

“Action Alliance—Stand Up Against Racism” in Germany: A cynical fraud

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This weekend sees an illustrious gathering in Frankfurt of pseudo-lefts, union bureaucrats, Greens and Social Democratic Party VIPs. They were invited to attend the “Action Alliance—Stand Up Against Racism,” or, more precisely, a conference against the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

This “Action Conference” is a cynical deceit. It is a meeting of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and the Left Party, i.e., precisely those forces that first prepared the ground for the AfD. The civil servants, union bureaucrats and academics gathered together have for years strangled every social protest and directed them into a dead end. The politics of their parties have benefited the re-emergence of the danger of fascism.

Workers and young people correctly regard the rise of the AfD with anger and concern. This reactionary party, which came out of the right wing of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and which initially opposed the euro, has developed increasingly openly in a fascist direction. Its recent campaign against Muslims—AfD leader Alexander Gauland described Islam as a “foreign body” and Baroness Beatrix von Storch claimed Islam was “not compatible with the constitution”—recalls the anti-Semitism of the Nazis.

However, those who want to fight against the AfD must understand the causes of its rise. A doctor can only treat the sick when he or she understands the causes of their illness and medical history; similarly, serious-minded workers must examine what causes and conditions have led to the rise of the AfD. And the most important reason lies in the rightward turn of those parties that are regarded as “left” in the official political spectrum.

In their practical politics, the SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left Party have supported the social devastation policies of the German bourgeoisie for years. Together with the Christian Democrats and Free Democratic Party (FDP), they have pushed these policies through against working people in the form of social cuts, the debt ceiling, the Hartz IV welfare and labour “reforms” and low wages. In this way, they have created a deep social frustration that plays into the hands of the right wing.

In addition, these parties have prepared the way for the AfD with their right-wing slogans, and are now reacting to its

electoral success by moving even further to the right, taking on the political positions of the AfD and Pegida, and putting these into practice. The constant tightening of the right to asylum, the dirty deal made with Turkey to halt the flow of refugees, and their mass deportation was only possible thanks to the support of the SPD, the Greens and, where they form part of the government, the Left Party.

In the meantime, prominent Left Party politicians are advancing flawless AfD views. Sahra Wagenknecht declared, “Those who abuse our hospitality have also forfeited the right to hospitality.” Oskar Lafontaine appealed to nationalism with the words, “Our capacity for refugees is limited.”

Those who want to fight the AfD must first break with the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens, who all defend the interests of the ruling elites. As in the 1930s, these parties are reacting to the deep international crisis of the capitalist system and the growing social tensions with militarism, oppression, increased exploitation and the promotion of far-right parties.

Only an independent movement of the working class that fights against capitalism and for an international, socialist perspective can oppose this development and direct the anger of the population in a progressive direction.

The “Action Conference” is aimed in the diametrically opposite direction: It diverts workers’ militancy into the wake of corrupt right-wing parties. Left Party politician Gregor Gysi has even spoken since in favour of a government coalition with the CDU; and the Marx21 tendency, the German offshoot of Britain’s Socialist Workers Party, and also one of the initiators of the Action Conference, even wants to extend the “anti-fascist alliance” to Christian Social Union leader Horst Seehofer. It justifies this by saying that in contrast to the AfD’s Björn Höcke, Seehofer was not organising “a racist mass movement on the streets as a springboard to forming a new fascist right.”

The Left Party is part of the “establishment parties,” whose politics are hardly distinguishable from them. Wherever they sit in government, as in the state of Thüringa, or as previously in the Berlin state assembly, they impose the same social cuts as the SPD, the Greens, FDP and the Christian Democrats.

The prominent participation of the trade unions in the “Action Conference” is also significant. The trade union

leaders who signed the call for the meeting include Frank Bsirke of service union Verdi, whose shameful sell-out of the strike by day nursery workers last year signalled his willingness to strangle every mobilisation of the working class and subordinate workers to government diktats.

The same right-wing politics are pursued by the IG Metall, many of whose functionaries also signed the call for the meeting. They have helped to organise the social devastation that has transformed former industrial regions into areas of high poverty. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, they supported the liquidation of East Germany's industry and the closure of the Opel Bochum car plant in the Ruhr area in the west. In the steel industry, they promote an alliance with the employers for protectionism and trade war. These nationalist politics divide the working class, and are grist to the mill for the AfD.

Among the first to sign the call for the meeting was the SPD federal minister for families, Manuela Schwesig. She belongs to the Merkel government, which is dictating austerity to all of Europe, has practically abolished the right of asylum and, since January, has deported even the sick and traumatised on a mass scale.

The bogus character of the "Stand Up Against Racism" alliance can be seen most clearly in the person of Christine Buchholz. She is both the most prominent member of the pseudo-left tendency Marx21 and the parliamentary defence spokeswoman for the Left Party. She has travelled alongside Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) to visit German troops in Africa as part of the preparation of Germany's imperialist projects in Mali and Senegal. She delivered a lecture to the German Society for Foreign Policy (DGAP) as part of the series "New Responsibilities of German Defence Policy."

Katja Kipping, Bernd Riexinger and Petra Pau of the Left Party, as well as the editor of the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper, Tom Stroschneider, were also among the first to support the call for the meeting.

"We want to show a clear demarcation against racism and right-wing witch-hunts," the paper stated. The phrase is particularly cynical when one looks at the reality of the SPD-Left Party-Green state government in Thuringia. There, state premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) is conducting mass deportations. Even the pro-Left Party newspaper *Junge Welt* has attested that the Thuringia state premier is "in deportation mode," conducting it "especially cost-effectively."

As for the Greens, it is enough to mention the names of Joschka Fischer and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the champions of an aggressive war policy, or Winfried Kretschmann, who as state prime minister in Baden Württemberg has perfected the system of quartering and disciplining refugees to enable their smooth deportation.

What bothers the politicians gathered in the Frankfurt trade union headquarters is not the rejection of the AfD's politics, but the fear of a rebellion by the working class and the youth

that runs out of their control. For a long time, the so-called "left" has functioned along the lines of "indicate left and turn right" in order to divert and neutralize social outrage. They are hardly able to do this anymore.

The more the anger in the population grows against the government's war drive and policy of social devastation, the harder it is for the establishment parties to maintain control. This can be seen by the drop in electoral support for the Left Party and the SPD. In the state of Saxony Anhalt, the Left Party lost 7 percent of its vote in the March election and finished far behind the AfD. The SPD, which in 1972 saw its best election result of 46 percent, stands at just 20 percent in national opinion polls. In Bavaria, Baden Württemberg, Saxony and Saxony Anhalt, it has shrunk to just 10 percent.

While some votes have turned to the AfD, up to 50 percent of those eligible to vote no longer bother because they do not feel themselves represented by any party. And not all AfD voters are racists or fascists. In the state elections in March, one in four AfD voters stated that they had not voted for their programme, but as a protest against the establishment parties.

The fascist danger is currently neither acute nor unstoppable. A determined mobilization of workers and young people against war and fascism could easily dispel it. Such a struggle would also attract those middle class layers who are turning away from the establishment parties in disappointment and increasingly lean towards a radical solution.

To do this, the working class needs a new party that is completely independent of the entire spectrum of bourgeois politics. In November 2015, the WSWS wrote: "Those who want to fight against the AfD must also reject the right-wing policies of the government, the Greens and the Left Party."

As the International Committee of the Fourth International says in its statement "Socialism and the fight against war," a movement against war and its associated risks must "be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population." It must be anti-capitalist, socialist and, above all, international.



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