German SPD's new program: Racism and law and order

Ulrich Rippert
10 July 2015

The presidium of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) recently adopted its "Agenda 2025." Under the title "Impulses for social democratic policy in the coming decade," the text begins with the customary phrases—the party must become more modern, more open and innovative, and it must move more firmly to the centre of the political spectrum. Above all, it must "get closer to the people" and learn to listen to them.

"The approach of Social Democracy must be to listen sincerely (instead of just posturing)," says the paper. The next paragraph makes clear what is meant by "listening." The everyday lives of people must serve as a guide, including "the concern for crime" as well as the fear of "'foreign infiltration.'" Both are just as important as the size of retirement benefits. "The SPD must not remain indifferent to these everyday concerns, even if they are 'only' felt subjectively."

The SPD's portrayal of the "fear of foreign infiltration" as an everyday concern of the population—even if the words are placed in quotation marks—is aimed at supporting the Pegida campaign that fomented racist, anti-Islamic sentiments at the beginning of the year. On a weekly basis during the winter months, right-wing radicals and neo-fascists from across the country assembled in Dresden, under the full glare of the media, to protest against the alleged threat of foreign infiltration through an "uncontrolled influx of Islamists."

While the counter-demonstrations against the fascistic mob were far greater, the extreme-right campaign of the self-proclaimed "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West" (Pegida) was played up in the media and presented as an expression of widespread fear within the population. The police and media systematically exaggerated the number of participants in the racist demonstrations. Pegida organizers were interviewed by prime time news programs and invited onto talk shows, where they were given the opportunity to present their fascistic thought to a mass audience.

In January, the initiator of the right-wing marches, Lutz Bachmann, was forced to step down, when online posts were discovered in which he referred to foreigners as "pests," "scum" and "vermin." A picture of Bachmann sporting a Hitler moustache and hairstyle was found on Facebook, prompting the public prosecutor's office to launch an investigation of him.

Despite this, SPD Chairman Sigmar Gabriel participated in a forum with Pegida followers, later justifying his conduct by claiming that the right-wing marches were the result of legitimate concerns among broad layers of the population. Now he is going a step further by integrating Pegida-type racism into the SPD program.

The second part of the SPD's programmatic revisions consists of the call for a strong state with more surveillance, better equipment for the police and security agencies, and tougher laws against crime. Any talk of a welfare state is long gone. Taxes on wealth and inheritance remain unmentioned. Instead, the program states that "a policy of national redistribution through taxes reached its limits long ago."

"A lot of space is granted to the idea of security, both nationally and internationally," wrote *Spiegel Online*, summarizing the central passage of the SPD's strategic reorientation, adding: "In some places it strikes a tone which recalls Schröder's interior minister Otto Schily." In the words of the strategy paper, "New security means 'zero tolerance' for crime and violence, whatever their motives, and an adequately equipped police force."

At the same party convention at which Gabriel introduced the cornerstones of the strategy paper, he put forward a resolution on the Data Retention Directive. According to the directive, the "traffic data collected in telecommunications" may be saved for up to 10 weeks by telecom companies and handed over to "law enforcement agencies" upon request.

© World Socialist Web Site

Saved information would include "in particular, the phone numbers of the parties involved on a call, the time and duration of calls, the location data of mobile communications, as well as IP addresses and the time and duration in which an assigned IP address was used."

The Data Retention Directive is "a step toward total surveillance" of the population (*Zeit Online*). A few weeks ago, *Die Zeit* commented that, "Data retention means that information on who, when, where, and with whom someone has spoken, emailed or texted will be saved. Whether someone is suspected of a crime or not, information on who, with whom and how often one has talked to someone will remain traceable for months."

This has far reaching consequences. With the saved data, the police and intelligence agencies can retroactively reproduce with whom, when, where and how long one has communicated and which web sites a given person has visited. The state is thus able to produce a complete motion profile of any citizen and spy on their social and political activities.

When faced with critical voices in the SPD, Gabriel, according to press reports, threatened the party leadership, saying that the governing capability of the party was directly bound up with these questions, and he was not prepared to compromise. The *Bild* newspaper reported the SPD chairman even threatened his resignation.

Like all Social Democrats, Sigmar Gabriel knows no compromise in questions of building up the state. Since Gustav Noske declared during the November Revolution of 1918 that "Someone has to be the bloodhound" and drowned the workers' uprising at the end of the First World War in blood, including the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, all SPD leaders have seen their main task as strengthening the state in order to suppress any opposition from below.

The new strategy paper represents a significant shift to the right by the SPD. Even though the next federal elections will not be held for another two years, the SPD is making clear that it is fully prepared to take on the central responsibilities of government.

While Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has played the leading role in Germany's foreign policy turn toward militarism and preparations for war, Gabriel is now initiating a domestic turn towards racism and police state measures.

The last SPD chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, organized the destruction of the welfare state with Agenda 2010 and the Hartz laws. Along with this, an ever-growing low-wage sector was created which has served to overturn the remaining labour contracts and set in motion a permanent downward spiral of social cuts and low wages. Once millions of working class families are driven into poverty and despair, and an army of under-employed workers without any kind of social safeguards exists, Gabriel will prepare the next blow against the working class.

Growing anger and outrage is to be directed into racist channels and suppressed with brutal police violence. In line with the policies of this new agenda, Gabriel met last week with Wolfgang Clement, who as "super minister" for economy and labour in the Schröder government was responsible for Agenda 2010. He subsequently accused the SPD of not having consistently pursued his antisocial free-market policies. In the state elections in Hesse in 2008, Clement warned against voting for the SPD and called for support for the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Despite his public call for support for a rival party, the SPD was not prepared to expel Clement and limited itself to issuing a reprimand. His legal representative in the party expulsion proceedings was SPD law-and-order man Otto Schily. Clement thanked them by voluntarily resigning from the SPD and taking part in the FDP's election campaign.

Last Friday, the SPD chairman again met with the former economic minister and ex-Social Democrat Wolfgang Clement at the Dussmann bookstore in Berlin and lauded his new book *The Germany Principle*. The miserable collection of 178 short stories by politicians like Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), star entrepreneur Arend Oetker, journalists, actors and athletes abounds with self-involvement and Germanomania. Sigmar Gabriel praised it to no end.

Finally, it should be noted that the new Agenda policy of racism and law-and-order is highly attractive to the Left Party. Hardly a day goes by in which Gregor Gysi does not offer the SPD the prospect of governmental collaboration.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site