

Berlin state election: The offensive of the extreme right

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A number of far-right parties and organizations are using their participation in the Berlin State election in September to disseminate vile propaganda.

The neo-fascist National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) has put up tens of thousands of posters throughout the social hot spots on the outskirts of the capital city. The posters feature Arab immigrants depicted as inferior, in the style of old Nazi caricatures, and demands their expulsion. The party has put up posters with the slogan "Give gas!"—evoking the Nazi gas chambers.

The far-right "Civil rights movement Pro-Germany" and the far-right "Freedom" party are also resorting to openly racist slogans and plan to hold conventions in the next weeks against the threat of "Islamisation".

In recent weeks there have been repeated attacks by far-right activists on the offices of the Left Party and leftist youth organizations. On 29 June, the district office of the Left Party, in Berlin's Neukölln district, was pelted with eggs and paint bombs.

Two days earlier, a life-threatening arson attack was carried out on a center of the Social Democratic youth organization, "Die Falken", forcing the center to close down temporarily. On 6 July several memorials to the victims of National Socialism were desecrated in the course of a poster campaign by the NPD.

The audacity of these far-right elements is directly related to the policies of the city's Senate—a coalition of the Social Democrats and Left Party, which has been in power in Berlin for the past 10 years. In the course of its two legislatures the coalition has wreaked havoc with the city's social infrastructure.

The 13.5 percent official unemployment rate in Berlin is the highest in all German states. But in fact the real figure is much higher. 441,000 persons are dependent on welfare. In 2010 2,000 of this total were forced to abandon their homes, relocating from the downtown to the suburbs, due to rising rents. The Social Report for 2010 noted that poverty among those holding full-time jobs has also increased massively.

It is these social conditions created by the city coalition which provides the breeding ground for the fascists. Falsely claiming to have a record of "left-wing policies," the Left Party and the SPD

have implemented devastating social cuts, thereby allowing the far right to pose as the defenders of social rights.

The NPD has focused its campaign on these issues and claims in its election newspaper that it is the only party, "not tied to big business, but rather to the interests of low-income Germans." It systematically combines social issues with racist propaganda, by calling for cuts in welfare for foreigners, in order to increase welfare benefits for native Germans.

However it is not only in the field of its disastrous social policy that the Senate contributes to the offensive of the extreme right. It has itself moved further to the right and is deliberately stirring up racism and anti-Islamism.

Thus the far right refers to the writings of Thilo Sarrazin, the former long-time social-democratic finance minister in Berlin, who determined cuts to be imposed by the Senate, and now is mounting a virulent anti-immigrant campaign. The far-right party has put up thousands of poster across the city featuring the slogan: "Go Vote for Thilo's Theses". The poster also features a mosque with a cross drawn through it.

In his recently published book "Germany is Abolishing Itself," Sarrazin accused Muslim immigrants of having a long tradition of inbreeding and a resulting genetic intelligence deficiency. In his book he called for strict limits to be place on their immigration. In April of this year, an arbitration court of the Social Democratic Party opposed proposals for his expulsion—declaring that his racist theories were not incompatible with SPD membership.

The Left Party was also quite prepared to tolerate Sarrazin as the head of Berlin's finance department for seven years, and refrained from challenging his chauvinistic and racist positions, which were well known prior to the publication of his book.

The stance of the Berlin Senate was not limited to providing support for Sarrazin. It has also actively implemented his program, deporting thousands of refugees over the past ten years.

The city's social-democratic Interior Minister took a particularly hard-line position. In 2005 he rejected a third of all cases in which special circumstances (hardship) were cited as grounds for allowing the immigrant to stay in the country. The Hardship

Commission examines whether a deportation is consistent with legal and humanitarian considerations, but the final decision lies with the interior minister. In most other German states, the Commissions' recommendations are generally respected.

In late 2002, early 2003, and again in April 2005, dozens of immigrants imprisoned in the detention center in Berlin-Köpenick went on hunger strikes to protest the lack of medical care and harassment by officials. Interior Senator Körting reacted to this development in 2003 by declaring that the imprisoned immigrants had nothing to complain about. Following the additional hunger strikes, he announced that changes would be made, but they were never satisfactorily implemented. These anti-immigrant policies were supported by both parties in the Senate.

In addition, the Berlin Senate has massively extended the powers of the police. It has not only installed more cameras in public places, but also allowed the police to utilize the countless cameras installed along the Berlin transport system authority (BVG) to identify suspects. These measures were accompanied by increasing the payroll of private security staff in the city, who are largely freed from the types of legal scrutiny applicable to the Berlin police.

When demonstrations against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in August 2006 took place in Berlin, the interior minister banned any expression of sympathy with Hezbollah - a blatant attack on free speech.

The ultra-right's rise flows directly from these policies. In its election manifesto, Pro Germany declares "homeland security" its second priority after the struggle against "Islamization", and warns against "Islamic terrorism". In its policy statement, the party calls for reducing the age for criminal responsibility to twelve years and a strengthening of the "Prussian heritage."

Pro Germany was founded in January 2005, following in the footsteps of the ProKöln group, which opposed the building of a mosque in Cologne. Many former members of other far-right parties such as the NPD have now found their way into Pro Germany.

Anti-Islamic and xenophobic sentiments are also fuelled by the "Freedom" party. It was founded by the former Christian Democrat Rene Stadtkewitz, after he was expelled from the CDU, for inviting the Dutch right-wing populist Geert Wilders and anti-Islamists to attend a meeting in Berlin. The party's program calls for the "abolition of the integration industry," and the reduction of benefits for those "refusing to integrate". In addition the party, together with Pro Germany, calls for more police and increased electronic supervision.

Other far-right parties taking part in the Berlin election include the "German Conservative Party," historically linked to the German National People's Party (DNVP)—a party behind the rise of Hitler in the Weimar Republic, and the "LaRouche" (BüSo) party, characterized by hysterical anti-communism and sympathy for

authoritarian political systems like that in China.

None of these parties enjoys any significant support. According to a survey conducted by the Info GmbH on 21 June this year, all these groups in Berlin command just two percent of the vote. Their aggressive offensive is assisted by the fact that their right-wing positions are systematically supported by the media, and none of the established parties seriously opposes them.

The spread of anti-Islamic propaganda and the creation of far-right parties is part of the strategy of the ruling elite to impose its program of social counter-revolution. The dregs of society are to be mobilized to this end on the basis of xenophobia.

It should be recalled that the German Constitutional Court turned down demands in 2003 for a ban to be imposed on the German NPD, arguing that the party was effectively in state hands. It was revealed that one in seven of the party's officials was on the payroll of the German secret police.

The growing role of the far-right in the political establishment is a pan-European phenomenon. In Italy and Hungary far-right parties are already involved in the government, while in the Netherlands Wilders' PVV plays a critical role in public affairs—by supporting the minority conservative government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

At the same time, the trend towards authoritarian forms of rule is not limited to the far right. It results directly from the social polarization of society, which is incompatible with democratic rights for the broad layers of the population. In this respect it is not surprising that the established parties refuse to seriously mobilize against the offensive of the extreme right, even when their own offices are attacked.

The fight against the extreme right is inextricably linked with a struggle against the right-wing policies of the Berlin Senate, and its unprecedented social cutbacks. The SPD and Left Party are seeking to continue their current policies, while the Greens are calling for even tougher austerity measures. Only the Socialist Equality Party is intervening in this election on the basis of a socialist perspective, calling for the international unity of all workers, regardless of race, color or religion.



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