The German PDS joins the political campaign to limit immigration

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You have to hand it to the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism—the former ruling Stalinist Party in East Germany). The party does not lose any time when it comes to German national interests. Only a short while ago the party made clear how warmly it embraced the German nation. Now the organisation has translated thoughts into action and is taking part in the scurrilous debate on restrictions for immigrants wishing to come to Germany.

On November 10, four days after the CDU had presented its own immigration proposals and just a day after the mass demonstration in Berlin “For Humanity and Tolerance”, the vice chairman of the party, Petra Pau, made public six concisely formulated theses which revoke the consensus in the party with regard to immigration.

Up until now the party has defended a generally liberal policy on immigration and emigration. But the latest theses now call for strict rules governing immigration and therefore clearly defined limits. After explaining in the first thesis that a “mere defence of the legal status quo” would be false (something, incidentally, which no one has demanded of her), Pau comes to the point in the second thesis: “The PDS is in favour of a clear right to immigration and settlement.... As a matter of principle immigration should be afforded to those who are legally entitled.”

In the following thesis she elaborates the basis for such legal entitlement. In addition to those wishing to join their families, other requirements include: “taking up work (to the extent that it is possible to prove that the employment entails social insurance payments and wages corresponding to local or tariff rates), looking for work for a period of up to six months (as long as living costs are covered), founding a business as well as taking up an apprenticeship or study.”

Finally in the fourth thesis she demands that “whoever immigrates must be able to integrate”. This thesis appears to be a demand on society to welcome those who immigrate with open arms. As we shall demonstrate, however, the thesis is in fact more of a warning to immigrants to adapt themselves to the national “guiding culture”.

The last two theses of the PDS paper defend the individual's right to asylum and call for a humane migration policy. Both points are, in fact, aimed at concealing the main gist of the document.

In the discussion which followed inside the PDS, the concrete meaning of the theses became somewhat clearer. The latest product of the discussion is a joint paper by Petra Pau and Katina Schubert (speaker of the PDS anti-racism national committee) which appeared in the middle of December with the title “Considerations regarding a modern immigration and settlement law for the PDS”.

This paper speaks openly of a change of strategy. In future, the paper states, asylum policy should be treated separately from immigration policy: “The PDS position of ‘open borders for people in need' only covers part of the political spectrum, namely the area of asylum and refugee policy.” According to this position only war and earthquakes are regarded as the causes of human need, excluding economic grounds whereby the inability to be able to secure the necessities of life forces immigrants to seek a solution in other countries. While the PDS maintains that it is attempting to oppose arbitrary state measures through the means of clear regulations for immigration, in fact it adapts its own definition of need arbitrarily to the aim expressed in its paper—the regimentation of immigration.

The latest paper repeats Pau's conditions for a right of immigration. There is, however, in addition an indication of the consequences for all those who do not measure up to the demands of the PDS: “Whoever is unable within a determined period of time to prove that they have employment on a basis of proper social insurance payments and local or tariff rates cannot settle and must leave.” This is a particularly cynical demand when one considers that as a rule foreigners are only employed when the employer is not required to pay insurance and tariff wages.

Clear about the severity of these measures the paper continues: “We have to provide incentives in order to avoid illegality and forceful measures.” It is difficult to believe that such considerations will bear fruit, however, meaning that forced deportations and prisons for deportees will receive the approval of the PDS. As usual, the party will maintain that this is not what they intended.

A further point in the “Considerations” is devoted to demands on those seeking to immigrate. The paper continues: “Whoever immigrates to the BRD must have the chance to integrate into society. This entails the duty [on the part of the immigrant—HP] to actively pursue integration.” At the heart of these responsibilities is the necessity to learn the German language: “We should think about obligatory language courses with the precondition that everyone has the chance to take part in such courses, either free of charge or at a reasonable price.”

Bearing in mind that public money for such courses is being continually cut, all that remains from this point is the demand to learn the German language in order to settle in Germany. In this respect the PDS argumentation fits into the package of demands for immigration drawn up by the right-wing CDU and CSU, which in the same way places impossible demands upon the majority of immigrants who lack the means to be able to finance such courses themselves.

Taken together the desired “clear and transparent right” to be able to live in Germany entails a series of conditions which only a tiny majority of potential immigrants could fill, leaving the vast majority stranded at the German border.

Petra Pau does not stand alone in the PDS with her theses, as is

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shown by the support given by the committee on anti-racism. The new chairwoman of the party, Gabi Zimmer, has also expressly given her approval to Pau's paper.

The clearest expression of support, however, has come from Helmut Holter, the PDS minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and a member of the party's national executive committee. His statements are more direct than those of others in the PDS. In an interview with the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* he made clear his views with regard to the restriction of immigration: “There are already regulations governing quotas, for example for Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union. Quotas have to do with a certain number. In my opinion such regulations should also apply to other immigrants.”

The opposition in the PDS to Pau's initiative is mainly linked to the figure of Karin Hopfmann. She is the speaker for Refugee Policy for the PDS fraction in the Berlin state parliament.

In particular, with two contributions published on the official web site of the PDS, Hopfmann strongly criticises the positions raised by Petra Pau. She makes clear first of all: “An immigration law, whether it is liberal or illiberal in its limitations ... involves a qualitative choice between desirable and undesirable immigrants who are to be excluded.... The underprivileged, less qualified, weaker will always be the losers.”

Hoptmann refers to the causes for the world-wide movement of immigrants to richer countries and calls for an “acceptance of the principle of generosity with regard to immigration and emigration for all humans”. In addition she describes a “national or even European regulation of immigration” as an “unsuitable attempt to seek to establish domestic national state policy or Euro-bureaucratic instruments against global developments.”

Then she comes—without herself realising it—very close to the real reasons for the present debate within the PDS. In a paragraph describing the supporters of the PDS she writes: “This debate encounters a membership and voters who exhibit a great deal of resentment against immigrants and refugees. This is demonstrated once again by the shocking results of a recent questionnaire by the Berlin Society for Social Research and Statistical Analysis. According to the organisation, 59 percent of PDS supporters are of the opinion that there are already too many foreigners living in Germany and 45 percent are in favour of doing away with the right to asylum which is currently incorporated into the German constitution. It is logical to assume that the overwhelming majority of PDS supporters are in favour of strict limits on immigration and would have nothing against a law limiting immigration. The results point to a mixture of lack of information, prejudice, cares and worries about one's own property, xenophobia, social envy and racist resentment, social chauvinism and national narrow-mindedness.”

Is it possible to make a harsher criticism of a party, which for a decade has posed as the attorney of the people against the rapacity of big business, which still calls itself socialist and whose leadership claims to pursue the struggle for social equality? Hopfmann is not just referring to a few right-wing slips but rather to the political essence of her party.

It should be noted that Hopfmann's list is by no means complete. According to an Emnid opinion poll at the start of this year, 19 percent of PDS voters would contemplate, under certain conditions, voting for an extreme right-wing party.

In this respect the conclusions drawn by Hopfmann arising out of her criticism are pathetic. She calls for the banning of arms exports, the demand for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the effective regulation of the international finance markets and a number of other demands without giving any indication of who should do the banning, demanding or regulating. In addition she raises these demands inside the PDS, which has just proved its complete lack of interest in any liberalising of immigration.

This is of course no accident. Hopfmann regards the main cause of the movement of refugees as globalisation and the world-wide integration of “Capital, work, service industries and information”. She sees allies, for example, in the resistance movements aimed against the IMF and the World Bank—forces that have manoeuvred themselves into a dead end because they reject globalisation in its entirety. Instead they favour compressing global productive forces back into the framework of the nation-state, rather than liberating these forces from the grip of private capitalist interests and making them available to the majority of the world's people.

Hopfmann is linked to these movements, as she is to the PDS itself, by her conviction in the durability of the nation. She is unable to contemplate a world without nations, or any movement which bases itself not on a *national* but rather on an international *class* foundation.

So it is hardly surprising that her line of argument leads her to entertaining the possibility of immigration restrictions. If her “wishes” are fulfilled, she is ready to discuss the possibility of “tying the right to immigration to the existence of a work permit” and establishing conditions on the immigration of poor people. In other words, with the pushing back of global interests everybody can find happiness in their own country and deportation at the German border then receives its “political and moral legitimacy”.

The PDS makes no secret of its desire to join in the race with the other main parties in seeking immigration restrictions. It feels pressured to do so by the party membership itself and by its supporters. Above all, Karin Hopfmann's criticism of the party's position is a devastating verdict on her own politics as well as all those who regard themselves as left-wing in the PDS.

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