

# The racist outburst of German Federal Bank executive member Thilo Sarrazin

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Using language usually associated with far-right parties, German Central Bank executive committee member and long-time Social Democratic Party (SPD) member Thilo Sarrazin has stirred up hatred against the most vulnerable layers of society—the unemployed and poor—and in particular, against Turkish and Arab citizens.

The support Sarrazin's outburst received in the German media shows that it reflects not simply the prejudices of a man who became notorious for his provocative outbursts as finance minister in the SPD-Left Party Senate in Berlin, but broader political forces.

Sarrazin's vicious tirade appeared in the latest edition of the renowned cultural magazine *Lettre International*. Under the revealing heading "Class instead of mass. From the capital of social benefits to a metropolis for the elite," the magazine published a long discussion with the former Berlin finance senator.

The racist prejudices Sarrazin evoked in his interview won the unrestricted approval of neo-fascist organizations such as the German National Democratic Party (NPD). The latter applauded his comments and declared that Sarrazin had "summed up the political situation in our country at this time," proposing he be appointed immigration commissioner in the federal government.

The public prosecutor's office is currently checking whether Sarrazin's interview amounts to sedition.

Sarrazin left no stone unturned in his tirade of class hatred. Recipients of meager Hartz IV welfare payments were denounced as part of the "20 percent of the population who are economically redundant". This section of society must be allowed "to peter out," he said.

When asked if this meant that "these people die and then this layer no longer regenerates itself by means of children, grandchildren etc.," Sarrazin agreed: "[False] scientific opinions have always become extinct. And that applies universally."

That is particularly valid for Turks and Arabs, whose "numbers have increased due to a false policy." They have no "productive function apart from the fruit and vegetable trade, and are unlikely to develop any perspective." That is valid "also for a part of the German underclass, which operated coils or serviced cigarette machines in subsidized factories." Here racism against Arabs and Turks is mixed together with naked class arrogance towards the unemployed.

In one passage, which could have been lifted from NPD publications, Sarrazin declares: "The Arabs and Turks have a two to three times higher birth rate than corresponds to their share of the population. Broad layers are both unwilling and incapable of integration. The only solution to this problem is: No more immigration, and whoever wants to marry should do it abroad. Brides are constantly being delivered at a later point: The Turkish girl here is married with an Anatolian, the Turkish youth with a bride from an Anatolian village. The situation regarding Arabs is even worse. My concept would be: in general no more immigration apart from highly qualified persons and as a future perspective no more social benefits to immigrants."

The racism of the ex-finance senator is boundless: "I do not have to recognize anybody, who lives from the state, rejects this state, does not do enough for the education of his children and constantly reproduces new small headscarf girls. That applies to 70 percent of the Turkish, and 90 percent of the Arab population in Berlin."

Sarrazin continues: "The Turks are conquering Germany in exactly the same manner as the Kosovars conquered Kosovo: by a higher birth rate. I could accept that when it applied to East European Jews with around a 15 percent higher IQ than the German population." Here the agitation against foreign infiltration is combined with anti-Semitic clichés.

Representatives of the Jewish community in Germany protested against Sarrazin's "praise."

The federal banker explained that he wants to begin such social-Darwinist selection as early as possible. Although studies testify that few countries discriminate against persons based on social origin to such an extent as Germany, Sarrazin is still not content: "The schools must be organized differently from top to bottom. That also means that we communicate to non-performers that they carry out their non-performing somewhere else. I would adopt a completely different tone: Everyone, who comes to us and really can and wants to achieve something is welcome; the rest should go elsewhere." In addition "the number of the students should be lowered and only the best accepted."

Sarrazin is a well-connected member of the German ruling elite. The son of a doctor and the daughter of a West Prussian landowner, he had a long career in public posts and state enterprises. After his PhD graduation as an economist, Sarrazin joined the SPD in 1973, and was employed the same year in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which is close to the party. From there he ascended to the Treasury, where he remained—including the period when the conservative Helmut Kohl (CDU) took over as chancellor.

Following German reunification in 1990, he played a prominent role in preparing for the subsequent monetary union and was also active in the trust set up to liquidate industry and companies in former East Germany. He then took up well-paid posts in the Treasury of Rhineland-Palatinate and at the German Railways.

In 2002 he was invited by the governing mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit (SPD), to join the Senate, where he assumed responsibility for the finance department. With the support of the SPD and the Left Party, he implemented a rigid austerity course, which had a devastating effect on the jobs and incomes of public service workers and for the social conditions in the city as a whole. In the spring of 2009, Sarrazin then took up his current post with the German Central Bank.

In Berlin, Sarrazin had close experience with rising social opposition to the policies of the SPD. During his time as finance senator in Berlin, Sarrazin had already made a name for himself, with his provocative and crude onslaughts against the poor and immigrants.

In the Senate he played the role of a lightning rod, attracting attention and providing a right-wing populist cover for the right-wing policies of

the SPD and Left Party. The SPD and Left Party kept him at his post throughout the entire period, as he delivered these vicious, anti-working-class tirades. This in itself speaks volumes on the political orientation of these parties.

It would therefore be incorrect to dismiss his recent pronouncements as merely the thoughtless expressions of a choleric figure. Sarrazin apparently counted on sufficient political support to avoid difficulties his tirade might cause him with his employers.

According to *Der Spiegel* magazine, the article was the source of conflict with the president of the Central Bank, Axel Weber, who regarded the text as “completely unacceptable.” Nevertheless, Sarrazin subsequently passed on his article for publication in an unchanged form.

In light of the devastating effects of the international financial and economic crisis and the decline of the SPD, which obtained its worst ever election result on September 27, Sarrazin is playing the racist card in order to divide and suppress the working class. He speaks for the self-appointed “elite” in the upper middle classes, who seek to finally put an end to the welfare state and all forms of social reconciliation and are determined to crush any resistance. This is above all confirmed by the positive reception to his foul outpourings by sections of the media and television talk shows.

It is indeed remarkable that *Lettre International*, which describes itself as “Europe’s cultural newspaper,” published Sarrazin’s inflammatory interview in the first place. The German edition of *Lettre International* originated in 1988 on the periphery of the *taz* newspaper, which was founded by former 1968 radicals as a leftist alternative to the official bourgeois media and is close to the Greens. The editor of the German edition, Klaus Berberich, who personally conducted the interview with Sarrazin, was a founder member of the *taz*.

These layers, whose characterization as “left” has more to do with lifestyle issues rather than social questions, have long since moved to the right—beginning with the entry of the Greens into a federal government coalition in 1998. The intensification of social polarization provokes in them a further lurch to the right. In the meantime, openly racist points of view are being raised in such circles, above all those directed against Islamic minorities in Germany.

Only a handful of politicians from the SPD, the Greens or Left Party—above all those with Turkish roots—have either raised objections to this latest diatribe or called for Sarrazin’s resignation or expulsion from the SPD.

There has been a notable lack of reaction from the ranks of the Christian Democratic Union and Free Democratic Party, which together will form the next federal government. There has also been silence from the government’s former conservative interior minister, Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), who in the past has sought to present himself as an advocate of integration and organizer of conferences on behalf of the country’s Islamic communities.

Other representatives of the ruling elite have made no bones about it and have unequivocally lined up behind Sarrazin. Thus former BDI (German Industrial Federation) chairman Olaf Henkel declared in *Deutschlandfunk* that Sarrazin is being victimized by “do-gooders around the Greens and the Left Party” because he spoke out “certain truths.”

The yellow press *Bild* newspaper defended him with the statement that Turks and Arabs are in fact “twice as likely to be unemployed or guilty of criminal acts as the federal average. Also the number of foreigners and their children receiving state alimony (Hartz IV, welfare assistance) is twice the average.” In its comment, *Bild* exploits the results of poverty and discrimination to justify blatant racial prejudices.

The latter’s racist remarks have also found a groundswell of support in the newspaper *Die Welt*, which like *Bild* belongs to the Springer group, but is regarded as a “quality” newspaper. Of special significance is an editorial by the paper’s editor-in-chief Thomas Schmid, who declares that Sarrazin has articulated “obvious truths” and that immigrants would have

to get use to such “truths.”

In the 1970s Schmid was a companion of the former Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer and a cofounder with Fischer of the group “Revolutionary Struggle.” At the time, Schmid wrote for alternative newspapers such as *Pflasterstrand (Pebble Beach)* and *taz*, and was an adviser to another leader of the Greens, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Cohn-Bendit remains a close friend of Fischer and is a leading figure in the Green Party in France. Schmid represents a layer of former radicals that have rapidly climbed the social ladder and retained just one outstanding characteristic from their past: a profound contempt for the working class, and in particular its most repressed layers.

One journalist, Bettina Röhl, goes so far in a confused right-wing tirade on the web site of *Die Welt* to declare that Sarrazin is the victim of a “Inquisition.” She even makes the grotesque statement that “the inequality in education and concomitantly between the majority of migrants and the majority of Germans based on income” is “caused by nobody and is nobody’s fault.”

In one comment, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper calls for Sarrazin’s resignation, (“Sarrazin must go”), but carefully avoids addressing the content of his tirade.

In a further comment, however, the paper strikes a completely different tone. Under the title “Headscarf Girl,” author Volker Zastrow denounces criticism of Sarrazin as an attack on the freedom of speech and complains: “Years after the great cultural revolution of the sixties the ground down authorities have been replaced by an anonymous formless slime, a generalized authority, out of which upon demand a malleable mass assumes new forms and announces verdicts, against which no appeal can be made. In so doing freedom of thought is undermined, independent judgment is discouraged.”

This is the background to this latest outburst from the central banker and SPD member Sarrazin. He is waging his own crusade and was well aware that he is speaking to the soul of an influential layer. There is a sizeable layer in the German ruling elite who want to finally put an end to any forms of tolerance, social reconciliation, consideration for the socially disadvantaged, the welfare state and “left-wing do-gooders.”

These circles regard the change of government from the grand coalition of CDU-SPD-Christian Social Union to a black-yellow (CDU-FDP) coalition as a signal to go onto the offensive.

Another clear indication was an essay by the professor and self-appointed philosopher Peter Sloterdijk in the *FAZ* in June, in which the author condemned progressive income tax as “functionally equivalent to socialist expropriation” and then referred to a “tendency to reverse exploitation”: the “unproductive” were living at the expense of the “productive,” i.e., top earners and entrepreneurs. He called upon the latter to undertake a “revolution of the giving hand” and for the abolition of “obligatory taxes.”

After the federal election it was the editor of *Der Spiegel*, Gabor Steingart, who welcomed the black-yellow coalition and in particular the increased vote for the pro-big business FDP and the Greens: “The increase in support for the FDP marks thereby a social change. In former times the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist was the distinguishing feature of the epoch. Now in its place we have the exploitation of white collar workers and the middle class employees by the state, whereby the exploited are rebelling just as the downtrodden workers formerly.”

Sarrazin’s tirade and the support for him in sections of the media are a wake-up call for such a “rebellion.” It is part of a deliberate campaign to systematically mobilize layers of the upper-middle classes against the working class, and in particular its weakest and most oppressed layers.



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