

# Pegida and the German government's campaign for militarism

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On Monday, more than 15,000 people took part in the right-wing, anti-Islam Pegida demonstrations in Dresden, Germany.

For the past 12 weeks, the self-styled “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West” (Pegida) has organised demonstrations in Dresden's city centre every Monday. Right-wing extremists such as the fascistic National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) have mobilised nationwide for the Dresden demonstrations.

The biggest demonstrations by right-wing extremists since the end of the Nazi dictatorship are not a spontaneous development. This is clear from the fact that many more people have taken to the streets in protests aimed against Pegida.

In fact, the right-wing demos have been systematically built up and supported by substantial sections of the political establishment and the media. Week after week, the Pegida demonstrators have been mobilised from all over Germany and surrounding areas in Dresden and could rely on unprecedented media coverage.

The mobilisation of the most backward social layers is directly related to Germany's increased military buildup and preparations for war. Following the pronouncements by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen a year ago that the period of military restraint in Germany was over, there has been an unceasing campaign in political circles and the media deploring the inadequate state of the German army and the need for more support for the military.

As is invariably the case, the evocation of militarism is bound up with support for, and the mobilisation of, right-wing groups and parties.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and state premier Bodo Ramelow of the Left Party, both leading politicians, have voiced their sympathy for the demonstrations and offered to enter into dialogue with the fascistic mob.

The media has given disproportionate attention to the demonstrations, which were initially quite small, and has

provided a platform for organisers and participants to disseminate their chauvinistic slogans.

Former family minister and current CDU member of parliament Kristina Schröder expressed criticisms of the counter-demonstrations. She referred to the justified “concerns about Islamism” as far back as December. According to the former minister, Islamism is a genuine problem.

In the past few weeks, there has been a growing effort to institutionalise the Pegida demonstrations and to use them as a lever for a further shift to the right in official politics. On Wednesday, Frauke Petry, co-chair of the right-wing anti-Europe Alternative for Germany party (AfD), met with Pegida organisers in order to explore a possible collaboration. Pegida's programmatic points have “many points of intersection with the political views of the AfD,” Petry said prior to the meeting.

The collaboration is also receiving influential support from media outlets such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ( *FAZ* ). Its co-publisher, Berthold Kohler, called in December for Pegida's demands to be taken seriously and for “an immigration policy to be pursued strictly oriented to national interests.”

The Sunday issue of the *FAZ* opened its pages to the AfD's second chairman, Konrad Adam. In a guest article titled “How the Christians beat back the Turks,” he gives free expression to his chauvinism and writes with enthusiasm about the Battle of Lepanto, which took place on October 7, 1571. In this battle, allied Spanish, Maltese and Italian city states forces destroyed the fleet of the Turkish admiral, Ali Pascha.

Adam reverently describes his experience viewing the original war flag. He claimed that this flag represents the fact that “the Christian forces” proved themselves to be “more disciplined and stronger.” The article is a barely disguised tribute to Pegida.

Adam was first able to spread his racist poison in the *FAZ* edition of December 17. As if the brutal colonisation of the Middle East and two world wars had never taken place, he

stated that Islam, unlike Christianity, was based on violence. In addition, the Christian world had gone through the Enlightenment, of which Islamists knew nothing. That is why, Adam, states, it was necessary to pose the question with regard to refugees: “Do they belong here?” or “Are they willing and able to integrate?”

The major German publishing house, Springer, also defends Pegida. On Friday, the chief commentator of the Welt-Gruppe, Jacques Schuster, complained that critics of the right to asylum in Germany were too “quickly branded as right-wing extremists” and were being subjected to an “unparalleled campaign of defamation”.

The encouragement and support provided by the media and politicians to this fascistic mob is part of a comprehensive turn to the right in German politics. In the past year, not only have austerity measures in Europe been intensified, but—above all—the return of German militarism was prepared.

The German government’s policy of aggression towards Russia and its interventions in the Middle East have been widely rejected by the population. To implement an aggressive foreign policy against this opposition, the dregs of society are now being mobilised. As was the case prior to the First and Second World Wars, the ruling elite is resorting to chauvinism and xenophobia in order to advance its imperialist and militarist agenda.

This development is by no means limited to the streets of Dresden. In German universities, history is being revised and the crimes of German militarism downplayed. The aim is to prepare the ground for the revival of German nationalism.

Professor Jörg Baberowski, who heads the Department of History of Eastern Europe at Humboldt University, told *Der Spiegel* in February, “Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn’t vicious.” And his colleague, Professor Herfried Münkler, said that “the pursuit of a responsible foreign policy would be impossible if one had the perspective that we are guilty of everything.”

New crimes are being prepared with the help of such historical falsifications combined with the foul media campaign. Just as they did 80 years ago, the aggressive policies of German imperialism are bound up with moves towards dictatorship and the mobilisation of fascistic elements.

The fight against Pegida must therefore be bound up with a struggle against militarisation and all the bourgeois political parties that promote it. This in turn requires an uncompromising struggle to expose those hypocrites in the government who have spoken out against Pegida but fully support the imperialist agenda of the ruling elite.

It should be noted that chorus of opposition to Pegida in

ruling circles increased just at the moment counter-demonstrations began to take on a mass character and the foreign press began to report on the right-wing Pegida demonstrations.

In her New Year’s address, Chancellor Angela Merkel criticised the demonstrations. According to Merkel, one slogan used by Pegida— “We are the people” — had been misappropriated from the mass movement 25 years ago, which led to the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the DDR. Now, according to Merkel, it was being used by Pegida to tell foreigners “you don’t belong here because of your race or your religion.” Immigration, Merkel continued, is “an advantage for everyone.”

On Tuesday, former chancellor Helmut Schmidt (Social Democratic Party, SPD), now 96 years old, spoke out against the demonstrations, saying, “Germany must remain tolerant and open to the world. Therefore, a clear no to Pegida!” In the tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*, his successor, Gerhard Schröder (SPD), demanded “an uprising of all decent people” against the right-wing demonstrations.

The hypocrisy of these statements is staggering. It was the SPD that in 1993 supported the CDU’s complete undermining of Germany’s postwar right to asylum. Since then, every successive government has devoted itself to shielding Germany from refugees. In the last 15 years, 25,000 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean alone as a result of the tightening of European border controls—with the support of German governments. If the refugees nevertheless make it to Germany, they are crammed into lodgings unfit for human beings, where they are prone to become the victims of abuse and torture.

A particularly pernicious role is being played by Gregor Gysi and the Left Party. Its appeal for an “alliance of all democrats against Pegida” is aimed at supporting precisely the government policy that has led to the mobilisation of the right-wing mob.

The only basis for an effective struggle against both militarism and the threat of right-wing, protofascist organisations such as Pegida is the political mobilisation of the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme.



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