

# Right-wing opponents of the euro found party in Berlin

Ulrich Rippert  
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Five months before the German general election in September, opponents of the euro held a meeting in Berlin last weekend to officially found the Alternative for Germany (AfD). 1,300 members of the organization gathered for the founding conference in the main meeting room of the Intercontinental Hotel—mostly men in advanced old age. Some ostentatiously wore 100 Deutschmark notes on their lapels.

“Get out of the Euro” was the main conference slogan. Bernd Lucke, a professor of economics and the party’s co-founder and spokesman, introduced the party’s program, which states: “We call for an orderly dissolution of the euro zone. Germany does not need the euro. Other countries damage the euro”.

The AfD urges the reintroduction of national currencies, “or the creation of smaller and more stable currency unions”. The reintroduction of the D-mark must not be a taboo, Lucke said. Like many other founding members, Professor Lucke is a former longtime member of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), opposing CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel’s policy only a few years ago.

When the effects of the financial crisis in Europe became apparent, he launched a “plenum of economists”, attracting more than 300 professors of economics. Two years ago, this plenum spoke out against any extension to the euro rescue fund. But no one wanted to hear the option of economic experts at the time, Lucke complained in his convention speech.

Much of the AfD’s personnel and membership come from the right-wing of the CDU, e.g. Alexander Gauland. In the late 1980s, the 72-year-old Gauland was secretary of the Hessian State Chancellery headed by Premier Walter Wallmann, who led a right-wing faction in the Hessian CDU.

Today Gauland writes articles lamenting “German

pacifism”. Last summer, he complained in the *Tagesspiegel* about the “disturbed relationship between Germans and military force”. Although Clausewitz stressed that war is an instrument of politics, the Germans regarded war merely as the “epitome of evil and wrongness”. That led to a “lack of appreciation of the Bundeswehr” which he claimed had to be surmounted.

Besides representatives of the right wing of the CDU, other AfD members include business leaders such as the former Thyssen CEO Dieter Spethmann, and Hans-Olaf Henkel, former president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI). Henkel’s own campaign against the euro is, however, rejected by the current leadership of the BDI which fears that an end to the monetary union and a return to the Deutschmark would do great damage to the German export industry.

There was something eerie about this meeting in the Berlin Intercontinental. It called up ghosts from the past, in particular memories of the German National People’s Party (DNVP), a mouthpiece for the nationalist propaganda of the former media mogul Alfred Hugenberg during the last global economic crisis, in the late 1920s.

A series of speakers at the meeting denounced the euro. The currency was blamed for all social ills: the European financial crisis, growing social instability, the dominance of an unmanageable and uncontrollable bureaucracy in Brussels, the loss of self-determination, associated fears for the future, and much more.

Although the AfD criticizes the euro, it supports the imposed massive austerity program associated with it in order to “defend” the common European currency. In its program, the AfD calls for a continuation of the cuts and “more competition” in Europe. Its aim is to intensify austerity policies in Germany and throughout

Europe, but under different financial conditions.

The call for a return to the Deutschmark was also bound up with a yearning for the relatively stable economic and political relations which existed in Germany after the Second World War. One is reminded of Diederich Hessling, the protagonist in Heinrich Mann's novel *Man of Straw* who, amid the breakdown of Wilhelmenian society on the eve of World War I, clings desperately to the monarchy and empire.

This character of the congress has led many commentators to assume the AfD is a passing phenomenon that will disappear from the political scene as rapidly as similar initiatives in the past. Berlin is seeking to minimize the impact of the AfD, well aware that every percentage point it gains in the coming election reduces the chances for the current governing coalition.

There is, however, no guarantee that the AfD will meet a speedy end, and the new party should by no means be underestimated. Its formation is directly related to the growing opposition to the European Union which, in the name of saving the euro, has imposed massive cuts in social spending and organized a social disaster in many countries.

The AfD aims to deflect the growing opposition to anti-social policies into right-wing, nationalist channels. Right-wing opponents of the euro have sought to organize for some time and in the past used the open electoral lists of the Free Voters organisation. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the founding congress of the AfD was held just weeks after the brutal bailout of Cyprus.

The aggressiveness with which the troika—the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—supported by the German chancellor's office wrecked the financial system of Cyprus and the economic livelihoods of its population surprised and shocked many people. For the first time, bank deposits of more than 100,000 euros were confiscated by up to 60 percent, in exchange for the new ECB loan. This move has intensified the insecurity of hitherto affluent strata of the petty bourgeoisie.

This insecurity can be exploited by a right-wing party, because the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and many pseudo-left groups support the reactionary policies of the EU to maintain the euro.

In this respect it should be noted that alongside CDU

politicians, business professors and military officers, the AfD web site lists among its “main supporters” an official from the Verdi trade union, Christian Hanika, and a former treasurer of the Green Party in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Klaus-Peter Last.

The tributes to the post-war D-Mark of chancellor Konrad Adenauer made at the AfD conference also recalled the glorification of Adenauer's finance minister and later chancellor, Ludwig Erhard, by Sahra Wagenknecht, economic policy spokeswoman for the Left Party parliamentary group.

The Socialist Equality Party (PSG) is the only party in Germany which takes up the struggle against the euro and the European Union on a genuinely progressive, i.e. socialist basis. The fight against the EU as the main instrument for the subjugation of Europe to the dictates of the financial markets cannot be left to right-wing forces.

The response of the PSG is not a return to the nation-state, but rather the mobilization of the entire European working class to overthrow capitalist governments and establish the United Socialist States of Europe.



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