

Why the SEP (Germany) rejects a state ban of the neo-fascist NPD

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG)
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In mid-December, the German Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) agreed to take a case to the Supreme Court aimed at banning the far-right German National Democratic Party (NPD). So far, the Bundestag (lower house of parliament) and government have hesitated to support the move. While the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) seem rather reluctant to take such a step, it is above all the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Left Party and the Greens who are pushing for the ban.

The *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) fundamentally opposes a ban. Such a ban does not help the struggle against the far right, but instead strengthens the state apparatus which is closely tied to the extreme right and is increasingly adopting authoritarian measures.

The banning of a political party represents a serious breach of the democratic rights of the working class. As masses of people turn their back on official politics because they feel they are not represented by any of the parties in the Bundestag, the ruling elite is reacting by attacking the right of assembly and setting itself up as arbiter of which parties people may or may not support.

History has repeatedly shown that, in the final analysis, such curbs of democratic rights only strengthen and encourage the most right-wing and reactionary sections of society. At the same time, the workers movement is denied basic forms of free and democratic expression.

In the Weimar Republic in the 1920s and 30s, measures such as the Law for the Protection of the Republic that permitted the dissolution of political associations, were applied almost exclusively against left-wing groups in the workers movement. In post-war Germany, the banning of the tiny, right-wing *Sozialistischen Reichspartei* (Socialist Empire Party, SRP) in 1953 served as a precedent for dismantling the Communist Party (KPD) three years later. Today, the banning of the NPD would mainly serve to increase the powers of the state, rather than contribute to the fight against the danger of fascism, which is growing throughout Europe.

In reality, the rising powers of the state and the rise of fascist and far-right tendencies cannot be separated. The background to both developments is the intensification of class conflict in Germany and throughout Europe. Across the continent the

ruling elite is shifting the burden of the crisis onto the population and destroying social gains fought for over decades. Such an assault is incompatible with democratic rights. While the stepping-up of state powers serves to maintain surveillance of and suppress all opposition from below, far-right gangs are employed to mobilise the dregs of society against the working class.

The extreme right in Germany has been built up and sponsored by the very same state apparatus, which supporters of the NPD ban want to strengthen in the supposed “fight against the right wing”. This was already evident in the previous attempt to officially ban the NPD. The attempt failed because the judges of the Supreme Court concluded that the NPD was “in reality a state-run affair”. In the course of the legal proceedings it was revealed that at least one in seven of all NPD party functionaries were on the payroll of the secret service.

Over the last year, revelations about the far-right terrorist “National Socialist Underground” have brought to light details of the relations between the secret service and police with the fascist and far-right terrorist scene. They both have close links to the far-right milieu and have financed right-wing extremist groups through undercover operatives, even helping to found some groups. There is considerable evidence to indicate that state authorities were actually involved in the NSU’s murderous terrorist attacks, carried out under the eyes of state agents.

State and media campaigns against refugees and immigrants have also prepared the ground for the growth of the far-right. In 1992, a campaign against the so-called abuse of the asylum system, carried out by all of the parties in the Bundestag and the media, led to a wave of racist violence. This ended with the siege of an asylum hostel in Rostock and culminated with murderous attacks in Solingen and Mölln. Today, the systematic deportation of refugees and the sweeping aspersions cast against Muslims, depicted as violent Islamists, have a similar effect.

The number of NPD members has been falling recently, and it can only keep its head above water because the Federal Administrative Court exempted the party from paying half of a million euro fine imposed on it for submitting faulty accounts.

But in other European countries far-right organisations are gaining considerable influence. In France, the National Front won 18 percent in the 2012 presidential election, its best ever result. In Hungary and Greece, the openly fascist Jobbik and Chrysi Avgi parties have a significant number of parliamentary deputies.

Such a development is also possible in Germany. The reason for this growth of the far-right lies with the brutal attacks on wages, pensions and the welfare state, which is driving whole layers of the population into poverty and desperation, under conditions where the Social Democrats, trade unions and pseudo-left groups block any progressive solution to the crisis.

This is particularly the case in Greece. Five rounds of austerity measures dictated by the European Union have driven down wages and pensions by up to 60 percent, and unemployment is officially over 25 percent. The broad resistance to these measures has been stifled by the unions, via ineffective one-day protest strikes. The Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which has profited from the decline of the social democratic PASOK, resolutely defends the EU and is promising international banks it will guarantee repayment of Greece's debts. Under these circumstances, the fascists can exploit growing social desperation and anger with the EU.

The rise of the Nazis to power in Germany eighty years ago was the result of the paralysis of the working class due to the betrayal of the SPD and KPD. The SPD subordinated the working class to the state, supported the Emergency Regulations of Reich Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, and eventually elected the arch reactionary Hindenburg as president, who then appointed Hitler as chancellor. The Stalinist leadership of the KPD refused to form a united front against Hitler, and hid its defeatist attitude behind ultra-left attacks on the SPD.

“The victory of the party of despair [the Nazis] was only possible because socialism, the party of hope, proved to be unable to take power,” Trotsky wrote in 1933. “The German proletariat was strong enough both in number and in culture to reach its goal, but the labour leaders have proven themselves incapable.”

Today, there is no party with similar influence in the working class as the SPD and KPD enjoyed then. But petty bourgeois parties that pose as “left”, like SYRIZA in Greece and the Left Party in Germany, as well as their pseudo-left hangers-on, play a decisive role in suppressing an independent offensive by the working class. They defend the bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions, the bourgeois state and the European Union. It is significant that the strongest advocates of a ban of the NPD are found within their ranks.

The domestic policy spokesperson of the Left Party in the Bundestag, Ulla Jelpke, has repeatedly spoken out in favour of banning the NPD. She demanded that this time such a ban be prepared more carefully, so that it does not fail.

For the Socialist Alternative (SAV), the German off-shoot of

Britain's Socialist Party, which works inside the Left Party, a state ban of the NPD does not go far enough. It demands that parties should also be dissolved even without a decision by the Supreme Court. The NPD should be “banned immediately, all its funds and offices confiscated and all meetings dissolved”, the SAV declares.

With their call for a stronger state, all these groups are reacting to the intensification of class tensions. They speak for a well-off layer of bureaucrats and petty bourgeois, who are fiercely hostile to the interests of the working class. The more the social situation worsens, the more openly they collaborate with the state. By presenting the authoritarian state as the guardian of democracy and bulwark against the fascists, they are seeking to bind workers to the bourgeois state, which is moving ever more sharply against them. Moreover, the exclusive concentration on the NPD serves to distract from the general political move to the right in official politics, which is paving the way for the extreme right's development.

A serious struggle against the danger from the right must be linked with a struggle against the comprehensive attacks on social and democratic rights of the working class. The working class must counterpose its independent perspective of an egalitarian socialist society to the politics of the ruling class and its defenders in the Left Party. This is the only basis today on which democratic rights can be defended against the money-grubbing of the banks and corporations.

Such a perspective would undermine the right-wing demagogues and win the best elements of the petty bourgeoisie to the side of the working class. The most important basis for the struggle against the right is the building of a revolutionary workers party which unites the working class across national borders and provides a progressive solution to the capitalist crisis on the basis of a socialist perspective. This party is the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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