

Germany: junge Welt defends coalition between social democrats and neo-fascists in Slovakia

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In an extraordinary article which appeared last week in the Berlin daily newspaper *junge Welt*, journalist Jürgen Elsässer vigorously defended the recently formed government coalition between the Slovakian social democratic party Direction—Social Democracy (Smer-SD), and the ultra-right Slovak National Party (Slovenska Narodna Strana—SNS).

In an article headlined “Cross-party government in Slovakia: questions to the Antifa,” Jürgen Elsässer launched a broadside against members of the German Antifa (antifascists) organisation who have criticised the decision by Slovakian social democrat leader Robert Fico to form a governing alliance with the ultra-nationalist SNS and the conservative Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Elsässer is particularly keen to defend the inclusion of the extreme-right SNS in the new Slovakian government.

Jürgen Elsässer has written regularly for the *junge Welt* (“young world”) for a number of years. *Junge Welt* describes itself as a “socialist” newspaper but in fact has its roots in the German Democratic Republic as the organ of the youth movement of the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED). During the postwar period the paper had the largest circulation of any daily newspaper in the GDR. After the capitalist reunification of Germany in 1990, *junge Welt* retained its name and links to certain layers inside the post-Stalinist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

According to Elsässer in his latest article for the *junge Welt*, when Antifa supporters object to the presence of the racist and ultra-nationalist SNS in the new Slovakian government they are guilty of “political correctness.” For his part Elsässer expressly supports the new coalition on the basis that it represents a challenge to neo-liberalism: “For the first time since the capitalist turn of 1989/90 a new political force has taken power in Donald Rumsfeld’s ‘new’ Europe, which wants to break with neo-liberalism,” he writes. “This could show the way for others,” he continues.

Elsässer concedes that there is a problem with the new government, i.e., one of the coalition partners, the Slovak National Party, “does genuinely come from a fascist tradition.” According to Elsässer, however, this is not sufficient reason to reject the new coalition, and he renews his attack on the Antifa: “If one uses the criteria of the Antifa, then a left-wing party would never be able to form an alliance with such a partner.”

Elsässer concedes that the rhetoric of the SNS is “sometimes unappetizing,” but the real enemy, he writes, “are the representatives of the Hungarian minority who, with the help of the Slovakian subsidiaries of German newspapers, most violently encourage hysteria

against the new government.” These forces, according to Elsässer, represent the “fifth column of Budapest.”

Elsässer’s broadside against the Antifa and support for the SNS is astonishingly blunt and reactionary to the core. Elsässer has a history of defending extreme nationalist forces. As a leading journalist for the *junge Welt* he has carried out a longstanding and thoroughly uncritical campaign in defence of the recently deceased Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. Nevertheless, his latest outpourings in support of the Slovakian SNS, an organisation with pronounced fascist tendencies, make clear that for Elsässer the struggle against “neo-liberalism” permits alliances with the most right-wing and foulest of political forces.

In his tirade against the Antifa organisation Elsässer not only defends the new Slovakian coalition, but in his argumentation he employs virtually identical language to that of the SNS and its leader Jan Slota, who also view the Hungarian minority in Slovakia as the “fifth column of Budapest.”

The SNS has made absolutely clear where it stands on the political spectrum—i.e., in the tradition of fascism. The Slovenska Narodna Strana (SNS) has its origins in the Slovak People’s Party, which collaborated with Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1945 and whose leader, Josef Tiso, is still admired today in the party.

In 1999 the SNS was instrumental in organising a conference to commemorate the founding of the puppet Slovak republic in 1939. Documentation from the conference ignores the role of Tiso, a Catholic priest and ultra-nationalist prime minister of the Slovak regime, in the deportation of thousands of Jews. Instead he is described as “one of the greatest sons of the Slovak nation.” The same documentation goes on to describe Nazi leader Adolf Hitler as someone who “liked Slovaks” and had saved Slovakia from the Hungarians.

The despicable heritage of Tiso and his party has been taken over by the current head of the SNS, Jan Slota, who has repeatedly abused and threatened the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. He has variously described them as “lumpen elements” and “murderers of Slovaks.” In one especially belligerent speech Slota declared, “We will get in our tanks and crush Budapest.” Slota’s ravings against the Hungarian minority in Slovakia are only matched by the vehemence with which he seeks to intensify the oppression of the Roma community living in the country.

Now Slota has found a willing ally in Germany who is prepared to support his racist filth against the so-called Hungarian “fifth column.”

In his *junge Welt* article Elsässer seeks to appeal to his largely

Stalinist readership with a reference to the Stalinist dominated Comintern of 1935. While it is correct that there are precedents for the policy he now espouses of alliances between “left-wing” forces and the extreme-right, in fact the real historical parallels occurred much earlier.

A few years after the assassination of the two outstanding leaders of the German Communist Party (KPD), Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, by Freikorps soldiers, the Comintern functionary Karl Radek sought to impose an extreme nationalist course on the German party. In 1923 Radek proposed that the KPD conduct propaganda on behalf of Albert Leo Schlageter, who had been captured in France while conducting sabotage for the right-wing German Freikorps. Following Schlageter’s execution by the French army, Radek, who was responsible for the KPD’s political instruction, praised Schlageter as a “martyr to German nationalism” and a “courageous soldier of the counterrevolution.”

According to Radek, the KPD had to seize the initiative in the struggle against foreign capital and in so doing should be prepared to cooperate with the most extreme nationalist forces. “If the people matters to the nation, then the nation will matter to the people,” he wrote. Following criticism inside the party Radek’s initiative was halted after a few months, but the incident served to seriously disorientate the KPD and the seeds were sown for subsequent betrayals.

Further capitulations by the KPD to nationalist and fascist forces took place prior to Hitler taking power. In August 1931 the Nazi Party launched a referendum to overthrow the Social Democratic government of Prussia. After initially criticising the proposal, the KPD was then ordered by Stalin’s Comintern to support the National Socialist campaign. Three weeks before the vote the KPD joined forces with the fascists in order to bring down the “fifth column,” this time the Social Democrats. They changed the name of the plebiscite to a “Red Referendum” and ditched former opposition to the fascists, who they now referred to as “working people’s comrades”!

Fortunately, the referendum failed to win a majority. Following recent electoral successes by the Nazis any success for the referendum in Prussia could only have helped to accelerate Hitler’s rise to power.

Incapable of drawing a single political lesson from its appalling political errors, the KPD, under Stalinist tutelage, once again seriously disoriented the German working class through its role in the Berlin transport workers’ strike. In 1932 tram workers in Berlin, under the influence of the Communist Party, took unofficial action over a wage cut proposed by the Social Democratic-run city government. Under Goebbels’ leadership the National Socialists decided to support the strike and joined forces with the Communist Party, attacking trams and ripping up tram lines. Street collections were organised for strike funds with members of the Communist and National Socialist parties standing side by side rattling collecting tins for the strike.

Within a week the strike was called off, but the damage had already been done. Social democratic workers who could have been won for a joint struggle against the Nazis were disgusted by the KPD pact with the fascists in the German capital and recoiled from any alliance. Less than a year later Hitler was quite legally able to assume power. His first act upon taking office was to order the arrest and incarceration of tens of thousands of Communists, social democrats and trade unionists.

Even such a brief glimpse at German history reveals the disastrous consequences of collaboration between left-wing parties and the extreme right, and this case history could be extended at length with

respect to the collusion of left organisations with fascists in many eastern European countries during the last century—always with devastating results for the working class.

This, however, is the historical tradition of the “new political force” which Elsässer so fulsomely supports in Slovakia. In his campaign on behalf of the SNS Elsässer demonstrates that he is quite prepared—on the basis of the “struggle against neo-liberalism”—to support the process of reconciliation currently taking place between nominally “left” forces and extreme right-wing organisations in a number of eastern European countries.

Any survey of the development of political life in eastern Europe since 1990 reveals a bewildering range of political parties that have taken power, quickly been voted out of office only to re-emerge under a new name, and perhaps with a different leader. To speak of any political principles which separate parties and their leaders in eastern European politics is entirely out of place. Cronyism, corruption, self-enrichment and the lack of any political scruples have characterised the political course of dozens of various governments and parties during the past one-and-a-half decades.

However, there is a general trend which can be observed. To the extent that *all* parties based on the free-market system have become increasingly discredited and social discontent grows, so-called social democratic, Green or “socialist” parties, which themselves have largely emerged from former Stalinist parties, are increasingly willing to develop coalitions with ultra-right, authoritarian or even neo-fascist forces.

In Bulgaria, the Socialist Party (BSP) has formed a government with the extreme nationalist National Movement Simeon II, led by the former Bulgarian monarch. In Slovakia’s neighbour, the Czech Republic, the Green Party has just entered government with the arch-conservative Citizens Party (ODS). And now in Slovakia itself the social democrats have closed ranks with Slota and the SNS.

The same tendency can be seen at work in a significant number of other eastern European countries and the Baltic states. As political tensions intensify it is precisely this shift towards governments and coalitions embracing extreme right-wing populism and authoritarianism which has now been given a seal of approval by Jürgen Elsässer and *junge Welt*.



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