

German news anchor's anti-racist comments conceal the real issues

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A video of German television news anchor Anja Reschke's anti-racist commentary has spread virally on social networking sites. On Facebook alone her criticism of those making racist comments on the Internet has been seen ten million times and shared more than 300,000 times. There are also countless supportive comments and "likes" on other platforms.

The anchor of the *Panorama* political magazine programme presents the growing number of arson attacks on refugee shelters as the product of a major campaign on social networks. "The hate speech on the Internet has long since unleashed group dynamics. The number of right-wing extremist acts of violence has increased," she says in the video (with English subtitles).

It is not enough to take criminal action against such posts, she adds. Rather, there must be a "rebellion of the decent", as the then German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called for in 2000. "If you are not of the opinion that all foreigners are parasites who should be chased away, burned or gassed, then you should say so clearly," Reschke states.

Countless people have already been doing this for a long time because they sympathize with the refugees. Everywhere in Germany there are initiatives that help refugees and confront the right-wing extremists. After the major media outlets pumped out propaganda for months against "lazy Greeks" and against refugees, millions of people obviously welcomed an anti-racist contribution on Germany's most-watched television news programme.

Reschke's comment, however, deflects attention away from those really responsible for the attacks on immigrants and covers up for them. She is entirely silent on the role of the media and mainstream politicians. She says nothing about the right-wing

extremist dregs of society being systematically mobilized. Instead, she presents racism and xenophobia as quasi-organic phenomena. In this way, she obscures the inhuman practices of the German government and the heinous propaganda of the media.

This was already clear from the context of her commentary. The first news report of the day regarding the drowning of hundreds of refugees in the Mediterranean barely merited one minute's airtime. The disaster was not presented as a product of the European Union (EU) closing its borders, but as a result of the lax policies of the Libyan state.

In reality, the European governments through their countless military interventions and neo-colonial policies are responsible for the growing flow of refugees from the Middle East. Because the EU has sealed its borders, the only available means of flight for desperate people involves a dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean in traffickers' boats. The European Naval Force-Mediterranean [EUNAVFOR Med] mission is not aimed at rescuing refugees in distress at sea, but the destruction of their boats by the military.

Should the refugees still manage to reach Germany, they face inhuman conditions. Last week, several volunteers at a refugee camp in Dresden spoke of a "humanitarian catastrophe" unfolding there. Not even the minimal standards of the World Health Organization were being complied with, complained one doctor. Malnutrition prevails and medical care is not provided. Similar conditions are developing in Berlin.

Ex-Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU, Christian Social Union) responded to these conditions by demanding that future would-be immigrants should be further hindered from coming to Germany. On Friday, he called for visa-free travel for citizens of the

Balkan states of Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to be lifted: “We must ensure that they do not come here in the first place”.

But the brutal attitude of the German government was not mentioned in Reschke’s news programme. Instead, the report on the drowned refugees was followed by a two-minute item citing extremist and racist posts on the Internet, which bore no direct relation to the refugee disaster. This was then followed by Reschke’s commentary, which also did not say a word about the EU’s inhuman practices.

In an interview on the news programme the following day, Reschke explicitly defended the German government. Whereas there were problematic statements by politicians, she said, one must also understand, “No politician wants to take a stand supporting refugees because he or she is afraid of the electoral consequences.”

The systematic campaign against refugees is laid at the door of an allegedly racist majority. The media had nothing to do with the growing number of arson attacks, Reschke said. Instead, she believed that “basic racist sentiments are not a problem of the media, but are inside people themselves.”

A glance at the viewing figures for her own video refutes this simplistic thesis. Great solidarity and sympathy with refugees exists in much of the population. In the media, however, a vicious smear campaign has taken place for some time, which has systematically encouraged the extreme right.

After the German government forced Greece to implement unprecedented austerity measures, the German gutter press was full of despicable chauvinism. Representatives of the Greek government were called “gamblers and rogues”, the Greek government defamed as “perverse” and the Greek people insulted as “bankrupts”. With respect to refugees coming to Germany from the Middle East or the Balkans, the language used referred to the “abuse of asylum”.

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Meanwhile ultra-right movements are being officially encouraged. This was particularly marked in regard to the right-wing extremist Pegida demonstrations in Dresden at the end of last year. The number of participants was exaggerated, the protests virtually given free advertising and their right-wing positions

presented as the understandable concerns of citizens. In fact, the counter-demonstrators were far larger.

Reschke also played a rotten role even then. The *Panorama* programme, for which she has been reading the news for years and which she has anchored since January, published interviews with Pegida’s extremist supporters uncommented and uncut in December. Reschke called this an “attempt at making contact”.

Her latest claim that the far-right posts on social networks represent the opinion of the masses follows the same line. In this way, right-wing positions are made acceptable, on the one hand, and extremists are encouraged. On the other hand, the state apparatus is to be transformed and strengthened.

In her commentary, Reschke herself appeals only in passing to the prosecuting authorities. But the logic of her argument that there are masses of racists on the Internet has been taken up by others. As if to order, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [leading German newspaper] on Friday, Helmut Schwan railed against “unlimited communication” on social networks, which would be used by extremists to “radicalize and remotely control” people.

On *Spiegel Online*, Sibylle Berg spoke in embarrassing pseudo-psychological phrases and asserted “the people” were “tired, self-righteous and arrogant”, and only begin to quiver “if they can terrorize others”. She also claimed that the media did not play a major role. Rather, “people’s” behaviour placed democracy in question.

The restriction of democratic rights strengthens the right-wing extremists. Their growth is not explained by kitchen sink psychological banalities, but by the systematic encouragement of reactionary positions by official politics and the mass media. The more aggressive German imperialism acts abroad, and the more brutally it attacks social rights in Germany, the more it returns to its anti-democratic roots. The fight against ultra-right elements is inextricably linked to the struggle against militarism and social inequality.



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