

Far-right Alternative for Germany adopts party programme

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Three years after its founding, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) adopted a party programme last weekend. Some 2,000 members voted on the programme and several hundred amendments at a party congress in Stuttgart.

The party, which currently has representatives in the European Parliament and eight German state legislatures, has undergone a rapid development in its three years of existence. Emerging at the height of the Greek crisis as an anti-euro party, it embraced an anti-refugee policy last year. Now it has made Islamophobia its calling card.

The Islamophobia codified in the AfD's programme plays a similar role as that played by anti-Semitism for the conservative and extreme right-wing parties in the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. It serves to divert social dissatisfaction against a minority--then the Jews, now the Muslims--encourage racism and nationalism, and promote arch-conservative and militarist goals.

The statement "Islam does not belong in Germany" was adopted by a large majority as part of the programme, as were bans on minarets, the call of the Muezzin, the full face veil and the slaughtering of animals according to Islamic and Jewish custom. "The cultural essence of Islam is irreconcilable with the Western world," stated deputy party leader Albrecht Glaser to applause from the floor.

Die Zeit described this as "Volkish nationalism, which is now typical of the AfD." The worldview of the AfD, it wrote, opposes "the construct of a Volkish-German 'us'" to a "foreign Muslim 'them.'"

The transformation of the AfD was consummated by a change in leadership. The founders, associated with economist Bernd Lucke and former German industrial association president Hans-Olaf Henkel, who combined opposition to the euro with a neoliberal economic programme, left the party when it shifted to an anti-immigrant focus in the summer of 2015.

Frauke Petry, who forced Lucke from the leadership, has herself now been sidelined. In Stuttgart, Jörg Meuthen, who is national spokesperson along with Petry, and Alexander Gauland laid down the line and guided the direction of the

discussion. They are attempting to consolidate the party on the basis of a programme embracing right-wing conservative, German nationalist and fascist positions. Islamophobia is the cement that holds this together.

Meuthen, who stood as the AfD's lead candidate in the Baden-Württemberg state election in March, has long been viewed as a moderate within the party. Like Lucke, he is an economist, but he did not leave the party when it adopted its anti-immigrant stance last summer.

Gauland was active in the arch-conservative Christian Democratic Union in Hesse for 40 years before helping found the AfD in 2013. Among other things, he headed the staff of state premier Walter Wallmann. The 75-year-old is considered the AfD's strategist. Albrecht Glaser, who will be the AfD's candidate in the presidential elections, was also a member of the CDU far-right Stahlhelm faction in Hesse for 40 years.

In a speech that had a programmatic character, Meuthen spoke of three tendencies that had to be united in the AfD: "modern conservatism, consistent advocacy of freedom and healthy patriotism."

By means of the term "modern conservatism" Meuthen refers to those conservatives who have held fast to the conventional social ideals of the 1950s and no longer feel at home in the Christian Democratic Union under Angela Merkel. The AfD programme promotes the traditional family of father, mother and child as the "nucleus of society." Under the slogan "more children instead of mass immigration," it includes demands for families with multiple children and opposition to abortions. Meuthen received sustained applause when he declared, "We want to get rid of this left-wing/SPD/Green-infested Germany of the generation of '68."

By "freedom," Meuthen means freedom for capital. The AfD programme advocates lower taxes and the abolition of the inheritance and local business tax. It also calls for the inclusion of a tax break in the Basic Law, rejects climate change, and demands that the decision to shut down Germany's nuclear power plants be overturned.

“Healthy patriotism” refers to the extreme right-wing and fascist tendencies that dominate in the party’s regional organisations in eastern Germany. Above all in Saxony-Anhalt, where the AfD achieved its best result, with 24 percent of the vote in the state election, and in Thuringia, the leaders of the state parties, André Poggenburg and Björn Höcke, have close ties to extreme right networks.

While Petry declared prior to the convention that a drift to the right and Volkish positions were not acceptable and there were “red lines” that could not be crossed, this was no longer an issue at the convention. When Höcke arrived late, he was greeted by the delegates like a movie star, with shouts and extended applause.

Also on the European level, the AfD is lining up with the far right. European Parliament deputy Marcus Pretzell, Petry’s partner, announced his transfer to the far-right fraction of the National Front. The Austrian FPÖ, which also belongs to this fraction, sent greetings that were fervently welcomed by the delegates. Former Czech president Vaclav Klaus attended the convention in person.

Like these parties, the AfD not only opposes the euro, but also the European Union. It calls for a referendum on leaving the euro, for the repatriation of powers from the EU to national parliaments, and, if this is not achieved, the dissolution of the EU. The AfD combines this nationalist opposition to the EU with demands for a stronger state and militarism.

Among other things, the programme advocates “comprehensive protection of German borders under the command of the federal police.” It further calls for the use of conscripts to protect the borders. It demands the reintroduction of military service and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Germany. An exit from NATO was also raised at the convention, but not voted upon.

One speaker made clear the conceptions lurking behind this. It was only a question of the will to establish, in a few years, an army superior to the American military in Europe, he said.

Thus far, the AfD has drawn support from right-wing Christian Democratic Union voters who oppose Merkel’s policies, outraged petty-bourgeois elements who fear social decline, and workers and unemployed voting for the AfD as a protest against the right-wing policies of the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party. But it is no spontaneous movement from below. The attempt to once again build a right-wing party in Germany that combines extreme conservative, German nationalist and Volkish positions is a direct consequence of the revival of German militarism.

Since German President Gauck and government officials announced two years ago that the period of military restraint

was over and Germany had to play a role in the world corresponding to its significance, all of the taboos of the post-war era have been systematically broken.

The nationalist liberal and German nationalist parties that prepared World War I and World War II, and collaborated with the Nazis and helped them to power did not survive the Second World War. Their members concealed themselves, and if they did remain politically active, it was mainly in the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and the Free Democratic Party. Today such parties are required once again.

That is why experienced politicians like Gauland and professors like Meuthen are positioning themselves at the head of the AfD. Military personnel are also active in the AfD. The chair of the Rheinland-Palatinate AfD, Uwe Junge, is a career officer in the Bundeswehr, and the chair of the Cologne branch, Hendrik Rottmann, is an intelligence officer at the military intelligence service (MAD).

For the same reason, the established parties are preparing the ground for the AfD with their brutal refugee policies and drive to war. Much of what the AfD demands has already been implemented by the government. The promises that there would be no cooperation with the AfD, which came from all party centres in the wake of the convention, should therefore not be taken seriously.

The conditions under which the AfD’s convention in Stuttgart took place displayed the true relations between the AfD, the other bourgeois parties and the state.

More than 1,000 police officers in combat gear guarded the location. Anti-fascist activists who protested against the convention with roadblocks were arrested, locked up for hours and abused. The police arrested a total of 500 demonstrators, restrained them with cable ties and held them without water, food or sanitary facilities. This took place in a state governed by a Green Party state premier and a city whose mayor is also a Green.



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