

# The repulsive spectacle of the Berlin Senate election television debate

Ulrich Rippert  
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On Tuesday evening, a discussion took place at rbb television studio between the leading candidates for multiple parties standing in the election to the Berlin Senate on September 18.

This so-called “elephant round” has a long tradition and is usually mind-numbingly boring. All of the established parties are on the same wavelength and their programs virtually interchangeable. All of them have been involved in different government coalitions in recent decades and are responsible for the social misery in the capital.

In the past all parties with representation in the Berlin Senate were invited to participate in the 90-minute program. This time around the rules were altered to allow the AfD (Alternative for Germany) to spout its racist and far right policies.

The rapidly implemented rule change opened up the program to all parties expected to exceed the five percent hurdle for representation in the Senate. In addition to bringing in the AfD this also allowed the establishment parties to dispense with the Pirate Party, which entered the state parliament after the last election with 15 MPs, but is expected to crash in the polls in ten days’ time.

The result Tuesday night was a repulsive spectacle, in which politicians and moderators, most of whom have known each other for years, cracked jokes and exchanged pleasantries. Whoever was able to sit through the program for an hour and a half at least knew by the end who they should not vote for on 18 September.

The most striking thing about the evening was the level of agreement between the parties. The only differences were over small details.

What might be called the German Unity Party, which reaches from the right wing of the CDU and the AfD to

the left wing of the Left Party, discussed among themselves. And yes, the AfD is one of them.

It is no accident that the deputy AfD chairman Alexander Gauland explicitly praised the statement on the deportation of refugees made by Left Party leader, Sahra Wagenknecht, a few months ago.

Wagenknecht had supported the CSU demand for the accelerated removal of so-called criminal aliens as follows: “Whoever abuses our hospitality has forfeited any right to hospitality.” Gauland responded: “It is pleasing to see the extent to which the Left Party is capable of realpolitik.”

On Tuesday evening political agreement between all parties emerged particularly over the issue of security. All parties vied with one another with demands for more police, better equipment, more weapons, more effective coordination between departments and closer cooperation between the different security agencies.

For weeks the CDU has been conducting a law-and-order campaign. There is only one issue on its posters—the need for stronger police powers.

A few days ago CDU candidate Frank Henkel, together with the chief of police announced that the Berlin police are to be equipped with stun guns. These stun guns fire metal arrows into victims at a distance of up to ten meters. The electrodes are delivered with barbs that penetrate clothing up to a thickness of 5 centimeters. Once the projectiles have penetrated the body tissue of a victim, they can be repeatedly activated by pulling a trigger.

The weapons are part of the preparations to suppress unwanted mass gatherings, demonstrations and riots and they serve to brutalize the police.

In the elephant round the SPD’s top candidate Mayor Michael Müller was asked about the new police weapons. He replied, “I wonder why you do not ask the

interior minister first when it comes to internal security?" Interior minister and top candidate of the CDU, Frank Henkel, stood beside him, grinning.

After Müller explained that he has long advocated significant increases in personnel and equipment for the police and security agencies, Henkel replied: "I am very happy you first asked the Mayor, because I have not heard so much support for my policy in a long time."

Already in May the Greens had called for a "police with sufficient personnel that is technically and conceptually well-equipped and well-trained" in a policy paper. Their top candidate Ramona Pop repeated this position on Tuesday.

The leading candidate of the Left Party, Klaus Lederer, also agreed with Henkel. A better equipped police force was one of the few issues upon which he could support the interior minister.

However, Lederer went on to declare that he saw a lack of ideas when it came to the expansion and modernization of the security apparatus. New measures to enhance surveillance of the population would not increase security. Even now, the flow of data was hard to cope with. Lederer declared: "If one is looking for a needle in a haystack, it makes no sense to increase the size of the haystack." What was necessary was more and better qualified staff in the security apparatus.

Under these conditions, the AfD's leading candidate Georg Pazderski had an easy run. As a former army officer—during the broadcast it was stressed he was a former "general staff officer"—he posed as an expert on security. Although his statement on refugee policy provoked critical comments, the friendly exchanges with him continued. Regarding refugees Pazderski said: "I am in favour of training these people, but not integrating them. We have to prepare these people to go back where they came from."

Seventy-one years after the end of the Nazi terror and the crimes of the German army, an army officer leads a far right and openly racist party in Berlin, and no one from the ranks of the established parties dares to oppose him. There could be no stronger indication of the bankruptcy of the German political elite.

After Tuesday night it should be absolutely clear that the Socialist Equality Party (PSG) is the only party that opposes the massive rearmament of the police and army.

The PSG was featured on a program dedicated to smaller parties on German television Thursday evening. "I will address the central issue of current political development that is being systematically hidden by all the other parties: the rapid military buildup and preparations for war. The struggle against war is the focus of our campaign" declared Christoph Vandreier, who represented the PSG on the rbb broadcast.



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