

Alternative for Germany attempts to establish equivalent of French National Front

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4 February 2015

Although the party congress of “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) that took place in Bremen last weekend was focused almost exclusively on organizational questions, the disagreements actually concerned the fundamental orientation of the party. The issue was to determine how an extreme right-wing party similar to the National Front (FN) in France could be established.

The AfD was founded in 2013 by neo-liberal economic and nationalist forces that had split from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) as well as the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The AfD addressed itself to conservative middle class layers who—after the confiscation of Cypriot bank accounts—feared the loss or devaluation through inflation of their savings.

For this reason, the party’s program initially laid its emphasis on an exit from the euro and the reintroduction of national currencies. One of the voices in favor of this policy was spokesperson Bernd Lucke, a former professor of macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg. The former chairman of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), Hans-Olaf Henkel, also supported this policy.

Lucke was chosen at the founding congress in 2013 as one of three AfD spokesmen constituting the party leadership. The other spokesmen are Frauke Petry, a chemical industry entrepreneur who went into private insolvency, and Konrad Adam, a former journalist for the cultural section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and correspondent for *Welt*.

Since then, the AfD has entered the European parliament as well as the state parliaments of Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg. In two weeks, the Hamburg state election will take place, and in May the federal city-state of Bremen will hold elections.

When the party was founded two years ago, its economic nationalism was already paired with an arch-conservative view of the family and the world. Chauvinism and hostility to foreigners were already present behind the façade of bourgeois respectability.

With the growth of social tensions, the rebirth of German militarism and the intensification of national conflicts, sections of the ruling class are purposely stoking nationalist and racist moods and attempting to build up a right-wing organization.

This is why there was little discussion of the crisis of the euro in the lead up to the congress. Instead, discussions centered on the AfD’s attitude to the anti-Islamic Pegida movement that has held demonstrations every Monday in Dresden. Frauke Petry and Alexander Gauland, the head of the state parliamentary fraction of the AfD in Brandenburg, led the effort to make the “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West” (the full name of Pegida) into foot soldiers of the AfD.

Gauland was the first high-ranking politician to visit a Pegida demonstration in Dresden. He called their central demands “things to which one could append one’s signature.” The Pegida demonstrators were “natural allies.”

Gauland’s career began in the ultra-conservative network of the Hessen CDU under Alfred Dregger. He was the secretary of state of the Hesse state government under Walter Wallmann (CDU). He still maintains close connections with his old party friends.

Frauke Petry met with Pegida organizers at the beginning of January and defended the demonstrators against accusations that they are hostile to Islam. She said there was “an overlap in content” with the Pegida movement. She also advised Pegida spokesperson Kathrin Oertel about her public image.

Many AfD members who were previously active in parties and organizations on the extreme right have connections with the Pegida movement, which was created by radical right-wingers and neo-fascists.

Pegida was purposely created by politicians and the media. The social scientist Simon Teune recently described in a guest article for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* how “the professional media pushed Pegida continually higher up the agenda in an flood of attention.” Teune wrote, “The obsession for Pegida then took an absurd turn ... Its nationalist [volkish] thrust became a secondary issue. Instead, now the whole Republic was lining up to talk with Pegida.”

Politicians from all other parties are also getting in line to talk to Pegida. From SPD Chairman and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, to the head of the Greens Cem Özdemir, to Left Party politicians Gregor Gysi and Sahra Wagenknecht—all say that politicians must take Pegida supporters seriously and listen to them.

The recent departure of Oertel and five other members of the Pegida leadership and the founding of a new organization under the name of “Direct Democracy in Europe” can be traced directly back to a meeting with Saxony’s Interior Minister Markus Ulbig (CDU) on the previous day.

The AfD attempt to jump on the bandwagon of anti-Islam sentiment has led to internal tensions. This is what was behind the organizational disputes at the party congress, which centered on Bernd Lucke’s proposal that the party should be led by a chairman—namely himself—and a general secretary in the future, instead of three spokesmen with equal rights.

Lucke succeeded in the end. The necessary change in the party constitution was enacted with an extremely narrow two-thirds majority. The change will go into effect at the end of the year. Before then, the party plans to adopt a new program for which the chairman will be responsible.

Lucke himself has no fundamental misgivings about playing the anti-foreigner card. *Spiegel Online* quotes from emails in which he suggests running in elections while invoking the views of Thilo Sarrazin and trying to win the votes of former voters for the NPD and other neo-fascistic parties on the extreme right.

However, Lucke is worried about whether the AfD

can present itself as a “serious” party if all Pegida demonstrators are declared “natural allies.” He welcomes the support of neo-fascists, the extreme right and hooligans, but an open collaboration with them appears counterproductive to him, and a danger for the project of establishing a German version of the Front National.

The French Front National was strengthened after Marine Le Pen, the daughter of the founder of the party Jean-Marie Le Pen, assumed a more “moderate” tone, while not deviating in content from the old program’s points and demands.

Lucke also demands this tactical discipline. This is why he insists that the party must speak with one voice in the future, namely his own. Only with difficulty could he impose this demand on the party. Petry is considered the most promising candidate for the position of general secretary.

To what extent the intelligence agencies are also involved in this disagreement remains unclear. But the fact that extreme right-wingers have close personal connections with the Office for the Protection of the Constitution has been known since the terror killings of the “National Socialist Underground.” In Thuringia, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution built up the right-wing scene, out of which the NSU originated. In Saxony, the terrorists were allowed to go into hiding.

The political class in Saxony is known for the dominance of right-wing forces in its ranks. This includes the persecution of anti-fascist activists and the convening of the press conference of Pegida organizers in the state center for political education, which was broadcast live on German television.



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