

The growth of the extreme right in Europe

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9 May 2011

With its decision to halt the expulsion procedures against Thilo Sarrazin and to keep this blatant racist in the ranks of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), German social democracy has moved sharply to the right.

Sarrazin, a former finance senator in the Berlin city government and executive member of the Bundesbank (Federal Bank), advocates racist and social-Darwinist theories—views that, since the defeat of Hitler, were only held in Germany by small groups of die-hard neo-Nazis. In his widely sold book *Germany abolishes itself*, Sarrazin accuses Muslim immigrants of coming from a long tradition of inbreeding and expressing a genetic deficiency of intelligence. He warns against the conquest of Germany “by fertility” and calls for a strict limitation of immigration.

Elsewhere, in the spirit of the Nuremberg racial laws, he claims all Jews share a particular gene.

The SPD justifies its reconciliation with Sarrazin with electoral considerations and “respect for different opinions.” In reality, it is responding to fundamental economic and social changes. The SPD’s right-wing turn is part of a pan-European development.

Increasingly, established parties on the right and left of the bourgeois political spectrum are adopting chauvinism, anti-Islamism and other forms of racism in their political programmes, and reconciling themselves with far-right parties. The media contribute to this right-wing development by boosting right-wing preachers of hate such as Sarrazin and Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French National Front (FN).

In Hungary, the ruling party Fidesz—a leading component of the European People’s Party, which also includes Germany’s Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the ruling French Union for a Popular Movement (UMP)—is promoting archaic nationalism as the basis of its policies. The Fidesz government has restricted press

freedom, and agreed on a new constitution in the traditions of the authoritarian, anti-Semitic Horthy dictatorship. On the streets, the fascist paramilitary militia of the Jobbik party are allowed to hunt down Roma and other minorities and terrorise whole villages.

In Italy, Switzerland and probably soon Finland, xenophobic parties are sitting in government. In the Netherlands and Denmark, conservative governments rest on the parliamentary support of the right-wing extremists.

In French opinion polls, the neo-fascist FN regularly surpasses the ruling UMP. If presidential elections were held tomorrow, FN candidate Marine Le Pen would probably be the second-strongest candidate and enter the second round. The rise of the FN has been boosted by the anti-Islamist campaigns of the Sarkozy government. In some cases—such as the prohibition of the headscarf in schools and the banning of the burqa—these campaigns were also supported by France’s Socialist Party and its “left-wing” periphery.

With their turn towards the extreme right, the European bourgeoisie is responding to the international financial crisis and the heightening of national antagonisms in Europe.

Thirty years ago, they turned their back on the policies of social reform and compromise, which had dominated the post-war period. Since then, they have rested on the social-democratic and Stalinist parties, the trade unions and their supporters among the former radical “left” to depress wages and social benefits, and hold the working class in check.

The Socialist Party governments under François Mitterrand and Lionel Jospin in France, the Labour government under Tony Blair in Britain, and the SPD-Green Party coalition under Gerhard Schröder in Germany presided over a massive redistribution of income and wealth to the benefit of the rich. The unions have either completely suppressed the class struggle or

limited it to impotent protests. This has strongly discredited these organisations. The number of their members and voters has fallen dramatically, and they hardly find support among the youth.

The financial crisis of 2008 has led European capital to embark on a new offensive against the working class, putting its previous efforts in the shade. While profits and bonuses in the boardroom reach new records, workers' living standards are set back generations. What began with the cuts programmes in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and several eastern European countries is becoming the benchmark for all of Europe.

To carry out these attacks, the bourgeoisie continues to rely on the support of the former reformist parties, the trade unions and their ex-radical followers. But given the weakness of these organisations and the rapidly growing class tensions, the bourgeoisie is probing different avenues and preparing for the violent repression of social protests; hence their support for the extreme right. This is needed to poison the social atmosphere, to divide the working class and mobilise support for an authoritarian state.

It is significant that this policy gets support from the SPD and the unions. These organisations have long since lost any relationship to the working class. They represent a wealthy, privileged bureaucracy, closely enmeshed in the state apparatus and big business, and which fully defends their interests. As their retention of Sarrazin makes clear, they respond to the growing economic and social tensions in Europe by fomenting xenophobia and nationalism themselves.

The political situation in Europe is increasingly shaped by national conflicts. Tensions between Germany and France are growing, Europe's external borders are being sealed off, the internal borders reinstated and foreign policy interests—as in Libya—pursued by military means and war. The future of the euro and the European Union is in question.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, the Fourth International characterised the world situation as follows: “The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem.... In an era of aviation, telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, travel from country to country is paralysed by passports and visas. The period of the wasting away of foreign trade and the decline of domestic trade is at the same

time the period of the monstrous intensification of chauvinism and especially of anti-Semitism.”

Were one to use these lines as the description of the situation today, one would only need to replace the term “anti-Semitism” with “anti-Islamism.” The growth of national conflicts and the far-right movements is an expression of a deep crisis of capitalist society, which is again careering towards a historical disaster, unless opposed by the working class.

In contrast to the former reformist parties and trade unions, the working class is not moving to the right but to the left. Its opposition to the capitalist orgy of enrichment, against welfare cuts and growing political repression is—as in Tunisia and Egypt—moving towards powerful social explosions. What it lacks is a political perspective and leadership.

The working class must break with the old bankrupt parties and trade unions and abandon the illusion that they can be forced to take a different political line through pressure from below. Only the unification of the European and international working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist programme offers society a way out of the impasse. Capitalist Europe must be replaced by the United Socialist States of Europe. This requires the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the continent.



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