

Germany: How the Left Party creates a platform for neo-Nazis

Emma Bode, Peter Schwarz
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For several days the German media has been full of reports prominently featuring neo-fascists agitating against refugees in the Berlin suburb of Marzahn-Hellersdorf.

On Monday, the main news on Germany's first public television channel featured an interview with a man with a shaved head who complained loudly about plans to provide accommodation for refugees from Syria and Afghanistan in a former school in Hellersdorf. On Tuesday, the same man with the same message was interviewed on the main news program on Germany's second public TV channel.

The man allegedly represented "residents" of the area, while the much larger number of demonstrators opposing the Nazis and defending the refugees were described as "outsiders." How this assessment was made is not explained to the audience. The news reports sought to give the impression that a right-wing mob dominates in Hellersdorf, a suburb largely inhabited by working class families.

In fact there is no evidence of widespread racism in Hellersdorf. When the Socialist Equality Party collected signatures in the area a few weeks ago as part of its campaign to qualify for the German election, it received more support there than anywhere else.

The anti-refugee protests were not initiated by local residents, but rather by ultra-right organizations such as the National Democratic Party (NPD) and the Pro Germany Citizens Movement, which officially registered their xenophobic protests. Despite the fact that they mobilized nationwide, the parties were unable to assemble more than a few dozen people. The right-wingers were heavily outnumbered by a factor of 10 to 20 times by counter-demonstrators.

The conflicts in Hellersdorf are not the product of xenophobia on the part of residents, but rather the result

of cynical political manoeuvres by the Left Party, which gave the right-wingers a backhanded invitation to come to the suburb. Now the Left Party is using the subsequent racist protests to divert attention from burning social problems at the height of the German election campaign, while at the same time closing ranks with all the other bourgeois parties in the name of anti-fascism.

The Berlin Senate took the decision to accommodate up to 400 refugees in cramped conditions in the premises of the former Max Reinhardt High School on short notice and away from the public spotlight. The district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf first invited tenants to a public information meeting on July 9, i.e., less than a month before its scheduled opening.

The mayor of the district, Stefan Komoß of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and Councillor for Social Affairs Dagmar Pohle (Left Party) sent out a letter advertising the meeting, formulated in such a fashion that any racist would recognize it as an invitation. The letter expressed the desire "to discuss with you any concerns, reservations, worries and fears with the new situation in your area."

The web site of the Left Party in Marzahn Hellersdorf was even more explicit, declaring: "The residents meeting is a good opportunity to inform yourselves extensively and express concerns." The statement continued: "It is not permitted, however, that this be used as a platform by right-wing organizations thereby abusing the concerns and fears of local residents."

The right wing took the hint. Around 70 neo-Nazis from all over Germany turned up at the meeting and intimidated the audience with their xenophobic propaganda. The Left Party had achieved its aim. The media denounced local residents as the source of the racism, and the Left Party was able to organize an

alliance of all bourgeois parties in a supposed struggle against this racism.

The party wrote two resolutions that “unconditionally” supported the decision of the Senate to set up a refugee camp in a former school. In addition to the Left Party, these resolutions were officially supported by the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, the Christian Democratic Union, the Free Democratic Party and the Pirate Party.

This right-wing alliance was then able to pose as a defender of “democratic principles”, calling for “respect for human dignity” in opposition to “racist and inhumane attitudes”. In other words, the Left Party enabled precisely those parties responsible for the abolition of the right to asylum in Germany, leading to thousands of refugee deaths every year, to pose as champions of human rights and democracy! This alone demonstrates that the Left Party has situated itself firmly in the camp of right-wing bourgeois politics.

It would be naive, however, to regard this manoeuvre merely as a misguided attempt at anti-fascism. Dagmar Pohle, one of the signatories of the letter of July 9, is a shrewd politician with a long history. Born in 1953 in East Germany, she studied philosophy at Leipzig in 1975 and joined the East German Stalinist ruling party, the SED, in 1975. She has admitted that she worked as an unofficial collaborator for the East German secret police, the Stasi.

Following the reunification of Germany in 1990, Pohle continued her political career in the neo-Stalinist PDS and the Left Party. Since 2002 she has been councillor for social affairs in the suburb of Marzahn-Hellersdorf and was district mayor from 2006 to 2011. During this period she played a key role in enforcing the massive social cuts demanded by the SPD-PDS Senate at the time, measures that involved closing schools, recreational and cultural facilities and dismissing thousands of public service workers.

Pohle is also chair of a longstanding group of former Stalinists known as the Local Political Forum-Berlin. Many leading members of this forum have a similar biography to Pohle, and some even studied with her in Leipzig. They know each other very well.

Marzahn-Heller village is a stronghold of the PDS and the Left Party. It is one of the few constituencies where the Left Party has won a direct representative to the parliament. The deputy for the district, Petra Pau, is

also one of the vice presidents of the German parliament.

In the election for the Local Assembly in Hellersdorf in 2001, the PDS, forerunner of the Left Party, received 51 percent of the vote. After 10 years of welfare cuts, the Left Party’s share of the vote has shrunk to just 31 percent. The party has responded to its decline by closing ranks with other leading bourgeois parties and demonstrating its willingness to suppress future social conflict. This is the background to the party’s political manoeuvres around the refugee accommodation in Hellersdorf.

A genuine struggle against fascism and xenophobia is inextricably linked to the struggle against capitalism and against social inequality, oppression and war. It requires the international unity of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, the German section of the Fourth International.

The Left Party, stemming from the tradition of Stalinism, is vehemently opposed to such a perspective.



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