

# Germany: Christian Democrats mount racist campaign

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The campaign initiated by the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) against the introduction of a new law permitting dual citizenship has unleashed a considerable political conflict. While extreme right-wing parties such as the DVU, the NPD and the Republicans have declared their enthusiastic support, calling upon their members to support the action, the campaign itself has met with growing rejection and opposition from the population. Opposition is also growing inside the CDU.

Within the leading committee of the CDU, in part because the party has only recently elected a new party chairman, Wolfgang Schäuble, only three members of the executive voted against the campaign. But inside the party as a whole opposition has become more audible.

The *Frankfurter Rundschau*, one of Germany's main newspapers, published in the city with the highest proportion of foreign workers, has initiated a counter-campaign and is collecting signatures for its "Frankfurt Appeal," which reads: "We are concerned about peaceful cohabitation in this city. We therefore emphatically condemn the way in which a difficult issue of domestic policy has been dragged onto the streets with the intention of encouraging ill-feeling".

A *Rundschau* article from February 3 throws light on the opposition inside the CDU to the racist campaign. The former CDU minister Christian Schwarz-Schilling and the executive member of the Jewish community Michel Friedmann (CDU) are quoted as decrying "the intensification of emotions with regard to the issue of immigration".

The minister president of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Erwin Teufel, until recently a vice-chairman of the CDU, said he "was never enthusiastic about the campaign". The local CDU branch in Lörrach and the CDU youth organisation in Stuttgart are refusing to support the campaign. The local branch in Oldenburg voted unanimously to boycott the action: "After 16 years [of CDU rule in Germany] we are no longer prepared to accept as a command every wrong decision made by the party leadership in Bonn and Munich".

The clearest statement against the campaign came from the chairman of the CDU state organisation in the Saarland, Peter Müller. This area bordering France has a varied history--at times in German hands, at times French--and has many inhabitants who already have joint nationality.

The *Rundschau* article described the situation in Berlin, which has 440,000 foreign workers: "At the signature tables the atmosphere is tense. Many groups and organisations, whole classes of school children, and passers-by loudly make clear their anger over the action. The chairman of the CDU in Berlin, Klaus Landovsky, a symbol of party nepotism, corruption and scandal, described the opponents of the campaign as "rabble" and said that the CDU 'would not bow to pressure from the streets'. A remarkable statement, when one bears in mind the repeated assertion that the whole action is designed to test out public opinion."

Why, despite warning voices within his own ranks, has Wolfgang Schäuble initiated this campaign of hostility to foreigners?

There are several reasons. For 25 years Helmut Kohl was chairman of

the party, in recent years leading it like a patriarch who held together the various squabbling fractions. He wanted to retire one and a half years ago, but there was such an acute danger of the party dissolving, it seemed only Kohl could hold it together. Now, with his retirement, the long suppressed contradictions are erupting with redoubled force.

The immediate form of the crisis in the Christian Democratic Union is the continual threat by its sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union, to end its coalition with the CDU and emerge as an independent right-wing party on a national basis. The head of the CSU, Edmund Stoiber, has already made extensive preparations and established his own personnel in a number of local and regional CDU leaderships. Schäuble has reacted for his part by going onto the offensive with right-wing nationalist positions.

But it would be wrong to present Schäuble as merely the victim of intrigues in Bavaria, as do many newspaper articles and commentaries. Schäuble has a history of reacting to political difficulties by adopting a right-wing and nationalist stance. In his book *Turning to the Future*, published prior to the national elections in 1994, he complained that among Germans "patriotism does not count as one of their outstanding characteristics".

"Where this leads, when only a stunted national consciousness exists ...", he wrote at that time, "we can see with our own debate on the issue of Europe." According to Schäuble a people (Volk) require a "transcendental dimension" when it seeks to successfully deal with its future. Because the "religious dimension" has been lost, Schäuble speaks instead of the "safe-keeping of the community [Gemeinschaft], the community of the family, the community of the village, of the group, and also the nation."

With the loosening of the grip of religious community, Schäuble propagates nationalism in its stead. In a country where in the name of "Volksgemeinschaft"--a favorite term of the Nazis--the greatest crimes in the history of humanity were committed, such words have a special significance, and are evidence of unparalleled political irresponsibility.

Following objections and protests over his nationalist slogans, Schäuble retorted that his book merely served to undermine the position of right-wing radical parties in the elections.

Schäuble's present conduct shows that this is not the case. Moreover, this line of argument makes clear his similarity to Stoiber, who has likewise claimed that in taking up extreme right-wing slogans his own party, the CSU, has prevented the entry of the fascists into the Bavarian parliament.

Leaving to one side a few peculiarities of German history, one observes a development that can be seen in a number of countries. Under conditions of growing social inequality and tension, a number of parties, which up until now have operated within the framework of certain forms of social harmonisation, are undergoing a rapid turn to the right. They fear a social explosion and are attempting as a precaution to mobilise the most backward elements of society. The result is a radical change in the party landscape.

A look across the border underlines this process. In a number of European countries the influence of the Christian Democrats and other conservative parties which dominated post-war development for decades has declined dramatically. In Great Britain the Conservative (Tory) Party is deeply split, and in the last elections was virtually reduced to the status of a fringe group. The Gaullists in France are no less divided, and the Christian Democrats in Italy lost 20 percent of their vote before splitting apart in all directions.

The situation has been especially desperate for the Christian Democrats in Holland, a party that governed for seven decades and was frequently able to win over 50 percent of the vote. In last year's election they received a miserable 18.4 percent of the vote and are fighting for their survival.

Reunification in 1990 slowed down this process in Germany, but now--as so often in German history--it is expressed in an intensified form. The break-up of the so-called "people's parties" takes the form of a marked turn towards the right.

To understand the depth of the present changes it is useful to look back in history. When the CDU and the CSU emerged from the ruins of war and fascism they were not parties in a classical form, with clear programs and support from specifically delineated groups of voters. They were rather founded as a union, i.e., a mishmash of various parties and political tendencies. The parties addressed the most varied social layers: peasants and craftsmen, together with workers, salesmen and small shop keepers, clerical workers and intellectuals, students and housewives, as well as apprentices and pensioners.

This broadly-based social orientation was matched by a program which lacked any kind of firm statement, and in a nebulous fashion was intended to be acceptable to everybody. In addition there were strong local and regional connections. In his book *The CDU after Kohl*, Peter Lösche writes: "From below, the CDU was founded from various local groups out of Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne circles." He continues: "Christian Socialists stood alongside German nationalist Protestant conservatives. In Berlin the CDU was socialist and radical, in Cologne clerical and conservative, in Hamburg capitalist and reactionary, in Munich counterrevolutionary and particularist--a multicoloured patchwork of ideologies."

Two ideological attributes quickly came to dominate: Christian and anticommunist. Conservatism without Christianity is like "a woman without a womb", wrote Hans Zehrer at the beginning of the 50s. In the 30s, Zehrer had made a name for himself as the editor of the right-wing conservative magazine *Tat*. He and others claimed that the churches of both confessions were the only institutions to survive the Third Reich with a morally clean slate.

In the early years after the war, Christian conservatism was used by the party to divert the discussion over Hitler and fascism into reactionary canals. The catastrophe in Germany was said to have been the result of a secularism which began with the Enlightenment. The years 1933 to 1945 "only made clear what had been prepared by the long tradition of a liberal, Marxist, god-hating world view based on equality", according to the church pamphlets circulated at the time--a message which was also intoned in CDU party speeches.

Anticommunism as the second ideological pillar became more pronounced with the intensification of the class struggle. It fed upon the crimes of the Stalinist regime which, in the form of the GDR, lay just across the border. It dominated political slogans during elections. The battle cry "Freedom or Socialism!" was repeated in a welter of variants. Anticommunism lies so deep in the CDU that, on the occasion of the last election, the national organiser of the CDU, Peter Hinze, resorted to the old slogans, even though the East German GDR government has ceased to exist some time before.

A determining factor for the further development of the Union parties

was the rapid economic upturn, which began with the million-dollar loans provided by the Marshall Plan and the currency union in the summer of 1948. The rapid improvement in living and working conditions for all sections of the population created the basis for policies which essentially sought to balance between the varied interests of different social layers and make concessions to everyone.

This type of "client politics" formed the basis for the "recipe for success" of the Union as a "people's party". In the 50 years of the existence of the Federal Republic, until September of 1998, there were only 13 years in which the Chancellor was *not* a member of the CDU, and only one occasion when the Union was not the strongest party, following the national elections of 1972.

Since the mid-80s the economic framework has changed completely and pulled the ground from beneath such a policy. The development of new technology, the accompanying growth of productivity and the globalisation of production have been used by the ruling circles in economics and politics to impose ever-more extensive redundancies. Growing unemployment serves at the same time as an instrument to push through wage cuts and attacks on social rights. The more the social divisions intensify, the sharper and more irreconcilable the conflict of social and political interests inside the so-called peoples parties.

In the last two decades the CDU has lost more than 10 percent of its members. The internal conflicts and tensions could hardly be more pronounced. The milieu of the Catholic workers movement, once upon a time the "heart and power source" of the Union and its various social committees, has continually lost influence over recent years, while the middle class groups have grown in strength. In the past, new generations of functionaries were primarily recruited from the circles of church youth and had close connections to the workers' wing of the party. Today the leadership consists of lawyers or tax and company advisers who demand the rapid destruction of all the institutions of the social state.

With Wolfgang Schäuble a political tendency now dominates which vehemently and rabidly attempts to divert the growing social tensions along nationalist and racist paths. In the next period this will lead to considerable conflicts. But neither the advocates of social reform nor the supporters of the Catholic Church inside the party--such as Geißler, Blüm and Süßmuth, nor, indeed, the governing SPD-Green coalition--can offer any serious alternative to this reactionary course.

The only basis for ending this nationalist furore lies in the political activity of a broad majority of workers to implement the profound social changes necessary to overcome mass unemployment and social misery.



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