of fascism, which had compelled thousands of people to go into exile in the 1930s, this right was embedded into the German Constitution of 1949. The central content of this democratic right is that no one may be turned back at the border seeking to enter Germany.

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was above all refugees from Eastern Europe who made use of the right of asylum. Yet the number of unemployed in the 60s and--due to wars and civil wars in the Middle East, Asia and Africa--the number of refugees from these

regions had scarcely begun to rise before the right of asylum was called into question.

Whilst the CDU stirred up hatred against 'economic refugees,' the SPD-Free Democrat coalition government in power in the 1970s enacted new administrative regulations according to which refugees could already be turned back at the border. In 1978 and 1980--still under the social democrat-liberal coalition--two laws followed for the 'acceleration of procedures for asylum,' which drastically reduced the possibilities of appealing against negative decisions on requests for asylum and also banned refugees from working for their first 12 months in the country. The laws also made possible the housing of refugees in assembly camps and the payment of social security in kind instead of cash.

'The dismantling of asylum laws has reached a low point. The constitutional guarantee of asylum is at the disposal of the lower administrative authorities,' Berlin judge Fritz Franz commented at the time. But it was by no means the lowest point.

In 1993--two and a half years after reunification and at the height of a wave of xenophobic pogroms--parliament passed a constitutional amendment with the votes of the SPD, which virtually annulled the right of asylum. Only someone who comes to Germany by air or sea and, in the course of this, has neither set foot on the territory of a 'safe third country' nor comes from a so-called 'non-persecuting state' has a legal chance of filing an application. Since then, new laws have enabled shortened procedures for dealing with asylum petitions immediately at the airport, and also extended the authority of the border guards and the border police.

The co-operation of all the established parties in attacking foreigners and refugees is a sure sign of the decay of capitalist society. None of the existing parties in Bonn has an answer to the pressing social problems confronting millions today.

The defence of immigrant workers and democratic rights urgently requires the building of a new party that defends the interests of all workers. An independent political movement of the working class would pull the rug out from under the feet of the DVU and other ultra-right-wing parties. These parties can only cash in on the despair of oppressed layers of working people because the old workers organisations block a progressive resolution to the social crisis.

See Also:

Germany expelling thousands of Bosnian refugees  
[16 July 1998]

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