

Germany: behind the ultra-right provocation in Saxony's parliament

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There was widespread indignation last Friday when deputies of the neo-fascist National Party of Germany (NPD) demonstratively left the floor of the Saxony state parliament during a minute's silence called for the victims of war and the Nazi dictatorship. In later contributions in the parliament chamber, NPD deputies equated the destruction of the Jews by the Nazi regime with the Allied bomb attacks on German cities, which they characterised as a "bombing holocaust."

A flood of media commentaries following the incident called for intensified measures against the ultra-right party and for the unity of all democrats. Some politicians reiterated the demand for a prohibition of the NPD, while others warned against such a move. Three years ago, an attempt to prohibit the NPD collapsed after it became known that seven members of the leading body of the NPD worked for the German secret police. The party was even able to prove that secret service agents had in fact formulated several anti-Semitic passages quoted in the indictment charging the party with incitement of racism.

Referring to the incident in Saxony, Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD- German Social Democratic Party) warned of damage to Germany's image abroad, which an export-oriented country could not afford, while Foreign Affairs Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) spoke of a "disgrace for Germany." Paul Spiegel, the chairman of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, once again demanded a "rebellion of decent citizens."

Nobody in the establishment media and political circles has bothered to address the issue of the background to the latest stupid and brazen provocations by the neo-Nazis, and nobody has posed the question: Who bears responsibility for the growing influence of the right-wing extremist party? Instead, commentators worried over the events in Dresden shedding light on the rottenness of the political system as a whole. They sought to draw a curtain of discretion over the matter to—in the words of the chancellor—avoid "damage to Germany's image abroad."

But the fact remains: since the last state elections in September, 12 neo-fascists of the NPD sit in the Saxony federal state parliament and conduct themselves more and more aggressively from day to day. Their increasing aggressiveness is fed by several developments.

On the one hand, they hope that the anti-social policies of the SPD-Green Federal Government and the CDU-SPD coalition at a regional level, which are supported by all other parties, will increase the number of right protest voters. On the other hand, they receive direct support from right-wing circles in other parties. Over the past months, two deputies from other parties represented in the Saxony state parliament have voted several times for the NPD in secret parliamentary votes.

The extreme right has systematically used the Hartz IV laws, which took effect at the beginning of January, for their social demagoguery. Hartz IV has dramatically worsened the living conditions for many German citizens. In addition, hopes for any improvement in the job situation or social conditions have been destroyed. Until recently, politicians—particularly in the east of the country—had stressed that the current social difficulties were temporary, the "rebuilding of the east" would take somewhat longer, one must have patience, and so on. As a result of this campaign, many workers undertook a whole series of retraining and re-education measures in the hope of finding a job.

Hartz IV makes clear that the "upturn in the east" was never a serious prospect. In reality, what is taking place is a downturn in the west. High unemployment and low wages in the east are used to undermine the social structure in the west and cut wages. Many people in the east feel thoroughly deceived and cheated.

Under conditions in which none of the established parties represented in parliament oppose the social cuts, but instead intone collectively that there is no alternative to the politics of dismantling the social state, right-wing demagogues are able to pose as the "saviours of the little man" and win political support based on the increasing rage and desperation of growing layers of the population.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which sits in Saxony as the second-strongest party in the parliament, is an exception to the alliance of established parties in just one respect. It contributes its own additional lie to the chorus of deceit embraced by the other parties. The PDS protests against Hartz IV where it lacks power, but where it shares political influence, it faithfully supports and carries out the cuts.

In addition, the extreme right has been able to exploit the contempt shown by the political establishment for ordinary

citizens. Last year, millions took part in innumerable protest demonstrations against the Hartz laws, but the only reaction by Chancellor Schröder, SPD chief Müntefering and all official political circles was “We will not respond to pressure from the streets”—an absurd distortion of democracy!

The situation has continued to intensify since the extension of the European Union towards the east last May. East German states share borders with areas where—often only a few kilometres away—labour costs amount to a fraction of the local rates. None of the established parties has an answer to these problems, and so the NPD can direct the fears of social decline into racist and nationalist channels.

The SPD-Green Party coalition also plays directly into the hands of the ultra-right. At the beginning of the year, a new immigration law entered into force that almost completely abolishes the fundamental right of asylum; it allows the state to expel even foreigners who have already lived for many decades in Germany on the basis of “facts pointing to a danger prognosis”—and without recourse to legal proceedings. “Foreigners out!” is the political slogan at the heart of the new law. In this respect, the Federal Government has adopted a central standpoint of the NPD and thereby strengthened its influence.

There are a number of indications that the additional two votes cast for the NPD in important policy decisions in the Saxony state parliament come from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union). The Saxony CDU was strongly influenced by the figure of Kurt Biedenkopf following German reunification. From 1990 to 2002, Biedenkopf was prime minister of the state, and his state government was always a stronghold for extreme-right politicians. The Ministry of Justice was headed for many years by Steffen Heitmann, who hit the headlines in 1993 for his xenophobic comments. Despite this notoriety, the conservative chancellor at that time, Helmut Kohl, (CDU), surprisingly proposed the east German church lawyer as candidate for the post of federal president.

Following a visit to Stuttgart and other west German cities, Heitmann had explained that, based on the high percentage of immigrant workers, he was “struck by the strangeness that was positively threatening,” and he had come to the conclusion that “Germans must be protected against too many foreigners!” After making these comments, he had to withdraw his candidacy for Germany’s highest public office but remained Saxony’s minister of justice for another seven years. His successor, Manfred Kolbe, comes from the right-wing Bavarian CSU. He comes from a Saxony family, which moved to the west in 1959.

In this respect, a look at Kurt Biedenkopf and his political career is also informative. He is the son of a National Socialist military industrial leader—his father William was a technical director of the Buna work in Schkopau during the Third Reich. The plant at the time belonged to the I.G. Farben company. In 1967, Biedenkopf junior, who was born in 1930, attained a

doctorate and master of law. He then went on to become the youngest university rector in the Federal Republic at the Ruhr University Bochum. Five years later, he was secretary general of the CDU’s federal executive board.

One of his most important political promoters was Dr. Fritz Ries. The industrialist Ries—a member of the Nazi party since 1934—raked together a large fortune as a “supplier of the armed forces” and was typical of a layer that profited from the war. At the same time, his speciality consisted of expropriating Jewish enterprises, in line with Nazi policy, and then employing Jewish forced labourers to maximise profits.

The author Bernt Engelmann writes about him: “In this way, for example, in the ‘expropriated’ enterprise of the Upper Silesian rubber works in Trzebinia (West Galicia) alone, he employed, according to a June 30, 1942, ‘prison report,’ a total of 2,653 Jewish forced labourers, of whom 2,160 were women and girls. Primarily with their assistance—i.e., on the basis of ruthless exploitation—production rose in Trzebinia...by around 12-fold” (Bernt Engelmann, *Schwarzbuch: Strauß, Kohl & Co.*, Cologne, 1976).

In Polish Lodz, Ries took over an “Aryanised” large-scale enterprise with 15 rolling mills. Shortly before the end of war, and after fleeing the advancing Red Army, he escaped to the West with a majority of his fortune. Nevertheless, after the surrender of Germany, he declared himself to be a “refugee.” Under the Adenauer government, he requested remuneration for his factories—still in the possession of the Red Army—and was successful in his claim. With the money, he built up the Pegulan works in the Pfalz region.

Alongside Kurt Biedenkopf, politicians systematically supported by Ries in the post-war decades include the future Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl (CDU) and the Bavarian Prime Minister and CSU Chairman Franz Franz-Josef Strauß. In 1979, Biedenkopf married Ries’s daughter Ingrid. Together, they headed the Saxony state government after reunification, running it in the manner of a “family business,” as *Der Spiegel* wrote in 2001.

The CDU’s connections to right-wing extremist circles and fascists are thus neither new nor surprising, and the latest calls for the “unity of all democrats” only serve to perpetuate policies that which play into the hands of the extreme right.



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