# Germany: Former left-wing radical Horst Mahler joins the neo-fascist NPD

**Max Rodenberg**
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Berlin attorney Horst Mahler was a lawyer for the Extra-parliamentary Opposition (APO) at the end of the 1960s, joint founder of the Socialist German Student Federation (SDS) and a member of the terrorist Red Army Faction (RAF). Last weekend he applied to join the neo-fascist National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD).

Mahler's membership application to the NPD followed a weeks-long campaign for a prohibition of the party. At a press conference in Bruchsal near Karlsruhe last Saturday, Mahler—in his own words an "opponent of the party-state"—called on all those for whom "Germany was close to their hearts", to "strengthen the patriotic front, by publicly joining the NPD without consideration for the consequences for their personal fate". "We must all act at present as if we were at war, and the German *Reich* [empire] now demands our contribution to defend the German people and requires personal sacrifice.... Now it is a matter of Germany and the German *Reich*; reservations or animosities should be set aside."

Mahler comes from a solid middle-class family, and would probably have followed in their footsteps if the APO had not existed and there had not been a broad radicalisation of the younger generation at the end of the 1960s. The prerequisites for a middle-class lifestyle were there: Mahler, the son of a dentist, was born in 1936, three years before the outbreak of the Second World War. Following the family's flight from Silesia in 1945, they eventually moved to West Berlin in 1949. Mahler studied jurisprudence at the *Freie Universität* in Berlin, even gaining a scholarship. At this time he was also member of a *schlagende Verbindung* (a militaristic student fraternity). However, he then joined the SPD and became chairman of their youth organisation in Berlin Charlottenburg. Later, he was expelled from the party because of his membership in the SDS.

After graduation, Mahler worked in one of the most renowned Berlin law offices. He soon started his own firm, specialising in medium-size businesses. When he took on more and more clients from the left-wing APO scene, and as a consequence lost his business customers, Mahler's legal career was at an end.

He became joint founder of the first "socialist lawyers collective" and represented Rudi Dutschke, Rainer Langhans and others. In 1969, he defended Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, who went on to jointly form the RAF. Following the assassination of Rudi Dutschke at Easter 1968, Mahler took part in activities against the notorious right-wing Springer press. Despite various legal actions against Mahler under the emergency legislation imposed at the time, the public prosecutor's office did not succeed in disqualifying him from his profession.

Following several criminal convictions in 1970—including a ten-month suspended sentence and a 75,000 mark fine—Mahler fled to Jordan with the recently released Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and others, where they trained as armed guerrilla fighters with the Palestinians.

Mahler was arrested in Berlin two months later. In October 1972 in a dubious trial, he was finally condemned to 12 years imprisonment for "conspiracy to commit aggravated robbery in connection with the establishment of a criminal association and participation in the same". His exclusion from the bar followed in 1974. Mahler remained in detention until 1980.

With the help of Gerhard Schroeder—the former SPD-Young Socialists chairman, later prime minister of Lower Saxony, and today Germany's federal chancellor, who acted as Mahler's legal counsel in 1978—he gained readmission as a lawyer in 1988 and was able to re-start his business practice in Berlin.

The joint founder of the RAF had already become one of its critics during his detention. In 1977 he wrote that this had come from his "inner liberation from the dogmatic revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism". But his conversion went even further. In 1998, after 10 years of relative calm, Mahler surprised the public with a submission to the right-wing newspaper *Junge Freiheit*, in which he revealed his new beliefs. In this article he drew a connection between the radical 1968 movement and the development of a new *völkisch* (German-nationalist) ideology .

"The 1968 generation destroyed tradition and religion as world-shaping conceptions ... and brought our people a step nearer to maturity. The ground is only now ready for completing this enlightenment, which will simultaneously mean their surmounting. We experience this result of the cultural revolution of 1968 as Hell, since along with tradition and religion our moral substance has departed.... As a cultureless *Volk* [people] we live in a second Stone Age. It requires some

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effort of thought to really extinguish the mental vacuum—this condition of absolute negativity, which threatens to destroy us now as humans and as a *Volk* —and recognise as something positive, and in this sense as an historical service of the 1968 generation.... Let us be warriors of thought! Let us argue together—for God and our forefathers' country!”

In the meantime, Mahler has become an ideologue of the neo-fascist movement. The statement he issued to accompany his NPD membership application reads like a lightning course in neo-fascist ideology and induces nausea in anyone whose mind is not blunted.

On the basis of a conspiracy theory of “Jewish financial capital”, Mahler speaks of the “secret government” by the “directors of the global economic and financial system”, whose “shadow treasurer” constitutes the chairman of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, Paul Spiegel. This government avails itself of “secret service provocations to stabilise the system, unleashing witch-hunts and campaigns of political persecution as required”. German politicians and media are all “well-intentioned puppets in this devilish play”. What prevails is “opinion-terror against all, even so timid, stirrings of the German people's spirit. Against everyone, who ... opposes the enforced *Überfremdung* [swamping with foreigners]”.

Mahler calls the murders and acts of violence carried out by neo-fascist young people “expressions of the natural—semi-instinctive—resistance of the German people against their *Umvolkung* [literally, un-peopling] into an Afro-Euro-Asiatic crossbreed”. “In view of the population explosion in the coloured peoples' countries destroyed by Euro-American imperialism, the fear of foreigners is necessary in the coming decades [i.e., as a life-supporting defence reaction] to the extent that the pressure of migration from Asia and Africa places a question mark over the identity of Europe as the continent of the white man.” For Mahler, “the taboo effect” must be removed from terms such as racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, “with which the German people were held in servitude for over 50 years”. The “genuine rage and outbreaks of hate” are nothing more than “symptoms of a spiritual illness, which arise from the suppression and proscription of healthy, vital drives”.

Mahler also justifies the Holocaust with the explanation: “History represents the actions of God, not those of humans. The spirit of the time denies God and “persecutes the Germans for their faith, by placing the responsibility for history, thus for God's actions [meaning the Holocaust—MR], onto the Germans.”

Mahler's transformation from a left-wing ideologue to a self-proclaimed fascist is unusual, but there are, however, historical precedents. In particular, a comparison can be drawn with the forerunners of Italian fascism, with the French theoretician Georges Sorel and with Mussolini, *el Duce*. Their original radicalism directed against bourgeois society—Sorel regarded himself as a Marxist, and Mussolini led the left wing of the Socialist Party—assumed an increasingly nationalist colouration and finally was directed against the workers' movement and its internationalism.

Socially, fascism was based upon the petty bourgeoisie, which feels equally threatened by big capital and the workers' movement, and which looks for protection to the bosom of the “nation”. Politically, it places itself at the service of the bourgeoisie, which it salvages from the social revolution, and supports its imperialist aims.

The course of Mahler's development—despite all his personal eccentricities—contains a rational core.

Despite their revolutionary rhetoric at the time, sections of the 1968 movement already regarded the working class as a mass that could be easily manipulated, dominated by “consumer terror”, on which the fight against bourgeois society could not be based. As a substitute, they turned to various national liberation and guerrilla movements. The highest, and at the same time most demoralised expression of this conception was the establishment of the RAF, which wanted to conduct a guerrilla struggle in the German cities.

While most of the 1968 generation soon abandoned their socialist ambitions, and returned to the bosom of bourgeois society or even (like the former street fighter turned German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer) to its head, Mahler's rejection of the working class went to another extreme. Marxism, according to Mahler today, divides the people, and that is basically false. “Resistance should particularly be directed against American supremacy and come from the *völkischen Einheit* [unity of the people]”.

Psychologically, Mahler's evolution reflects the pent-up fear and panic of social layers that are presently being hit by the effects of globalisation and welfare cuts.

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