

Germany: Leading SPD member Thilo Sarrazin (SPD) rallies the right wing

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While the conservative government coalition argues about how best to push through social cuts and step up its commitment to the Afghanistan war in the face of large-scale popular opposition, a group of politicians is assembling on the extreme right who are intent on mobilising the dregs of society using chauvinism and xenophobia.

One of the protagonists of this group is Federal Bank (Bundesbank) executive member Thilo Sarrazin (SPD, Social Democratic Party). The former finance senator in the Berlin city legislature has repeatedly made statements stirring up Islamophobia and seeking to blame the socially disadvantaged for their predicament.

According to the *Bild* newspaper, Sarrazin again stirred up hatred against migrant workers at a panel discussion last Saturday. He specifically called for the influx of Muslims to be limited while intensifying the “pressure to integrate.” “I would ban headscarves in the classroom,” Sarrazin said. “They are not a religious symbol but a political one. A symbol of the claim to power of men over women.”

As in France, which banned the wearing of headscarves in public schools in February 2004, right-wingers like Sarrazin try to lend their xenophobic attacks a feminist gloss. But it is quite obvious that Sarrazin is not seeking to improve the situation of Muslim women, but rather seeks to exclude them and their families.

It is not the first time that Sarrazin has launched a xenophobic attack on the socially disadvantaged and the poor, charging them with responsibility for their own poverty. At the end of November, he showed sympathy for the Swiss decision to ban minarets. “The Swiss referendum shows that thinking in the depths of society is different to what the political class and the majority of the media want to believe.”

About two months ago, this SPD member gave free rein to his racism in the magazine *Lettre International*. Turks and Arabs, he wrote, had “no productive function, except for the fruit and vegetable trade.” Their numbers had increased due to incorrect policies, he said.

The Turks, who are constantly producing new “headscarf girls,” Sarrazin said, were “conquering Germany, just as the Kosovars have conquered Kosovo: Due to a higher birth rate. That would please me if they were Eastern European Jews with a 15 percent higher IQ than the German population.”

Although Sarrazin was not dismissed as a board member of the Bundesbank after making these remarks, he was relieved of many of his tasks. The fact that he is again attacking migrants must therefore be seen as a conscious decision to continue the offensive for his right-wing programme. He wants to accustom the public to his racist utterances and rally like-minded people.

These are to be found among the representatives of business and veteran right-wingers, as well as among former middle class lefts. After his recent tirades, figures such as the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and Olaf Henkel, former chairman of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), have sprung to Sarrazin’s side. Proceedings to expel him from the SPD have long since ceased: the party is clearly of the opinion that such statements are compatible with its programme.

This time, too, Sarrazin rapidly found supporters in the ranks of official politics and the media. One example was the mayor of Berlin-Neukölln, Heinz Buschkowsky (SPD), who said that one should consider in what way one intervened “in the lives of migrants.” He was worried that “rites are also being applied to small children—from fasting to the

headscarf.”

A few weeks ago, Buschkowsky became a talking point when he combined chauvinism with arrogance towards the socially weak, and declared in relation to the government’s intention to introduce child care allowances: “In the German underclass it is spent on booze, and in the immigrant underclass grandma comes from the old country to look after the kids, if at all.” A few days ago, he accused the Neukölln mosque of training holy warriors.

The Berlin Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chairman Frank Henkel even went so far as to call waiving a headscarf ban as being “anti-integration.” In a comment in *Tagesspiegel*, Werner van Bebber supports Sarrazin’s position but complains that the latter concentrates too much on the “consumers of the welfare state” and does not pay enough attention to “those who pay for it.”

The right-wing provocateurs have gone on the offensive across Europe. Earlier this month in the National Assembly, representatives of France’s ruling party, the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), called for an extension of the headscarf ban. Headlines were also made by the ban on minarets in Switzerland, pushed through by right-wing parties.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy then intervened in the debate he had initiated about “national identity.” In an article for the newspaper *Le Monde*, he defended the Swiss decision about minarets and listed a catalogue of demands for Muslims in France, who should practice their religion in “humble privacy” and profess the values of the French nation.

That the right wing can act so aggressively is a result of the bankruptcy of the so-called left. There is no one in official politics who seriously challenges such right-wing provocateurs. The SPD, Greens and Left Party are all responsible for the social catastrophe that has created the ghettos in the cities and the impoverishment of large sections of the population, particularly migrants. These parties are organically incapable of opposing those who are now seeking to impose the results of their policy onto those most affected.

It is no coincidence that it is Thilo Sarrazin who is again initiating this debate. As finance senator in the SPD-Left Party Berlin city legislature, he was personally responsible for the unprecedented level of social cuts in the city. Now, he is supported by sections

of the middle class who, in the face of mounting social polarisation, are moving to the side of the wealthy and hope to defend their own social position through the exploitation of the vulnerable.

In his writings from the 1930s on fascism, Leon Trotsky describes how the National Socialists mobilised the dregs of society. Sarrazin is seeking to do the same. With his chauvinist slogans, he is trying to mobilise the most disoriented sections of the middle class against the workers and thereby enable the ruling elite to enforce its agenda of social cutbacks and war against all opposition.



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