

Germany: Who is behind the neo-Nazi march in Duisburg?

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Neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists staged an anti-immigrant demonstration last weekend in the German city of Duisburg. This right-wing march, involving the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and the Pro NRW (Pro North Rhine Westphalia) pressure group, was organised to pass directly in front of the Merkez mosque in the northern Duisburg suburb of Marxloh. Opposing this blatant provocation in a city where every third inhabitant has an immigrant background, a broad alliance was formed under the slogan of “Duisburg says no.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* welcomes a wide-ranging mobilisation against the neo-Nazi march. But several crucial issues need to be exposed and clarified.

First and foremost, the struggle against extremism requires the building of a party that consistently fights against capitalism and mobilises the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme. This is so because the breeding ground for extremist discontent is to be found in the social and cultural decline of a community that is based on exploitation and drives an ever-greater section of the population into social misery.

It is precisely those organisations and parties—the Berlin political parties and the trade unions, now feigning indignation about the Nazis—whose capitalist, anti-social policies enable the neo-Nazis to hold their heads high.

The neo-Nazis in Germany and Europe are largely a creation from above. By this, we mean that they are intentionally promoted by sections of the state and media in order to channel mounting opposition to unemployment and social cutbacks along racist and right-wing lines. The Federal Constitutional Court stated in 2003 that every seventh functionary of the NPD was on the payroll of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Germany’s domestic intelligence agency). It justified its refusal to place a ban on the party by claiming that “as things stood, the issue concerned an activity of the state.” The NPD receives millions of euros of taxpayers’ money in the form of election campaign subsidies. The police protect their demonstrations and target those opposing them.

Geert Wilders, the right-wing populist in the Netherlands, began his political career in the liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), which for years participated in coalition governments with the Christian and social democrats to implement social cutbacks and dismantle democratic rights, particularly for refugees and foreigners. Wilders’s sordid incitements are willingly

spread by the media, while the government grants him round-the-clock police protection.

According to the declaration of the “Duisburg says no” alliance, the “apparently bourgeois facade” of Pro NRW conceals “a deep contempt,” directed “equally against Muslims, immigrants and victims of the (niggardly) Hartz IV unemployment benefits scheme.” As though contempt for foreigners and the poor was something incompatible with a “bourgeois facade”!

Berlin’s former finance senator, Thilo Sarrazin (SPD—Social Democratic Party), has been stirring up right-wing extremists and hounding immigrants and the long-term unemployed for months. He has publicly complained that Turks and Arabs have “no productive function other than for the fruit and vegetable trade.” Especially the Turks, he rants, will only go on producing new “headscarf girls” and eventually “conquer Germany with their high birth rate.” He also urges Hartz IV recipients to “take cold showers” to save money.

The SPD’s Berlin arbitration committee recently decided that his outbursts in relation to immigrants do “not directly contradict positions reached by the party convention or the party leadership.” On the contrary, his provocations might “also be useful in that they stimulate open discussion.” In other words, Sarrazin’s baiting of foreigners and the socially deprived is compatible with the SPD’s party programme.

The racist campaign waged by Sarrazin and numerous other representatives of the ruling class is deliberately employed to steer the social crisis in a reactionary direction. This is just as much the case in the Netherlands and France, with the campaign against Islam, as it is in Germany.

When these political parties and trade unions go on about integration and “united community living” in order to distract attention from the actual role they are playing, they should be spurned with the contempt they deserve. Expressing moral indignation, linking hands in protest and praying for peace will prove just as ineffective in stemming the rise of extremism as appealing to the state to ban the fascist NPD. This last move would serve only to boost the authoritarian power of the state apparatus, since it would inevitably employ the same tactic against its left-wing adversaries. Sit-ins, the building of barricades and throwing Molotov cocktails also miss the point when it comes to understanding the central problem: the political paralysis of the working class through the operations of existing political and trade union structures.

The extremists dare to crawl out of their holes mainly because the working population currently has no voice of its own. For years, jobs have been destroyed, wages cut and social rights dismantled, while—at the other end of society—bankers and speculators have shamelessly enriched themselves.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU (Christian Democratic Union) is just as responsible for this as the SPD and the Greens, who initiated implementation of the Hartz IV unemployment support laws. The Left party also organises the demolition of social welfare wherever it participates in government. For their part, trade unions set out to dispel any sign of potentially effective social protest.

Duisburg, with its approximately 500,000 inhabitants, provides a glaring example of the consequences of this common policy. There, social misery is alarmingly palpable: 70,000 people are dependent on Hartz IV; 13.5 percent of Duisburg are unemployed, the highest unemployment rate in the Ruhr region. Poverty is concentrated in a number of the city's districts, particularly in the former steel and coal worker' neighbourhoods to the north. Proportionally, many more Duisburg citizens of foreign origin live there, because they are far more affected by the social decay. In the former miners' district of Walsum, almost every third foreigner lives off Hartz IV; in the Walsum area of Aldenrade and in Marxloh, where the neo-Nazis march was staged, it is as many as one in two. In the Bruckhausen district with its almost 6,000 mainly Turkish residents, more than 80 percent of the under-25s are dependent on Hartz IV. It is because of such misery and frustration that so many immigrants are driven to seek refuge in religion.

When it comes to social cutbacks, all the political parties in Duisburg are the same. Only last week, the city council passed a gruelling austerity budget with votes from the SPD, the Greens and the Left party, who all helped to draw it up. At a German Association of Trade Unions (DGB) rally last Sunday, Mayor Adolf Sauerland (CDU) spoke alongside social democrats and a representative of the church. The parties and trade unions with close links to the SPD and the Left party are utterly contemptuous of the people and their needs.

Thus, the declaration of the alliance "Duisburg says no"—whose tone is set by the Left party and the unions—claims that the extremists and neo-Nazis might be able to profit from an anti-Islamic debate, "that is initiated from the middle of the society." But who is supposed to be "the middle of the society"? The general population?

Workers and young people everywhere are looking for ways and means to fight against social cutbacks, militarism and the dismantling of democratic rights. But they are being systematically obstructed by the SPD, the Left party and the trade unions.

The real problem is not the neo-Nazis, who find their audience in backward and confused sectors of society, but the parties and unions that are enforcing the social demolition and strangling all opposition.

It should not be forgotten that Hitler owed his success in 1933, not to the strength of his own movement, but to the paralysis of the labour movement. At the time, the SPD crippled their supporters by slavishly subordinating themselves to the state and President

Hindenburg; and the Stalinist-dominated KPD (Communist Party of Germany) by indulging in ultra-leftist ranting instead of struggling to build a united front against the Nazis.

However, 2010 is not 1933. A political and social offensive on the part of the working class would immediately separate and disperse the extremist rabble like dust and give courage to all those disheartened by the social decline.

The struggle against extremism is therefore inseparable from the building of an independent political movement of the working class. The international financial and economic crisis has greatly sharpened the class divisions within society. In all countries—especially in Greece—governments are exacting from the working population the billions they gave away to the banks.

An independent movement has to begin by bringing together all workers, youth and socially deprived people across all national, ethnic and cultural borders. The dividing line is not between Germans and foreigners, but between workers and capitalists.

It must uncompromisingly oppose all cutbacks and sackings and fight for a socialist programme. The big banks and big business must be put at the service of society, and production organised according to social needs rather than the profit-making interests of capitalists. It must set up committees of workers to organise opposition, and build a new workers' party.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) fights for the establishment of a new international, socialist workers' party. As the German section of the Fourth International, we represent the Trotskyist tradition, which has defended Marxism against the onslaught of social democracy and Stalinism.

We call upon all opponents of right-wing extremism to contact the SEP and its youth organisation, the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE), and to read our daily internet publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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