

German SEP candidate condemns anti-immigrant campaign in Hesse

A correspondent
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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) is participating in the January 27 Hesse state elections with its own regional slate of two candidates. The PSG candidates are Helmut Arens, 59, a chemical worker and chairman of the Hesse regional PSG, and Achim Heppding, 53, a social insurance worker and former PSG candidate for the European parliament.

On December 1, Helmut Arens, the leading candidate for the *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* in the upcoming Hesse state election, issued a press statement condemning the recent comments by Roland Koch, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Prime Minister in Hesse. The statement was sent to 20 different media outlets in the central German state.

Arens stated, “I utterly condemn the attempt by Hesse Prime Minister Roland Koch to transform the recent brutal attack on a pensioner in Munich by two youth into a xenophobic campaign.”

Arens was referring to the recent comments by Koch, who called for the “consistent deportation of criminal foreigners” following the media release of a video showing two Turkish youth assaulting the pensioner during the Christmas holidays in Munich.

Publicly demanding harsher sentences for the youth, Koch told the *Bild* newspaper, “We have too many criminal young foreigners.... Zero tolerance against violence must begin at a very early stage and be a component of our integration policies.... We have to put an end to certain deep-seated lies; for a long time unfortunately the German position with regard to immigration was not clear enough.”

Facing declining ratings in opinion polls, Koch is seeking to revive his campaign, as he did during the last state elections in 1999, by appealing to the most backward social layers with appeals to nationalism and

racism. Days before the state election in 1999 Koch mounted a widespread campaign and collected thousands of signatures against proposals by the federal government for the introduction of dual nationality status.

Arens explained that Koch’s latest xenophobic rants only confirmed his role as a right-wing agitator. Against all evidence he seeks to depict foreigners in Germany or those of foreign descent as more inclined to acts of violence than German citizens. Koch’s aim, Arens explained, was to split the population and channel growing social tensions in a racist direction.

“In so doing Koch seeks to divert attention away from the fact that the problems expressed in the aggressive behaviour of the youths involved in the attack in Munich are a product of deeper problems arising in the society in which these two Turkish youth have spent their entire lives—rather than the product of any sort of nebulous ‘Turkish identity,’” Arens explained. “Years of welfare and social cuts carried out by a succession of SPD and CDU-led governments, including the Hesse state government led by Roland Koch, have created a degree of social pauperisation which can lead to such acts of violence.”

The restraint and lack of criticism of Koch’s contemptuous position by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party are completely unprincipled and purely an electoral and tactical reaction on their part, Arens concluded.

The SPD, the Greens and the Left Party in Hesse adapt themselves to such chauvinism and have nothing to say about the problems confronting many immigrant workers in Germany who lack proper residency papers. As the *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported, when the paper approached the party headquarters of the SPD and the Greens for a comment it was informed merely that

these organisations “did not want to become part of a campaign by Koch.” No mention was made of any opposition on their part to such a campaign.

All of these parties have refused in recent weeks of campaigning to make any criticism of the xenophobic policies of Koch’s CDU state government and have simply stood by as foreigners are denounced as criminals and subjected to state persecution. Hundreds of such workers without a proper German passport in the state of Hesse have been deported during Koch’s stay in power.

At the beginning of December Koch had sought to whip up anti-Islamic sentiments when he called for a ban in schools for the Islamic burqa. In this case he had to invent the problem in the first place in order to get his campaign off the ground. Up until now there has been no use of the burqa in Hesse state schools.

The sharpening up of immigration controls and deterrence measures means that the number of immigrants and applications for naturalization have been constantly declining in Hesse for the past five years. These figures do not include the many cases of so-called “illegal” immigrants who lack valid residency papers and are not included in official statistics. It is estimated, however, that there are hundreds of thousands of such cases in Hesse and an estimated 25,000-40,000 in the state’s main city of Frankfurt-Main. This latter figure includes over 5,000 children and young people forced to carry out menial work and denied any access to the state’s schools.

In October 2005 the Koch government introduced a decree, which called upon headmasters and doctors to report to the authorities any immigrants—including children—without proper residency papers. The measure made it impossible for such children to continue attending school.

Although a recent meeting of interior ministers agreed to an amnesty for those “illegal” immigrants who have lived and worked in the country for many years, the status of such “tolerated” citizens remains insecure. Regulations governing their stay are often interpreted in an unnecessarily harsh and restrictive manner. Theoretically the new regulations allow permanent residency for those who have been living in Germany for the past eight years. According to the immigrant rights organisation Pro Asyl, less than 40 percent of applicants have been granted a residency

permit in Hesse, which means that numerous families are being denied any basic rights and are forced to live with the constant fear of deportation.

There is no let-up to the stream of deportations. Before Christmas, for example, the father of Hassan K.—a young Palestinian about to take his exams for a high school diploma—was deported to Jordan. The deportation of his mother and six brothers and sisters in a few weeks has been made the condition for allowing Hassan to stay in school long enough to complete his exams. The family has lived near Frankfurt for the past 10 years and four of the children were born in Germany.

The first attempt to deport the family took place in July 2006. In the middle of the soccer world championship, which was held in Germany under the slogan “a time to make to friends,” a special unit of 15 policemen broke into the family’s home in the early hours. Since then the family has endured 17 months of uncertainty, which is now to end with their imminent deportation.



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