

Alternative for Germany moves further to the right

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26 April 2017

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) moved further to the right at its election congress in Cologne last weekend. The AfD was originally founded in 2013 as an anti-Euro party, embracing national-conservative and neoliberal values. It has now completed its transformation into a far-right, ethno-nationalist organisation.

The change in direction was initiated two years ago, when Frauke Petry replaced AfD founder Bernd Lucke, a Hamburg-based economist, as the party's leader. At the time, Petry worked closely with Alexander Gauland and Björn Höcke, the party leaders in Brandenburg and Thuringia, representing the right-nationalist and the folkish wing of the party. Now, Gauland and Höcke have sidelined Petry.

A "motion on the future", prepared by Petry, was bluntly rejected. The conference removed it from the agenda without discussion. Petry had sought to limit the most blatant forms of neo-Nazi agitation by leading party members and to prepare the AfD for future participation in government.

In February, at Petry's initiative, the party executive initiated expulsion proceedings against Höcke, who had created a public scandal with a speech attacking the commemoration of the victims of Nazi crimes. He called the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin a "monument of disgrace". He went on to charge that the allied powers in World War II, in their bombing German cities, had sought "to rob us of our collective identity" and "to eradicate us root and branch". The procedure to expel Höcke has now come to a halt, and he is once again playing a leading role in the party.

The same applies to Jens Maier, a leading candidate of the AfD in Saxony in the federal election this autumn. Mayer also faced expulsion after, in typical neo-Nazi fashion, he deplored Germany's "cult of guilt" and warned against the "production of mixed races", which "obliterate national identities". Maier went so far as to express understanding for the Norwegian fascist mass murderer Anders Breivik.

Frauke Petry remains party chair; a new election is scheduled at the AfD's regular congress in the autumn. She has, however, been sidelined. The congress selected

Gauland—the main figure behind the campaign against Petry—and Alice Weidel as its leading candidates for the Bundestag election this autumn.

The 76-year-old Gauland, a co-founder of the AfD in 2013, had been a functionary in the ultra-conservative CDU in the state of Hesse for 40 years. At the Cologne congress, he demonstrated his far-right orientation with the slogan "We are proud to be Germans". He added, "We want to keep the land we inherited from our mothers and fathers". For someone who was born in 1941, in the middle of the war, as the son of a lieutenant-colonel in the Nazi regime's police, his statement speaks for itself.

Alice Weidel is 38 and an economist who has worked for Goldman Sachs and Allianz Global Investors Europe. She worked in China for six years and is now a company consultant for start-ups.

As a lesbian mother living with her female partner and a child, Weidel appears not to fit into the AfD's preference for the "classic family of father, mother and children" as a "life model and role model", and its recognition of "natural differences between the sexes", as the party's election programme states. Her choice, however, is undoubtedly a nod towards wealthy middle class layers who are shifting to the right as the social crisis intensifies.

Weidel won the support of delegates with her tirade against immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. She said: "Today in our country we have to protect Christian festivals with police, machine guns and barriers to stop trucks". She accused the government of pursuing a completely uncontrolled and irresponsible immigration policy.

Opposition to Muslims and immigration and outright xenophobia form the core of the 68-page election programme adopted by the party congress. In proto-Nazi style, the programme section headed "Asylum needs borders" employs demographic statistics according to which "the population of Africa" will grow from 1.2 to 2.4 billion by 2050, while Europe's population will fall from 590 to 540 million. To further the "self-preservation of our state

and people”, the AfD demands a series of measures to stop immigration and increase the German birth rate.

Two years ago, Höcke’s racist drivel on European and African strategies for reproduction had created a scandal. He contrasted the “life-enhancing African type of proliferation” to the “European placeholder type”. Now, similar racist nostrums are anchored in the party’s programme.

Also, the programme’s section on “internal security”, advocating a massive rearmament of the police and a drastic tightening of criminal law—in particular, juvenile law—is justified with xenophobic arguments.

The foreign policy section of the AfD programme calls for a strict orientation towards “German interests”. It strongly recalls Trump’s “America First” policy and has an unmistakable imperialist tone, reminiscent of the German Imperial and Nazi eras. Among other things, it calls for “the defence of German economic interests to the same extent that other countries defend their interests”, as well as “access to raw materials and the freedom of trade routes”.

The programme rejects the Euro and calls for the replacement of the European Union by “a Europe of sovereign states”. The programme describes the US as the “most important German alliance partner”, but also notes that “the increasing focus of the US on the Pacific and East Asian region requires an autonomous German security strategy”. The programme also calls for “easing of tensions with Russia” and the “termination of the sanctions policy” against Moscow.

Regarding international military interventions, the programme states: “We must support the stability of states in the interests of our security, not in the name of democracy and morality”. To this end, the AfD is committed to massive military rearmament. It calls for “the return of the armed forces to a state of readiness” and for the reintroduction of conscription to be achieved by the “rebuilding of homeland security forces or a militia system based on the Swiss model”.

The programme also calls for the use of the Bundeswehr inside Germany—for “civil-military cooperation” and “round-the-clock fast reaction forces”. It is no coincidence that some leading AfD politicians are former army officers.

The AfD rejects an inheritance tax and advocates a strict ceiling on state debt, which excludes tax increases. In the “Social Policy” section, however, it has departed from its former neoliberal programme and calls for a number of social reforms, in particular for families and retirees—excluding immigrants. The AfD is evidently seeking to emulate the French National Front in order to lure impoverished layers of the population into its grasp.

The founding and evolution of the AfD cannot be understood in isolation from the policies of all the other

parties. Four years after its foundation, the AfD sits in 11 out of 16 state parliaments and is currently polling at around 10 percent for this autumn’s federal election—i.e., ahead of the Left Party, the Greens and the FDP. At the same time, it is moving ever further to the right.

Many of the demands in the AfD programme—the mass deportation of refugees, the call for a German “guiding culture”, the return of militarism, domestic rearmament—are now official policy. They are supported more or less openly, not only by the government parties—the CDU, CSU and SPD—but also by the Greens and the Left Party. All of these parties are reacting to growing social tensions and increasing international conflicts by turning to the right. As at the beginning of the last century, the only answer the ruling class has to the global crisis of capitalism is war and dictatorship.

The AfD has taken this policy to its ultimate conclusion and, in doing so, openly appeals to the most reactionary traditions in German history. In pursuing this path, it can rely on the right-wing policies of the other political parties as well as on the ideological shift to the right taking place at universities.

In the course of the demonstrations against the AfD congress in Cologne, the Socialist Equality Party and IYSSE distributed a leaflet dealing with the suppression of freedom of speech and thought at Humboldt University in Berlin. The university administration is seeking to suppress criticism of right-wing professors, such as the historian Jörg Baberowski and the political scientist Herfried Münkler. Both men have developed a new historical narrative aimed at playing down the historic crimes of German imperialism and justifying the return of German militarism.

Baberowski has come to the defence of Hitler and agitates against refugees. The leaflet warned: “The defence of Baberowski by the university administration and the media has direct political implications. Far-right AfD ideologues such as Björn Höcke, who links to Baberowski on his Facebook page, and Jens Maier...are given a boost”. This has been confirmed by the party congress.

The AfD’s new strong man, Alexander Gauland, is directly relying on Münkler. In 2015, he praised Münkler’s book *Macht in der Mitte* (*Power in the Centre*), which calls for Germany to be the “hegemon” and “disciplinarian” of Europe.



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