

Ten thousand take part in right-wing demonstration in Dresden

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The demonstrations that have taken place in Germany for some time under the designations “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West” (Pegida) and similar names, are aimed at directing growing social tensions into reactionary channels and building a fascist movement. Their ultimate target is not only refugees and immigrants, but the entire working class.

After ten thousand people took part in a Pegida demonstration in Dresden on Monday, representatives of every party in the federal parliament criticized the movement. Their criticism, however, is thoroughly dishonest. With their scaremongering about an Islamist danger, their intervention in the Syrian war, their continual tightening of the rules regarding the right to asylum, and their austerity policies, it is precisely these parliamentary parties which have produced the conditions for Pegida to grow.

This situation is reminiscent of the years 1992 and 1993, when the government and opposition parties worked closely together with racist groups. As a consequence of the reunification of Germany, hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs, and the media and politicians encouraged fears about immigrants. A wave of pogroms hostile to foreigners spread throughout the country and culminated in a siege of the accommodations of asylum seekers in Rostock and the murder of immigrant families in Solingen and Mölln. Shortly thereafter, the parties represented in the government at that time—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP)—changed the constitution, with the support of the opposition Social Democrats (SPD), and practically abolished the right to asylum.

The first Pegida demonstration took place in Dresden on October 20. The demonstration was called by the 41-year-old advertising agent Lutz Bachmann, who was previously known above all for his criminal record. He

has been in prison on a number of occasions, for—among other things—organised break-ins in Dresden’s red light district. At the moment, he is out on parole after being imprisoned for his involvement in drug dealing. The October demonstration’s approximately one hundred participants walked through the capital of Saxony demonstrating against “confessional wars on German soil.”

This demonstration aroused scarcely any attention, but six days later there was a violent street battle in Cologne between police and demonstrators calling themselves “Hooligans against Salafists” (Hogesa). The violent confrontation, which made headlines throughout Germany, had all the hallmarks of a provocation. Although the police had known in advance that several thousand soccer hooligans would be arriving, they only prepared for it with a small contingent of officers, which was then clearly outnumbered by the demonstrators.

The stir caused by the events in Cologne also gave an impetus to Pegida. Five hundred people participated in its next demonstration. Since then, the number has increased every Monday. In several cities similar initiatives were started, although they remained substantially smaller than the demonstrations in Dresden.

Pegida has now gained the support of the extreme right NPD, other neo-Nazi groups, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In the case of the AfD, such backing was initially local, with the party’s national leadership withholding support. In the city of Düsseldorf, AfD member Alexander Heumann has become the mouthpiece of the protests.

Following the big rally in Dresden on Monday, however, the AfD leadership showed its true colors. Alexander Gauland, a member of the party leadership, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that Pegida is “a good thing.” The AfD is a “very natural ally in this movement,” he said. “Therefore we must support this

demonstration. It is right for us to be there.”

On his Facebook site, AfD member Bernd Lucke wrote that it is “good and correct” that citizens express their “concerns about the spreading of radical Islamic values.” The demonstrations showed that these people felt that their concerns were not understood by the politicians, he said.

Frauke Petry, head of the AfD in the state of Saxony, fiercely attacked the state’s minister president Stanislaw Tillich (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), because he and Martin Dulig, leader of the Social Democratic (SPD) fraction in the Saxony Landtag (state parliament), had called for a counter-demonstration, which drew nine thousand participants. Petry accused Tillich of “combating a large peaceful demonstration.”

Tillich’s call for counter-demonstrations was, in any event, pure hypocrisy. The Saxon state government which, since the reunification of Germany, has been led by the CDU, has a long tradition of supporting extreme right-wing forces. For example, the Saxon judiciary pursued opponents of current Nazi organisations with great energy, while the neo-Nazi terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU) was able to operate undisturbed in Saxony. On Tuesday, Tillich called for “more discussion” with the Pegida demonstrators in order to relieve their “insecurity.”

His interior minister Markus Ulbig (CDU) had already signaled his goodwill towards the right-wing protests in November. Ulbig rejected “the usual anti-fascist reflexes,” and announced the setting up of a special police unit with the special task of combating “criminal asylum seekers” and “repeat offenders.” In reality, the crime rate among asylum seekers is no greater than it is in the rest of the population, according to statements made by the police. At just 2.2 percent, foreigners also make up an extremely small proportion of the population of Saxony.

Other CDU politicians have also shown sympathy for the right-wing movement. Interior Minister Lorenz Caffier of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania said that it is not especially helpful to call for counter-demonstrations. He gave Pegida credit for making clear to the federal government “that refugees in Europe must be distributed fairly.” Likewise, Interior Minister Ralf Jäger (SPD) of North Rhine-Westphalia said, “not everyone who goes on such a demonstration is a right wing extremist.”

Pegida organizer Lutz Bachmann emphasized in an interview with the right-wing newspaper *Junge Freiheit* (Young Freedom) that he had the backing of the local police. “On the whole we feel well protected by our

police and trust the officials”, he said.

In contrast to the “Hooligan” demonstration in Cologne, Pegida and its offshoots have striven to emphasize the peaceful character of their demonstrations. They have taken this approach—with some success—in order to draw in more respectable figures and families rather than just the usual thugs. Pointing to this, commentaries in the media have made the claim that Pegida is mobilizing the “bourgeois middle class.”

This is an extreme exaggeration. Pegida clearly represents extreme right-wing views and mobilizes layers of the population that are deeply frustrated following years of social decline. While the ruling CDU never tires of praising the economic successes of Saxony, many—above all in the rural areas—have experienced the exact opposite. Since reunification, almost a million people have left the state, and many small cities and towns are slowly dying out.

In the beginning, the Pegida demonstrations were almost exclusively directed against violent Salafists, although they are not to be found in Dresden, where just 0.4 percent of residents are Muslim. More recently, the demonstrations have emphasized demands directed against foreigners and asylum seekers, against the “left” and the euro, while criticizing the enforced conformity (Gleichschaltung) of the media and the established parties. At the last demonstration, Bachmann lamented that there are poor retirees sitting in cold apartments without electricity and who cannot afford Christmas cake, while the state provided asylum seekers fully-equipped lodgings.



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