Germany: Thilo Sarrazin and the SPD

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Expulsion proceedings are planned against leading Social Democratic Party (SPD) member Thilo Sarrazin. A concerted campaign has developed in Germany to defend the racist views promulgated in his new book *Germany Abolishes Itself*.

Leading Social Democrats—like former Hamburg mayor Klaus von Dohnanyi, former defence minister Peter Struck and ex-finance minister Peer Steinbrück—have either publicly solidarized with Sarrazin or have criticized the party leadership for initiating the expulsion proceedings. Willy-Brandt-Haus, the party headquarters, has received numerous emails from the ranks of the SPD supporting Sarrazin.

Anyone who knows the history of the SPD and has followed its recent development would not be surprised by the support for Sarrazin. The SPD has lost nearly half its members since German reunification in 1990, down to 400,000 from a total of 900,000. Blue and white collar workers have turned their backs on the party, while civil servants who have been able to pursue a career thanks to their SPD membership remain. They have supported the neverending welfare cuts for which the names Dohnanyi, Struck, Steinbrück and especially Sarrazin stand as a symbol. Now they are supporting Sarrazin's attempts to scapegoat immigrants and Muslims for the ensuing social misery.

Sarrazin is able to rely on long-standing traditions of the SPD, which include xenophobia, racism and even eugenics.

If you believe Sarrazin's warnings, Germany runs the risk of collapsing through dumbing down and Islamization. According to him, the stupid and lazy in general, and Muslims in particular, are reproducing far too extensively, the industrious and intelligent German academics from the middle and upper classes too little. He builds on theories that once exercised great influence in social democracy, as detailed in an article by Cord Riechelmann in *taz*.

Riechelmann writes: "The social democratic traditions that Sarrazin follows were laid down at the beginning of the last century by the physician and Professor of Social Hygiene in Berlin, Alfred Grotjahn (1869-1931). Grotjahn sat for the SPD in the Reichstag (parliament) from 1921 to 1924. He contributed significantly to the health-related policies of the SPD in the Weimar Republic, and in 1926 published his textbook, 'The health of human reproduction. An attempt at practical eugenics', which established the main theses Sarrazin is now advancing." Sarrazin's agreement with Grotjahn includes "the sources cited."

Grotjahn, who died in 1931, was a member of the Society for Racial Hygiene, which later assisted the Nazi regime. The Nazis developed eugenics to include the "destruction of unworthy life" and the mass killings of people with disabilities.

In his 1926 book, "Hygiene of human reproduction", Grotjahn did not go quite that far. But he did advocate that hereditary conditions were "systematically eradicated through custody and enforced sterilisation". His demands made him one of the most radical eugenicists of the Weimar Republic. He demanded, as a means of rationalizing human reproduction, in "quantitative and qualitative terms", the "purification of human society from the sick, ugly and inferior," whom he estimated formed a third of the population.

Grotjahn also advocated the compulsory sterilization of imbeciles, epileptics, alcoholics and cripples, and for a "lasting exile" of about one percent of the population. This is the man who was the author of the health policy in the SPD's Görlitz programme of 1922.

At that time, the SPD had turned its back on Marxism and internationalism. There had been a demonstrative and growing right wing at the turn of the century. Already in 1899, Eduard Bernstein, the theoretical head of anti-Marxist revisionism, had argued for colonial conquests by the "German cultural nation" using racist arguments in his book "The Premises of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy": "In addition, the savages can only be accorded a conditional right on the land occupied by them. In the extreme case, the higher culture has the higher right."

Finally, the right wing was able to prevail in 1914, when the SPD and its affiliated unions supported the German Empire in the First World War. After the war, the SPD and trade union leaders worked closely with conservative generals and the right-wing *Freikorps* to drown revolutionary workers' uprisings in blood. The commitment to "one's own" nation at home and abroad developed its own logic, and the SPD shrank at nothing. Against this background, it is no surprise that Grotjahn, with his ideas about racial hygiene and eugenics, not only remained in the party but was even able to exert considerable influence.

In Sweden, the ruling Social Democrats also advocated a comprehensive state eugenics programme, which included forced sterilization, and was put into practice from 1934 to the mid-1970s.

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The Swedish couple Alva and Gunnar Myrdal—the latter was a Member of Parliament and minister for the Social Democrats—advocated the creation of "better human material" for the Swedish nation-state. As Franz Walter wrote in *Die Zeit*, it was a case of "preventing less mature elements of the population from reproducing. There should be no right to have children. For in modern work processes, it depended on speed, efficiency and rationality, because one could not afford 'poor population quality'."

In Denmark and Finland too, the legal basis of eugenics remained until the 1960s or late 1970s.

In Germany, after the Nazi dictatorship, eugenics was discredited, but nationalism, even with racist traits, lived on in the SPD. Immigrants were only mentioned in the section on internal security in the programme with which the party participated in the 1972 general election under Willy Brandt. It was necessary to prevent West Germany becoming "the arena of conflicts, which have their roots in the conflicts of other states." The SPD would therefore apply the "Aliens Law even more harshly".

A year later, Brandt said in his government statement that the "absorption capacity of our society" was exhausted. His government imposed a freeze on recruiting foreign workers.

The hopes of the SPD government for a return of foreign "guest workers" to countries such as Turkey, which were also affected by social and political crises, failed in the 1970s, and the number of immigrants even grew as a result of them being joined by family members. The SPD government of Helmut Schmidt offered "incentives to encourage [a] return" to their country of origin. Foreigners could receive money when they left Germany voluntarily.

The SPD government rejected any right to naturalization of "second generation foreigners", i.e., people who were born and brought up in Germany. The conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition under Helmut Kohl then consistently put this policy into practice.

When German unification at the beginning of the 1990s led to a social crisis, conservative politicians and the media fomented massive xenophobia, citing "asylum abuse", whipping up a pogrom sentiment, which in the neo-Nazi killings in Moelln and Solingen actually led to deaths. The SPD did nothing to oppose this and finally managed in 1993, jointly with the CDU/CSU and the FDP, to largely abolish the fundamental right to asylum.

The SPD did not have to be driven to this by the conservatives. Since 1980, the party has stressed in its programme the need to prevent the "abuse of the asylum". It even held firm to this in 1980 after the military coup in Turkey that was supported by the SPD and drove numerous refugees to Germany.

In 1998, the SPD under Gerhard Schröder together with the Greens took over the government. Now they endorsed the immigration of "skilled foreign workers", but the "national priority" still applied, i.e., foreign workers were still disadvantaged.

Schröder's Agenda 2010 welfare and labour "reforms" meant a marked increase in poverty, low-wage work and precarious employment, while at the other pole of society the wealthy saw their fortunes grow. Sarrazin, who was a finance senator (minister) in the Berlin city government, was substantially responsible for this development, pushing the blame onto the victims. According to him, it is not the politics of social cutbacks that is to blame for poverty and the consequent social problems such as crime and violence, but the poor themselves.

Last year, he expressed such views, a mixture of class hatred and racism, in his infamous "headscarf girls" interview with the magazine *Lettre International*. At that time he also he railed against Turks and Arabs, "the number of which has increased due to wrong policies", individuals who had "no productive purpose, except for the fruit and vegetable trade, and who would probably develop no perspectives." This also applied "to a section of the German lower classes", who at one time carried out menial jobs in the factories.

His eugenic views were already clear: "The Arabs and Turks have a two to three times higher proportion of births than corresponds to their proportion of the population. Large sections of them are not willing or capable of integration." A year before the publication of his book, he spoke unambiguously in *Lettre International*: "The Turks are conquering Germany in the same way the Kosovars have conquered Kosovo: through a higher birth rate."

All that was still not grounds for the SPD to expel him. The party's Berlin Arbitration Commission explicitly rejected the expulsion of Sarrazin. Encouraged by the decision of his party, Sarrazin has gone on to articulate the racist core of his theses very clearly.

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