

# Thilo Sarrazin and the preparations for a new right-wing party in Germany

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In the space of two weeks, a concerted campaign has developed in Germany to defend the racist views promulgated by Thilo Sarrazin in his new book *Germany Abolishes Itself*. Behind the former Social Democratic Party (SPD) official and member, until recently, of the executive board of the Bundesbank (Germany's central bank), there has emerged a broad alliance extending from leading Social Democrats to prominent intellectuals and media figures to the right wing of the Christian Democrats. Their goal is to overcome long-discredited racist prejudices and prepare the ground for a new right-wing party.

In his book, Sarrazin has supplied this campaign with its key themes. He declares that social problems are really ethnic problems, and places the responsibility for these problems on Muslim immigrants. To support his argument he cites falsely interpreted statistics and the types of pseudo-biological arguments which, since the Nuremberg racial laws and the Nazis' eugenics program, have had credence only in the grubby propaganda of various neo-Nazi groups.

Sarrazin, who served in the Berlin city government as finance senator for many years and bears major responsibility for the social decline of entire neighbourhoods, ascribes the increase in poverty and its associated problems to immigrants' supposedly below-average intelligence and alleged unwillingness to integrate. "The problem is not material but intellectual and moral poverty," he writes.

His book is a transparent attempt to divert growing anger over worsening social conditions away from those political and corporate figures who are responsible and channel it against vulnerable sections of society.

The publication of Sarrazin's book was accompanied by a well-orchestrated campaign in the media. This began with the advance publication of long passages in *Der Spiegel* and *Bild*. In recent weeks there has not been a

television talk show that did not feature Sarrazin himself or one of his defenders.

Whereas most commentators initially distanced themselves from Sarrazin's most provocative theses, declaring that he had initiated a "legitimate" debate but in an unfortunate manner, prominent politicians and journalists have now begun to openly support his racist theories.

On Monday, former federal education minister and current mayor of Hamburg, Klaus von Dohnanyi, a prominent Social Democrat, wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that he was prepared to defend Sarrazin in a hearing to consider his expulsion from the party.

He justified "Sarrazin's basic thesis," which he summarized by saying that Germany was "in danger of seeing its intellectual elites melt away," as they were having too few children, while groups that have thus far "not distinguished themselves through their work or performance" have produced more children, and thereby depressed "the long-term performance level of the nation."

Dohnanyi also explicitly defended Sarrazin's racist theory that there were "special cultural characteristics of ethnic groups, and that Jews had a slightly different genetic structure." His contribution ended with the call: "Please don't shrink from words such as race, Jews, Muslims."

On the *Spiegel Online* web site, Matthias Matussek, former head of the magazine's culture department, banged the same drum. Sarrazin had "become a symbol for those outraged at the way in which the self-righteous of the social consensus unleashed the steward to escort disturbing hecklers out of the room," he wrote.

Matussek then summoned up all the anti-Islamic prejudices by which the war in Afghanistan and the war preparations against Iran are justified. He wrote that Sarrazin embodies "the anger of people who are fed up

with seeing the Middle Ages return to their society, which has a long and arduous process of enlightenment behind it... They are tired of reading about Islamist associations that are close to terrorism, about honour killings, about death threats against cartoonists and film makers... Who are furious about reading that Western statesmen have to intervene on behalf of women in an Islamic country because they are to be stoned for adultery.”

Finally, referring to Dohnanyi, Matussek complained that “in Germany, against a background of the Holocaust, a culture of intellectual suspicion is blooming that means hardly anyone uses words such as ‘gene’ and ‘Jew.’”

Sarrazin has also had support from Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg of the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU). Speaking in a Bavarian beer tent in front of a 2,000-strong audience, Guttenberg said that Sarrazin had initiated the right discussion, and called himself for an “unblinkered debate” about the integration of immigrants.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) interior affairs expert Wolfgang Bosbach and his SPD colleague Dieter Wiefelspütz expressed themselves similarly, saying that integration was the “mega-theme of the next few years.”

In its latest edition, *Der Spiegel* proclaims Sarrazin a “national hero.” His face is featured on the cover of the news magazine alongside the headline: “Folk Hero Sarrazin. Why So Many Germans Fall for a Provocateur.”

In fact, there is little evidence that the hype over Sarrazin is anything more than a media-fueled campaign, or that his racist theses find broad support among the population. It took an intensive media campaign full of distortions and lies before the Emnid Institute could report in an opinion poll commissioned by *Bild am Sonntag* that almost 18 percent of Germans were prepared to vote for a protest party led by Sarrazin.

It is noteworthy, however, how vehemently prominent politicians from the SPD and the CDU/CSU support Sarrazin and demand an end to the political “taboos” with which German post-war politics has supposedly been burdened as a result of the crimes of the Nazi regime.

Although the SPD leadership initiated an expulsion process against Sarrazin, it rejected any fast-track procedure, meaning the deliberations will drag on for months if not years. According to the party statutes, the first arbitration hearing does not have to be held until six months from now.

The Left Party too has been silent. There is no conflict with Sarrazin’s theses from their side.

In a brief statement, Left Party Chair Gesine Löttsch

welcomed Sarrazin’s dismissal from the board of the Bundesbank, but justified this primarily from the standpoint of defending the reputation of the central bank. She said nothing about the content of Sarrazin’s theses. According to the Emnid poll, Sarrazin enjoys considerable support among supporters of the Left Party.

Unlike in Austria (Jörg Haider), the Netherlands (Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders) or Italy (the Lega Nord), Germany has not previously seen a xenophobic party win influence in the urban middle classes. Neo-Nazi parties like the NPD and the DVU have been able to achieve isolated electoral successes, but these quickly evaporated. They were able to hold onto their gains only in some rural areas such as the Saxony Schweiz or Western Pomerania.

This could now change in view of the worsening of the social crisis. The employers’ associations and their mouthpieces in the media have long complained about the weakness of the Merkel government. And they do not trust the SPD under Sigmar Gabriel to continue what was begun by Gerhard Schröder with the Agenda 2010 welfare and labour “reforms.”

Under these circumstances, Sarrazin’s book and the accompanying media campaign represent a deliberate attempt to prepare the basis for a new right-wing, xenophobic party. Such a party could be used as a lever to transform the political landscape. For a long time, the right wing of the CSU has been moving away from Merkel. Such a party could also count on support from sections of the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions.

This danger and Sarrazin’s racism can be combated only by building a new working class party that fights for an international socialist program independently of and in opposition to the SPD and the Left Party. This is the program of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party), the German section of the Fourth International.

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