Germany: SPD reacts to election defeat with authoritarian state measures

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Immediately after its recent election drubbing in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), the Social Democratic Party (SPD) announced it would reorient its campaign for the federal election to be held this autumn.

In the spring, SPD chairman Martin Schulz announced the party's so-called "social justice electoral campaign" following his election as the SPD's lead candidate for the autumn election. In a series of interviews Schulz stressed that the worst errors involved in the Agenda 2010 policy would be corrected. The Agenda 2010 was a full-scale assault on Germany's welfare and social state provisions introduced by the SPD-Green coalition (1998-2005) headed by Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

Shulz declared earlier this week that the SPD would now be placing domestic security measures at the heart of its Bundestag election campaign. On Tuesday, two days after the NRW elections, the party leadership sent out a 67-page document to its membership, summarizing the key elements of the party's election program. The document calls for a "strong, viable state" capable of decisively countering crime, extremism and terror.

The main motion, which is due to be adopted at a SPD conference in Dortmund on June 25, states:

* "We want to create 15,000 new police jobs at a federal and state level."

* "Video-technology should be used whenever it can assist in preventing threats and securing evidence."

* "Foreigners who commit serious crimes should be deported immediately after serving their sentence."

* "We will close extremist Islamic mosques and stop financing them."

This is identical to demands raised by the xenophobic Alternative for Germany (AfD). The SPD is calling for the expansion and strengthening of the police. Their powers are to be massively expanded, and such demands are not limited to the SPD's election program.

As the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported Thursday, the current grand coalition of the SPD and conservative union parties wants to expand state hacking—online searching—prior to the election. A corresponding reform of the criminal code, which the Bundestag was due to vote on in June, has been massively tightened up shortly before the end of the legislative process. Responsibility for the new legislation rests with the SPD-led Justice Ministry.

Such online searches involve using so-called Trojan software to spy on computers and mobile phones. Unlike a house search, the person involved has no idea he or she is being spied upon and cannot therefore undertake any action to prevent such a hostile invasion of privacy.

Formerly such online searches were only permissible in cases involving suspicion of a concrete, serious criminal offence. Now the parameter for searches is to be extended to include 38 various new offences. The offences include drug possession and "misuse of asylum applications." In addition, every branch of the criminal investigation department, and not just the federal police, will be empowered to use Trojans.

In the case of telephone monitoring judicial authorization is necessary. Last year, however, 32,668 cases of telephone monitoring were officially registered, meaning such measures are nothing more than a routine formality. The new law paves the way for an Orwellian system of spying on the entire population.

With its demand for the rapid deportation of criminal foreigners, the SPD is encouraging openly racist sentiments. In common with all other right-wing

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parties, it is seeking to direct social discontent into racist channels.

The SPD is not undertaking this lurch to the right in its program from the standpoint of electoral tactics. The party is well aware that both issues, domestic rearmament and xenophobia, are rejected by broad sections of the working population and youth.

The SPD is reacting to the NRW election result as a loyal party of the state. It evaluates its own loss in votes as an expression of massive opposition to the entire ruling class. Most media reports about the NRW election have largely ignored the fact that not only did the SPD suffer its worst result since 1947, the “winner” in the election, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), also racked up its second worst result in post-war Germany.

The SPD evaluates the election result as a prelude to major class conflicts and has responded with a law-and-order campaign, aimed at creating a police state.

Workers, for their part, must draw their own lessons from the NRW election and prepare for fierce class struggles. The reaction of the SPD to the election result confirms that the period in which the working class could defend its interests through the ballot box is irretrievably over.

Social Democracy and its allied trade unions are instruments of the ruling class. This is reflected by developments in other countries. In France, the former ruling Socialist Party suffered a humiliating defeat a few weeks ago in the first round of the presidential elections. This was the reply by the electorate to the despised labour-market reforms, police state measures and war policy of President Francois Hollande. In Greece, Spain, the Netherlands and many other countries the Social Democrats are also in free-fall.

The SPD reacts to the international crisis of capitalism by pressing for the revival of German great power politics. Parallel to military rearmament, it is pushing ahead with the build-up of domestic security and police measures.

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