

The reactionary nationalism of the “Alternative for Germany”

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The founding of the anti-euro “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) party has been widely presented as an attack against the German government’s European policy. Government spokesman Steffen Seibert and other representatives of the ruling coalition have sharply criticized the new party.

In fact, this depiction is entirely superficial. The emergence of a right-wing anti-euro party in Germany is the logical consequence of the European policy of the federal government, which has the full support of the Social Democratic Party, the Greens and the Left Party.

For decades there has been virtually unanimous support within the German ruling elites for the process of European integration under the auspices of the institutions in Brussels. After the Second World War, reconciliation with France enabled the German ruling class to sweep its war crimes under the carpet. Economic growth, which accelerated as internal borders fell away, facilitated the policy of social compromise.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, German export industries benefited from the enlargement of the European Union (EU) and the introduction of the euro. Low-wage Eastern European countries supplied cheap parts to German industry, while the common currency lowered the effective exchange rate for German businesses, facilitating their access to world markets and securing their domination in Europe.

This changed with the onset of the financial and economic crisis in 2008. Between October 2008 and December 2011, European governments pumped a total of €1.6 trillion (US\$2.1 trillion) into the vaults of ailing banks.

Since then the German government, in close cooperation with the EU, has set about retrieving these funds by cutting social spending and wages. Greece has

been made a test case. Five austerity programs have reduced the living standards of broad strata of the Greek population to Third World levels. Cyprus’s economic base was dismantled almost overnight.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has repeatedly delayed approval of euro rescue packages to exert maximum pressure on affected governments. Until now, these rescue packages have been allocated as loans or guarantees, with Berlin raking in considerable profits. Now the deepening of the recession caused by austerity measures poses the threat of ailing countries going bankrupt, with Germany picking up the tab.

The founding of the AfD is a response to these developments.

The organisation fully agrees with Merkel’s austerity policies and wants to tighten them even further. The AfD’s program calls for “respect for the debt ceiling and for the reduction of debts.” It wants to reduce taxes for the rich via “a drastic simplification of tax law based on the model developed by Professor Kirchhof”. (See “Germany: New attempt to impose radical tax reform”)

This would increase the pressure to implement austerity. It calls for maintaining the European Union and—following the example set by British Prime Minister David Cameron—for “slimming it down through more competition and personal responsibility”.

Simultaneously, the AfD seeks to limit the damage to the German treasury from weaker EU members. This is behind its demand for the reintroduction of national currencies, and for the rejection of a “transfer union” and of government-funded bailouts.

In the 1990s, conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl was prepared to pull out a cheque book and increase the German contribution to the EU to bridge differences with other EU members. The AfD, in contrast, insists

on the unqualified primacy of national self-interest—a standpoint that finds increasing support in the ruling elites and is also reflected in the ruthless treatment of Greece and Cyprus by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble.

The AfD specifically appeals to conservative middle-class layers who fear for their savings after the seizure of Cypriot accounts, or the devaluation of their portfolios through inflation. One of the few demands found in the AfD program, besides monetary and fiscal matters, is “protection of the family as the nucleus of society”—a phrase designed to attract conservative layers.

Unlike other anti-euro parties, such as the French neo-fascist National Front, the AfD is not adopting populist slogans, for the time being at least, and presents itself as a respectable party of the educated middle class. But as soon as one scrapes the surface, right-wing positions emerge. Thus the program demands “the prevention of an undermining of our social systems by immigrants at all costs”.

A correspondent for the weekly *Die Zeit* described the contrast between the displays of highbrow respectability and the populist mood of delegates at the founding congress. In the main hall, participants appeared as “middle class with reading glasses and pleated pants.” In the adjoining hallways, however, they railed against political correctness, gay marriage and “criminal East European gangs.”

While the AfD seeks to evoke the heyday of the Germany’s national deutschmark currency under the post-war chancellor Konrad Adenauer, in fact this period has more in common with the conditions prevailing in the 1930s. At that time national tensions escalated and eventually erupted in the Second World War. In its program the AfGDconjures a Europe living together “in friendship and as good neighbours”, but the inevitable outcome of its policies are intensified national tensions and conflicts.

The AfD benefits from the fact that the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party all unconditionally support the EU’s reactionary policies. Though they are in opposition, the SPD and the Greens have consistently voted in parliament for the Merkel government’s European policy.

Only an independent political movement of the working class can oppose the AfD. It must reject both

the reactionary nationalism of the AfD as well as the European Union and the euro. The latter do not embody the “unity of Europe”, but rather are the tools of finance capital across Europe. They have become the main instrument for a social counter-revolution that is reversing the living standards of the European working class by decades.

The only progressive alternative to the European Union is the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe. It presupposes the unification of the working class throughout Europe in a struggle to establish workers’ governments committed to reorganizing economic life on a socialist basis, i.e., to serve social need rather than the profit interests of the banks and big business.

This is the perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Party (PES) and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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