

Germany: Pirate Party makes overtures to the far right

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In the past few weeks, the far-right Pro NRW has conducted racist protests outside refugee camps in North Rhine-Westphalia as part of a campaign for a “people’s initiative against the abuse of asylum.” Their demands for a criminal offence of “asylum fraud” have received support from members of the Pirate Party.

At rallies in Bochum and Essen, in Witten and in Cologne, flags from the Pirate Party could be seen prominently alongside posters of Pro NRW. The former spokespersons for the Pirate Party in Duisburg and Cologne, Andreas Winkler and Oliver Wesemann, have even joined Pro NRW, along with Barbara Richter, who had been active in the Cologne branch of the Pirates.

Pro NRW is expecting even more defectors, saying “a large group from Oberhausen and two Pirates from Herne” had announced they were joining the neo-Nazi gang. Even before the elections in North Rhine-Westphalia a year ago, members of the Pirates repeatedly came to prominence for their racist statements, making the transition from local politicians to the far-right Pro NRW the only logical consequence.

Cologne Pirate Barbara Richter explained her dual membership in the Pirates and Pro NRW to the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* with the fact that they “fitted together”. She considers herself to be on the right wing of the Pirates; in her opinion, there were just as many “left-wing” as “right-wing” Pirate members.

The Pirate Party in North Rhine-Westphalia announced it intended to expel the deserters to Pro NRW, and publicly denounced the waving of Pirate flags on Pro NRW rallies. However, this is only to maintain the illusion that the Pirate Party is a refreshing alternative to the established parties. Now, as the party’s poll ratings are melting away like snow in the spring sunshine, the brown dregs are coming to the

surface.

Unlike the way in which the Pirate Party likes to present itself—and has been touted by the media in an almost obscene manner—it is not at all a party of rebellion, as the name falsely suggests; neither is it a progressive party. It is a thoroughly bourgeois party, which tolerates the military missions of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and supports the EU’s brutal austerity measures that have driven millions of workers into misery and despair.

Its vague demands for greater transparency of democratic processes were solely for the purpose of lending a fresh coat of paint to washed-out parliamentarianism. The Pirate Party’s programme and election manifesto say not a word about the class divisions in society; rather, they defend the ruling capitalist economic system, at most demanding a few small improvements.

These are mainly addressed to petty bourgeois layers who enjoy a refined lifestyle and fear the angry protests by workers against austerity diktats and social attacks. It is no coincidence that they have offered to hold coalition talks with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the Berlin city legislature, or to accept the debt ceiling in Saarland being used to justify social attacks on the population.

On this programmatic basis, the Pirates have attracted ruthless and backward elements in recent years, which are now openly setting after foreigners and immigrants and want to see the right of asylum abolished entirely. Initially, the leading party bodies stood idly by as their members became involved with the far right, until they were practically forced to act by sections of the membership.

The disinterest of leading party bodies with defectors to the far right is less an expression of the helplessness

of the party than a sign of its silent consent. Speaking to the *tageszeitung*, the chair of the Cologne Pirates, Thomas Hegenbarth, finds it “a shame that it is being so hyped up”. A young party sometimes attracts problematic people, according to Hegenbarth, something that just cannot be prevented. “If you want to participate, you can get involved”. The political views of those involved are obviously meaningless, he insisted.

After all, one of the current defectors, Oliver Wesemann, was only elected as the spokesman of the party’s Cologne district association in September 2012. But Hegenbarth simply says casually, “We did not know much about him, tried him out and then established: That’s not on.”

Kurt Klein, chair of the Duisburg district association, who has also lost his press spokesman Andreas Winkler to Pro NRW, will not “muzzle the members as they continue difficult discussions about immigration and xenophobia—as long as everything stays on the basis of the constitution”, he told online magazine *Der Westen*.

In other words, the Pirate Party will continue to tolerate extreme right-wing, xenophobic ideas. Klein is on the same wavelength as Bodo Theisen and former chair of the Berlin state association Hartmut Semken, who created a furore last year with his racist and nationalist rhetoric.

Bodo Theisen, who has publicly denied the Holocaust, was tolerated in the party for years because of a technicality. Semken has argued that it was “the ‘bouncers’ and those seeking to ‘delineate us’ that represent the Nazi problem for the Pirates, not the Bodos ...”

It is an outright lie when the leader of the Pirates in the North Rhine-Westphalia state legislature, Joachim Paul, says that the defectors to Pro NRW represent a “self-cleansing process”. He is denying the fact that the programme of the Pirates systematically attracts right-wing, nationalist forces. It is no coincidence also that the Düsseldorf Pirates have selected Frank Grenda as their candidate for the general election later this year.

Grenda had previously widely advertised the fact that he was a member of the “You are Germany Campaign”, sponsored by the Bertelsmann group, and which was even attacked by the bourgeois press for its racist character. The slogan “You are Germany” is a relatively unconcealed play on the slogan “For you are

Germany”, with which the Nazis celebrated Adolf Hitler in 1935. Nearly 80 years later, the candidate for the Pirates is saying, “You are a Pirate! You are Germany!”

This right-wing, nationalist orientation is by no means limited to the Pirates in Germany, but is a pan-European phenomenon. For example, the leader of the Italian Five-star Movement (M5S) also caused a stir with tirades against immigrants and Roma.

This is due to the petty-bourgeois orientation of these parties. Broad sections of the population are turning away in disgust from the establishment parties, which carry out one attack after another on the mass of the people in right-wing as well as in supposedly “left” governments, such as the last SPD-Green Party government in Germany, or with the support of the fake lefts like Rifondazione in Italy.

Into the vacuum now come parties that denounce the lack of democracy and criticise the corruption in the old party and state apparatus, but want to preserve the current economic system. Relying on petty bourgeois layers who want to preserve their modest wealth in times of crisis, and a nationally oriented programme, they are susceptible to xenophobic campaigns that divide the working class along ethnic lines.



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