

Germany: MP's anti-Semitic speech exposes ugly face of the CDU

Ludwig Niethammer
14 November 2003

The virulently anti-Semitic speech given by conservative MP Martin Hohmann on October 3, the bank holiday marking German reunification, reflects the outlook of the extreme right wing within the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), post-war Germany's traditional conservative party.

These forces feel emboldened to come forward, as the right-wing policies of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Social Democratic Party (SPD)-led government have produced a series of devastating defeats for the SPD in state and communal elections.

While the leaders of the CDU had originally declared that the speech would not put Hohmann's membership in their party and parliamentary faction in question, they reversed their position on November 10, announcing that steps would be taken to expel the MP. The decision was the result of considerable pressure by almost the entire political establishment, which fears serious damage to Germany's reputation abroad. Still, the CDU leadership delayed the move out of fear that the party would be split by any move against the fascistic elements within it.

The reports in the media concentrated almost exclusively on the fact that Hohmann had described "the Jews" as a "nation of perpetrators" (*"Tätervolk,"* which may also be translated as a "race of perpetrators"). Hohmann himself has meanwhile apologised for this particular formulation, claiming that he did not really mean it. However, if one reads his speech as a whole, there is no ambiguity about what he meant to say.

Hohmann reached freely into the propagandistic stock-in-trade of Hitler and Goebbels. About one third of his speech is devoted to cultivating the Nazi cliché of "Jewish Bolshevism." In closing his rantings, he quoted former American president Woodrow Wilson, who in 1919 described the Bolshevik movement as "led by Jews," and commented: "Thus, one could describe the Jews with some justification as a nation of perpetrators."

This was by no means a faux pas, but the summation of a long preceding diatribe. Just as under the Nazis, Hohmann's anti-Semitism is a main part of an ideology that serves to channel the extreme social tensions created by poverty and unemployment into national chauvinism. His first targets are the most vulnerable layers and minorities. In the first part of his speech, he railed against Muslims and described the recipients of social security payments as "parasites." He viciously opposed the meagre compensation paid by Germany to the victims—in particular the Jewish victims—of the Nazis' forced labor camps. "Regrettably, ladies and gentlemen," he raved, "I cannot disprove the suspicion that, as a German, one does not exactly receive preferential treatment in Germany."

When Hohmann delivered this scandalous speech in early October,

in his home constituency in the state of Hesse, it provoked not the slightest protest within the CDU. His remarks were published on the party's local home page for no less than three weeks. Only after a report by the Hesse state radio on October 30, did the party leadership express concern.

A couple of days later, it was revealed that the commander of the German army's (Bundeswehr's) special forces unit, the KSK, Gen. Reinhard Günzel, had sent Hohmann a personal letter congratulating him on his "courageous speech." Defense Minister Peter Struck (SPD) felt obliged to immediately fire Günzel, while claiming that he was just "a lone, confused general."

Hohmann's outlook has long been known and is by no means unique inside the CDU. For years the MP, who used to work for the notoriously right-wing Federal Criminal Police Office, has been railing against the Holocaust memorial that is to be erected in Berlin—"a mark of Cain, a monument of self-condemnation"—and against a well-known exhibition documenting the crimes of the Wehrmacht, the German army under Nazi rule. As mayor of the small town Neudorf, on October 3 (German Unity Day), 1997, he distributed leaflets with all three verses of the German national anthem—including the first one, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," which was banned after 1945.

Hohmann, who describes himself as a "guardian of conservative values," belongs to the ultra-Catholic wing of the CDU. He owes his constituency, in the town of Fulda, to his political godfather Alfred Dregger, a former Wehrmacht soldier. Dregger never broke from the Nazi ideology of his youth and belonged to the so-called "steel helmet faction" of the CDU. As chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary faction, he coined the party's notorious campaign slogan in the 1970s: "Freedom, not Socialism."

Another of Hohmann's mentors was the late Catholic bishop Johannes Dyba, a true follower of Dregger. Dyba was one of the vilest demagogues against the right to abortion and against homosexuals, and was, of course, a frenzied anticommunist.

The influence of this ultra-right wing has been increasing inside the CDU, since Roland Koch, the CDU governor of the state of Hesse, was elected four years ago on a xenophobic platform directed against the introduction of dual citizenship for immigrants. Hohmann had defended this campaign in an interview with the *Junge Freiheit* (*Young Liberty*), a magazine well known for its pro-Nazi sympathies: "The designation 'xenophobic,'" Hohmann had said, "has got nothing to do with German reality, it is an insult to the German people."

Nonetheless, the CDU faction in parliament made Hohmann its spokesman on the law regulating compensation payments for forced

laborers as well as on the state treaty with the Central Jewish Council in Germany. It would be naïve to believe that his nomination was accidental.

To illustrate how Hohmann revived the old formulas of the Nazis, we will quote a passage from his speech. We apologise for this rather unsavory piece of evidence.

With painstaking care, Hohmann enumerated all the members of socialist and communist parties with a Jewish background he could think of, pointing to what he called the “exceedingly high proportion of Jews among the founders of communism.”

He continued: “The assassination of the Russian tsar and his family was ordered by the Jew Jacob Sverdlov and carried out in person by the Jew Chaimovits Yurovsky against Tsar Nicholas II... Not to forget the Soviet Republic of Munich: Kurt Eisner, Eugen Leviné, Tobias Achselrod and other Jews clearly played a leading role.” Hohmann further singled out Leon Trotsky and accused him of having persecuted religious minorities: “No other than Trotsky stood at the head of the so-called godless movement of the Bolsheviks. At that time, he had renounced his Jewishness; however, he was perceived as a Jew both in Russia and worldwide.”

The Nazis’ hatred of the Jews, and in particular Hitler’s own hatred, was directly bound up with fascism’s deadly attack on the socialist workers’ movement. The antifascist author Konrad Heiden described this very well. When Hitler discovered that many Jews played prominent roles in the labor movement, he wrote in his biography, “The great light dawned upon him. Suddenly the ‘Jewish question’ became clear... The labor movement did not repel him because it was led by Jews, the Jews repelled him because they led the labor movement.” One can only agree with Heiden’s conclusion that “it was not Rothschild, the capitalist, but Karl Marx, the socialist, who kindled Adolf Hitler’s anti-Semitism.”

Hitler’s role was to stir up the prejudices of desperate petty bourgeois layers and to mobilise them, in the name of the nation and anti-Semitism, against the workers’ movement. In this context, leading figures among the Bolsheviks were demonised as the Jewish enemy.

Hohmann’s method has similar roots. What he spewed out in front of his provincial audience was not only the undigested Nazi ideology of the past, but at the same time a response to current social developments. In reaction to the extreme social tensions developing in Germany due to the ongoing destruction of the welfare state, he appealed to everything backward and reactionary in society. And he found a response among the leading personnel of the German army.

General Günzel, the commander of the KSK special forces, wrote in his letter congratulating Hohmann: “It was an excellent speech, of a courage, truth and clarity that one seldom hears or reads in our country.” He went on, brazenly claiming: “...even if all those who agree with me or even clearly articulate this opinion are referred to as right-wing extremists by the media, I can assure you that the majority of our people share your view.”

The letter left no doubt as to Günzel’s fascistic sympathies. Still, a number of leading CDU politicians declared their solidarity with the general. Hans Raidel, for example, a CSU (Bavarian sister party of the CDU) expert on defense issues, claimed that Günzel was “by no means a right-wing radical,” but “a man of principles.”

While Defence Minister Struck (SPD) felt compelled to fire Günzel, he tried his best to present his comments as an isolated incident by a confused individual—an attempt to prevent a public debate about the increasingly right-wing orientation of the military brass and the

Bundeswehr as a whole.

It was the SPD/Green government that chose Günzel to command the KSK. This special unit, which is exempt from any democratic control, was sent to Afghanistan under his leadership, to join the US special forces in their hunt for Taliban and Al-Qaeda supporters. The public has been kept in the dark about the precise number of people murdered by these commandos. The political elite in Berlin and Washington, however, have repeatedly praised their commitment. Now, suddenly, the brigadier general is depicted as “confused,” just because his outlook has become public.

Günzel is a man with a history. Back in 1997, Struck’s predecessor, Volker Rühle (CDU), was forced to transfer Günzel to a different post because the unit he commanded had produced neo-fascist videotapes. The spokesman for the “Working Group of Critical Soldiers,” former lieutenant colonel Helmuth Priess, was not surprised about Günzel’s letter. “The portion of Bundeswehr personnel with latent ideological inclinations towards right-wing radicalism is by no means insignificant,” he said. “The higher ranks are no exception.”

The SPD/Green government bears a large share of the responsibility for this growing influence of the extreme right within the army. Under the government of Chancellor Schröder (SPD) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Greens), Germany participated in military operations outside of NATO territory for the first time since the end of the Second World War. Since the SPD and the Greens took over in 1998, the Bundeswehr has been systematically upgraded and armed as an interventionist force that has participated directly in four wars. With Struck proclaiming that Germany is defending its security “in the Hindukush,” and Schröder and Fischer competing to be the most effective defenders of German interests abroad, it is only logical that the likes of Hohmann and Günzel feel encouraged to nail their colors to the mast.

With their increasingly militaristic posture abroad and their vicious destruction of social gains at home, the German coalition government of the social democrats and the Greens paves the way for the most dangerous right-wing forces and prepares the ground for authoritarian forms of rule.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact