

German media spreads nationalism by right-wing demagogues

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17 January 2011

The deepening international economic crisis has led to rapid social and political decline across the globe. Austerity programmes abound. Poverty and social misery are increasing dramatically. Living conditions are becoming intolerable for many people who are attempting to find a way to defend themselves. However, active resistance on the part of the working class is systematically stifled and suppressed with the help of trade unions.

An attempt is now being made in Germany to divert the mounting insecurity and fear of sections of the middle class into right-wing channels. Racist and nationalist demagogues have received an unexpected boost from the media and are strutting the stage ever more loudly, boldly and aggressively. They garner enthusiastic support from numerous newspaper editors and radio commentators, and are courted on countless television chat shows. A political climate is thus being created for the emergence of a new right-wing party.

When Thilo Sarrazin published his book *Germany Abolishes Itself* last summer, presenting the burgeoning social crisis as a result of “foreign infiltration” by Muslim immigrants, he was applauded by leading social democrats, intellectuals and media representatives.

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 increasing poverty and its associated social problems to immigrants’ allegedly below-average intelligence and their supposed unwillingness to integrate. He remains a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Although he demonstrably interprets statistics falsely and uses pseudo-biological arguments, which have been repeatedly repudiated since the Nuremberg racial laws and the Nazis’ eugenics programme, he is celebrated by some sections of the media as a national hero daring to confront a taboo subject.

His book first appeared in instalments in influential newspapers and was then promoted with great media fanfare. Finally reports about the book’s high sales figures were taken as evidence of Sarrazin’s success in capturing popular opinion in the formulation of his racist theories.

A few months later, Hans-Olaf Henkel published a nationalist diatribe directed against the euro. In a book entitled *Rescue Our Money*, the former president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI) agitated against the Greek population, accusing Greeks of “taking it easy at our expense”. The subheading of his book is “Germany is Being Sold Out—How the Euro Fraud Threatens our Prosperity”.

While Sarrazin limited himself in his 460-page-long book to disseminating the ultra right-wing and neo-Nazi slogan “Foreigners out!” Hans-Olaf Henkel goes a step further. Implicitly invoking the power politics of the German Reich (empire), he demands that Germany must be prepared to act with more self assurance and assert itself in Europe more forcefully. The euro should not be used to harmonise Europe, but to dominate it. He combines poisonous attacks on working people—referring to them disparagingly as “the little people”—and demands sharper cuts in social services, with calls to use Germany’s economic strength to make other countries bow to submission.

He writes: “From the moment the euro was introduced, there broke out in Greece the usual competitive auction”, which he claims also occurred in other countries. “In this kind of competition, every political party wanted to take credit when it came to ‘Who is the most socially minded?’ ‘Who is the most worker-friendly?’ ‘Who has the biggest heart for the little people?’” Sponsored by the “solidarity of the euro”, “charity without end” broke out in Athens (page 107).

Henkel demands an immediate end to this “transfer union”. All payments to indebted countries in Europe should be stopped immediately. This would require the immediate abolition of the common currency in its current form. The indebted countries should be forced to leave the strong euro and join forces in a weak euro zone—“One might call it the southern euro”, he says. He goes on to suggest that the economically strong euro countries should unite under the leadership of Germany in a “northern euro”.

That such a splitting of the euro would have a devastating impact on the German export economy; that German industry has dramatically increased its exports to European countries—including Greece, whose most important trading partner is Germany—since the introduction of the euro nine years ago; that the money from the euro rescue package does not benefit the Greek population, but goes directly into the accounts of German and international banks, which nevertheless demand drastic welfare cuts from the Greek government—all this the former president of the BDI knows full well, but it does not interest him.

At the beginning of his book, Henkel admits that he also had supported the introduction of the euro. But then exclaims that this was the biggest mistake of his political career. Without explaining exactly what he means, he calls for a fundamental rethinking. Germany would have to stop using its chequebook to hold the European Union (EU) together by buying compromises. Instead, it should use its increased economic power to dictate conditions to other countries.

Sixty years after the establishment in 1951 of European Coal and Steel Community, the first manifestation of the future European Union, the former leader of German industry is preaching the systematic and ruthless pursuit of German interests. To achieve this goal, he is fostering a right-wing, nationalistic, egoistical atmosphere. He is seeking to exploit the growing desperation of many people in order to appeal to the most backward layers of society.

Therefore, Henkel ridicules moral musings about international friendship and demands that Germany must once again ensure that it is more widely respected in the world. Ever since Wilhelm II declared in his Hun speech (delivered to the German expeditionary force, sent to quell the Boxer Rebellion 111 years ago) that Germany had to win respect by force so “that no Chinaman will ever again dare to look at a German askance”, and since Hitler’s master race devastated Europe, everyone knows where this kind of rhetoric leads.

“German self-disempowerment” must come to an end, blusters Henkel, devoting an entire chapter of his book to the issue. He regrets that no

citizens' movement against the "Greek rescue package" has formed "as in the case of the railway station dispute, 'Stuttgart 21'", and explains this by saying that "Germans traditionally tend to exhibit self-satisfaction to the outside world, even to the point of self-destructiveness". This "self-destructiveness" has a long tradition and is endowed by politicians with the "altruistic moral claim": "What one does is aimed at winning the approval of the international community", scoffs Henkel. A politician whose readiness to compromise basically contradicts his oath of office would have the option of "practising irresponsibility as a higher form of reason, weakness as a higher order of morality".

Adopting coarse barroom language, Henkel raves on about this political "drawing of horns" having become a German reflex, claiming that the famous German saying, "The cleverer people give in", will only lead to Europe "soon being governed only by the most stupid people". The absence of the German managers from the major world financial organisations must be described as "virtually chronic". The fourth-largest economy in the world and the third-largest contributor to the United Nations has so far been represented by its leading talents "neither in the corridors of power of the World Trade Organisation", nor in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or the International Monetary Fund. Germany acts everywhere as paymaster," but has no say in the matter".

Henkel is particularly abusive towards France. He writes that "The most recent case of self-destructiveness" can definitely be attributed to the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. She is said to have surrendered "to her close French friend, Nicolas [Sarkozy]" right across the board. Like "a tricky marriage swindler", the "over-bearing French president" suddenly claimed power over the "chancellor's dowry".

It was a bad joke that Sarkozy had threatened during negotiations over the Greek rescue package "to take France out of the eurozone and revoke the Franco-German alliance, if Germany were not prepared to open its wallet".

Henkel writes that he had asked himself at the time "what had become of Germany", when the decision of a French president to withdraw his country from the monetary union was enough to put "our politicians" under pressure. Moreover, he asks, why the Merkel delegation "refuses to counter by playing the card of a re-introduction of the deutsche mark", which would have had far more clout than the ridiculous threat of "a resurrection of the franc".

The dispute has triggered primitive reflexes in Henkel. He writes: "Recently, Germans were reminded that they have been sold into obligatory service to their friends for almost a hundred years. At the end of September 2010, the final reparation costs Germany had to pay for war damages arising between 1914 and 1918 were settled".

Henkel complains that the final balance amounted to at least €70 million, but this was only a tiny part of "the total of €700 billion imposed on Germany at Versailles". Apparently France wanted even now to maintain Germany as the donor country "with tributary obligations but without any further political influence".

It has been some time since the issue of reparations payments associated with the Versailles Treaty has been exploited for political purposes in Germany. More than 90 years have passed since the end of World War I, when various monarchist and national conservative parties combined into the German National People's Party (DNVP) and placed the "repeal of the shameful peace of Versailles" at the centre of its foreign policy agenda.

When Alfred Hugenberg took over the party chairmanship in 1928, he based his nationalist propaganda on a growing right-wing movement, whose tone was increasingly set by the National Socialists (Nazis). These extreme right-wing forces were confronted by a powerful and combative working class. However, the workers were divided and held back by the SPD and German Communist Party, enabling the Nazis finally came to

power.

Hans-Olaf Henkel links up with the historical tradition of the German National People's Party, but under completely different conditions. Since the war, several generations have grown up in a society characterised by international cooperation and the abolition of borders within Europe. Millions of people welcome this—despite the dominance of business interests in Brussels and the undemocratic structures of the EU—as an advance in the promotion of international understanding. Many young people live and work in European countries other than their own, have obtained a substantial part of their education abroad, speak several languages and have friends all over the world.

They abhor the hollow, nationalistic, pompous slogans of a Henkel and the racist rabble-rousing of a Sarrazin. Consequently, Henkel and Sarrazin find themselves adamantly rejected by large sections of the population—despite their near total support from the media.

Henkel responds to this by complaining about Germany's current "muzzled republic" (implicitly comparing it to the post-WWI Weimar Republic) at the beginning of his book. The same man, who last year was one of the most frequent talk show guests, complains that he gets little chance of being heard and the debates he and other rights-wingers try to initiate invariably land in a dead end.

Henkel belongs to a whole category of failed right-wing demagogues, and expressly places himself on their side. He writes that most of them later showed "that they—the outlawed, outcast, detested—had actually been in the right". He includes among the ancestral portraits in his gallery of the failed extremists "the historian, Ernst Nolte, who referred in 1986 to the obvious similarities between the Nazi and Stalin dictatorships". In fact, Nolte had downplayed the crimes of the Nazis by arguing that the Hitler regime had at least saved Germany from Bolshevism.

Henkel writes that the German Member of Parliament, Martin Hohmann, had been sacked in 2003 "because he wanted to use the term 'transgressor nation' to the point of absurdity". The truth is that Hohmann spoke of the Jews as a race of transgressors.

Then there is Jenninger Philip, who had to resign as president of the Bundestag (lower house of parliament) in 1988 because "on the 50th anniversary of the so-called Reichskristallnacht [Nazi pogrom of November 1938]" he made a speech that "was classified as downplaying responsibility for crime", laments Henkel.

He next defends Erika Steinbach, who as president of the Federation of Expellees (BdV) "stood up for two colleagues who had expressed their views on the outbreak of war in September 1939". Henkel fails to mention that the two BdV officials had blamed Poland for the Second World War because it had confronted the German government "in a particularly bellicose way" and had "even threatened war" in the dispute over Gdansk. Instead, he quickly proceeds to a long and detailed defence of Thilo Sarrazin.

Both right-wing demagogues can spread their racist and nationalist propaganda so effectively primarily because they are supported by influential sections of the media. No one in the established political parties dares to decisively oppose these throwbacks to the times of the Weimar Republic's compromise with the Nazis.

Still more crucial is the fact that the trade unions, the Left Party and its petty bourgeois appendages are suppressing every serious, independent and potentially effective struggle on the part of the working class. Instead, they appeal to the social conscience of the ruling elite, spread the illusion that an SPD government would improve conditions for working people, and degrade workers to the status of mere petitioners. This suppression of the class struggle in the name of providing capitalism with a human face only accelerates the process of social and political decay and strengthens right-wing extremism.

That is why it is urgently necessary to develop a revolutionary party, consciously representing the interests of workers and uniting them

worldwide on the basis of a socialist programme in the struggle against capitalism.



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