

How the conservative CDU/CSU alliance in Germany stirs up hatred against foreigners

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30 November 2000

On November 9, Edmund Stoiber, Angela Merkel and Friedrich Merz—leading representatives of the German CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and the CSU (Christian Social Union)—appeared together on a platform at a demonstration in Berlin held under the slogan “For humanity and tolerance”. The scene was reminiscent of the Mafia godfather who goes to confession on Sunday before returning to his normal criminal activities on Monday.

Since this travesty, both the CDU and CSU have laid bare their inhumanity and intolerance towards foreigners. Both stand for a sharp limit to immigration and the abolition of the constitutional right to asylum, and hope to gain political capital from campaigns on these issues.

Three days before the Berlin demonstration, the CDU had already presented its new immigration policy. On the one hand, its white paper tries to comply with the business community's demand for qualified foreigner workers and to promote the legal framework this will require. For the first time since the imposition of a general recruitment freeze on non-EU (European Union) foreigners in the 1970s, the CDU is now acknowledging the necessity for a limited degree of immigration into Germany.

At the same time, barriers against unwanted foreigners—and this means refugees in particular—are being further increased. The economic and national interests of Germany are to have express priority over humanitarian and democratic principles.

Originally the white paper, formulated under the guidance of CDU Saarland Prime Minister Peter Müller, was to contain the words: “Germany is a land of immigration” and the “the boat is not full yet”. On the demand of Friedrich Merz (chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary faction) and Angela Merkel (chairperson of the CDU), both phrases were struck from the paper. The phrase “the defining German culture”—previously rejected by Peter Müller—was inserted in the slightly modified form: “the defining culture in Germany”. What is being demanded is “compliance with and integration into the system of values and regulations which we currently deem appropriate”.

The paper continues: “Having a good command of the German language should be to the applicant's advantage—for example, in relation to decisions about his immigration application, the issuing of a work permit or the granting of permanent residency. On the other hand, it ought to be possible to oblige immigrants—at least those dependent on social support from the state—to take part in integration courses, especially language courses.”

Thomas Schäuble, CDU Interior Minister for the state of Baden-Württemberg, has already announced his intention to introduce a bill into the upper house of the federal parliament in order to compel foreigners to participate in German language and culture courses. According to the proposed legislation, if participation in such courses is refused, or if an immigrant fails to benefit from them, “a continued right to reside in the country should be withheld”.

The cynical nature of these demands becomes obvious when one

remembers how such language courses have been systematically denied in recent years due to budget cutbacks. Thousands of immigrants who would have jumped at the chance of learning German have thereby been deprived of the opportunity or the financial means to do so.

In the final analysis, it is clear that the CDU is aiming to create a two-class legal standard for foreigners. Whoever has the desired educational qualifications and financial resources is—to a certain degree—welcome. On the other hand, a person who wants to enter Germany as a refugee or as someone driven by economic necessity has no chance. The CDU is trying to meet the requirements of big business while simultaneously keeping open the option of instigating campaigns against foreigners in the approaching elections—as it did in Hessen during the 1999 state election and as faction chairman Merz has long demanded.

The CDU is also seeking drastic limitations on the right of foreigners to reunite with their families. These restrictions are formulated in rather general terms in the immigration proposals. However a “clarification” of the issue made by Wolfgang Bosbach, deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU federal parliamentary faction, makes patently obvious what is actually intended. According to Bosbach, a policy of family reunification corresponding to the guidelines of the EU Commission would result in the entrance of up to 250,000 immigrants per year. Therefore, the CDU categorically rejects these guidelines. In this respect, Bosbach sees himself as being in agreement with Otto Schily, the Social Democratic Federal Minister of the Interior. If these EU guidelines were in fact implemented, Bosbach believes there would be “only a limited chance for securing a new immigration policy complying with Germany's interests”.

The right to political asylum also comes under attack in the CDU's white paper, although the yearly number of asylum-seekers has declined from 400,000 to 100,000 since the changes to the Constitution in 1993. Combating the “abuse” of the right to asylum is declared to be a matter of priority. Moreover, the policy paper demands a “transformation of the right to asylum into a institutional guarantee” within the framework of “European harmonization”.

In reality, this would be tantamount to the abolition of the right to asylum. The legal claim to asylum would be transformed into an act of mercy dependent on the arbitrary discretion of the state. Unfair procedures could no longer be contested in a court of law—as is the case with any genuine right. Instead, a state committee would rule—in the manner of a feudal squirarchy—on the legitimacy of a refugee's right to remain in the country.

The reference to “European harmonization” amounts to pure chicanery. The handling of claims to asylum in Germany has already declined below standards set by the Geneva Convention on Refugees and other human rights accords signed by the German Federal Republic. And, as the previous example concerning family reunification reveals, the Red-Green federal government has striven to prevent the modest improvements to human rights recommended by the EU Commission from coming into force for the time being. It is simply not so that a more generous and

comprehensive right to asylum in Germany will be formulated in order to comply with European harmonization. The opposite will be the case.

In mid-November the CDU's Bavarian alliance partner, the CSU, exhibited a hostility to foreigners which was even more brazen and venomous. Immigration policy was the central issue at the CSU party convention in Munich. It consisted of countless variations on the theme introduced by Bavarian Interior Minister Günter Beckstein—of foreigners “who are useful to us” and foreigners “who want to use us”.

A much celebrated guest at the party convention was Wolfgang Schüssel, the Austrian head of state who achieved international notoriety for helping the extreme right-wing Jörg Haider (Austrian Freedom Party) into the federal government. It is becoming increasingly clear that the CSU protested so vehemently against European sanctions on Austria principally because it intends to emulate Haider's populist election campaigns and methods.

The party convention endorsed a white paper entitled “Germany should not become a traditional land of immigration” that was formulated by Beckstein in much more explicit language than that of the CDU's policy statement.

The emotionally charged phrase “defining German culture” is demonstratively cited in this document. Thesis 1 states: “The basis for Germans and foreigners living together is the defining culture of fundamental Western European values rooted in Christianity, the Enlightenment and humanitarianism.”

Thesis 2 demands a limitation to immigration from non-EU states. Thesis 3 acknowledges that, within certain limits, “a moderate, socially compatible degree of immigration would be practicable for economic and employment policy reasons as well as advisable on humanitarian grounds.” Thesis 4 gets to the bottom of the matter. There it is stated that “Only a limitation of continuing high, uncontrolled immigration into Germany will create the opportunity for an admission of foreigners which is in the interests of the state and the society.” The contrast between foreigners seeking protection and immigrants advantageous to the German economy could not be expressed more clearly.

Thesis 5 calls for a discarding of the right to asylum which is much more explicit than the CDU paper, while Thesis 6 demands an acceleration of the asylum procedure, as well as further disadvantages for refugees in relation to social support and protracted legal cases. Furthermore, the carrying out of deportations must be tightened up and more efficiently organised “in order to dispel any incentive for immigration through the channels of asylum-seeking”.

For anyone familiar with the current conditions in German prisons for deportees and the brutally callous extradition of thousands of people each year, it is difficult to imagine how this practice could be even “more efficiently” organised. Are Beckstein and the CSU considering mass deportations into countries torn by civil war—like Sri Lanka, Turkey and many African countries?

Theses 7 and 9 criticise the EU recommendations concerning family reunification: “The planned extension of the right of people to reunite with their families from a third country and the recommended raising of minimum standards for asylum procedures to a level clearly exceeding legal conditions in Germany ruin all hope of limiting the influx of immigrants on a national basis.” A further tightening of existing regulations in Germany is called for: “As a prerequisite for the reunification of families, applicants should possess integration skills, such as mastery of the German language. The age of children eligible for family reunification should be reduced from the current limit of 6 to 16 years of age, to 10 years at the most.”

Thesis 10 lists the types of foreigners to be welcomed because of their usefulness to the economy—“foreign qualified workers, businessmen and scientists”. The precise number is to be determined through immigration law and annually revised quotas. According to Thesis 11: “The quota for

immigration advantageous to the national economy and the labour market will be set by the federal government in accordance with statutory order and with the approval of the upper house of the Federal Parliament, based upon consideration of the current employment situation.”

The reactionary and often racist tone of these theses was even more obvious in the discussion at the party convention. Edmund Stoiber, the Bavarian State prime minister and CSU chairman, defended use of the term “defining culture” and explained that this entailed not only a command of the German language but, above all, “a readiness to adapt oneself to the German society”. In all of this there was not the slightest trace of cosmopolitan openness or tolerance of other cultures.

Günter Beckstein explained that he understood “defining culture” to mean that there would be no minarets in Upper Bavarian villages. Alois Glück, the chairman of the Bavarian state parliament, claimed that people who today speak about “defining culture” in a disparaging way “have lost contact with their own identity and patriotism”. He demanded that the asylum procedure should last no longer than six months.

If one is to believe the statements of social-democratic and Green politicians these days, the recommendations of the CDU/CSU alliance have little chance of being supported by a majority in the lower and upper houses of the federal parliament at the moment. But this would be a misleading impression. Taking into account the behaviour of the Red-Green government up till now, one can assume that it will react to the current campaign of the conservatives by also moving further to the right.

One recalls the 1993 constitutional changes that the Kohl government was able to push through the federal parliament only with the support of the SPD (Social Democratic Party). At the time, the watering down of the constitutional right to asylum had been preceded by an inflammatory, months-long campaign against an alleged “abuse of the right to asylum”. While this was going on, there was a dramatic increase in the number of murders and arson attacks on the lives and homes of foreigners and refugees. The reaction of the SPD to this wave of violence was to capitulate and take up the demands of the conservative alliance.

Things are much the same today. During the election campaign for the state parliament in Hessen in 1999, no social democrat or Green was prepared to go on the offensive to defend the right to dual citizenship against the nationalistic campaign being waged by the CDU at the time. Instead, on their own initiative and fawning to the CDU, they quickly decided to advocate the reduction of dual citizenship to a much smaller group of potential claimants. In light of the current campaign by the conservative alliance and the everyday practice of German organs of state, it is no wonder that the scale of racist and radical right-wing attacks has markedly increased since then. Nazi thugs feel they have been given the green light.

Today one still comes across those who believe that the SPD and Greens will prevent an abolition of the right to asylum. In terms of practice, however, there is little to separate the Red-Greens from the conservatives.

The arguments used by the CDU to justify a transformation of the right to asylum into an institutional guarantee were poached—in part, word for word—from Otto Schily, the SPD Federal Interior Minister. For his part, Schily has described the CDU's new white paper as a sound basis for achieving a compromise in relation to the legal regulation of immigration.

In an interview with the *Rheinische Post* at the end of October, Dieter Wiefelspütz, the SPD parliamentary faction's spokesman for domestic policy, claimed it would be possible to achieve agreement on the question of immigration within a few months: “All sides are making compromises—the conservative alliance, the SPD and the Greens, too—so it's certainly possible that we'll come to agreement.”

Wiefelspütz went on to explain: “The right to asylum is not up for negotiation. But we can and must talk about everything else. There won't be much leeway when it comes to the asylum procedure. But we'll have to take another look at that, too.”

He clearly signalled the conservative alliance that he was in favour of a hard line on deportations: “If anyone is wrongfully in Germany and is obliged to leave the country after a final legal ruling, then we have the right to enforce his exit—with all means at our disposal under the rule of law. We are certainly prepared to intensify our efforts in this respect.”



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