

SPD whips up xenophobia in German federal election

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The demonisation of refugees is increasingly the central theme of the federal (Bundestag) election campaign of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD). Just ten days ago SPD chief Martin Schulz resorted to the jargon of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Schulz accused German chancellor Angela Merkel of allowing into the country more than a million refugees two years ago in a "largely uncontrolled" manner and declared that this could not be repeated.

Boris Pistorius, responsible for internal security issues in Schulz's election campaign, quickly followed suit. The interior minister of the state of Lower Saxony, known as a hardliner, called for the limitation of asylum numbers by setting up detention centres in Libya. Refugees are to be held in such centres before they can embark on the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

At the centres their "asylum claims" are to be "summarily reviewed." In fact only a handful can ever expect a positive response to their applications. Refugees from Africa are dismissed en masse as "economic refugees," who are not entitled to asylum. It is already clear that the vast majority of African refugees are not eligible for the right of asylum, Pistorius told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

What Pistorius is proposing is the construction of concentration camps, in which tens of thousands of refugees would be imprisoned indefinitely until they are deported across Libya's southern border into the Sahara where they face fierce heat and the possibility of death by dehydration.

To overcome any resistance on the part of the largely powerless Libyan government, Pistorius suggests bribes. "Possible resistance by the Libyans can be resolved with money," he suggested delicately in the

Süddeutsche Zeitung.

Until now the demand for the establishment of such camps in Libya has been restricted to far-right circles in the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), along with the ultra-right AfD. Schulz's predecessor as leader of the SPD, current foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel, long rejected such camps noting that Libya is plagued by civil war and dominated by rival warlords and Islamic militia.

The existing prisons for refugees in Libya are hell on earth. Prisoners are crowded by their hundreds into tiny spaces, subjected to violence, beatings and rape, and even killed. Disease is widespread. There is a lack of washing facilities, clean drinking water and food. The Libyan coast guard is considered to be corrupt and brutal, and enriches itself by stealing from refugees and trading in human beings.

With its demand for such camps, the SPD is taking up the inhuman and racist slogans of the AfD. The shift arises mainly from domestic considerations. The SPD is responding to growing social antagonisms and the radicalisation of workers and youth.

The hoopla surrounding Schulz following his coronation as the party's lead candidate in the September election lacked any real basis. It was the product of a systematic campaign by SPD bureaucrats and the media. The Schulz bubble quickly burst and the party suffered major defeats in a series of state elections in Saarland, North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein.

The SPD is seen by the working class as what it is: the party which introduced the Hartz IV welfare "reforms," condemning millions to precarious forms of income, while the party's tax reforms precipitated the biggest redistribution of wealth and income in favour of the rich in the history of the federal republic.

In the meantime, the SPD is trailing far behind in every poll and Schulz is reckoned to have no chance of taking over the chancellorship after the September election. In a recent Forsa survey, Merkel polled 52 percent support compared to 21 percent for Schulz. The ratings of the SPD stood at 22 percent compared to the union parties—the CDU and CSU—which polled at 40 percent. Even the role of the SPD as a junior partner of the Union parties (CDU and CSU) is doubtful. The right-wing union has the option of forming a coalition with the neoliberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), while the Greens are quite prepared to form an alliance with the CDU.

Unable to lure and pacify workers and youths with promises of social improvements, the SPD has decided to turn to intimidation, the mobilization of ultra-right elements and the rearmament of the state apparatus in order to suppress future social and political conflicts. This is why it has adopted the slogans of the AfD and placed the refugee issue at the heart of its election campaign.

SPD Justice Minister Heiko Maas has long played a leading role in the introduction of measures aimed at censoring the Internet and persecuting left-wing organisations. Following protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg, he even demanded a “Rock against the Left” concert.

On foreign policy, the SPD is also outflanking the right-wing parties on the right. Foreign Minister Gabriel has been explicit in his advocacy of German great power politics.

It is not the first time that the SPD has allied itself with ultra-right forces to suppress the class struggle. After betraying its socialist program and supporting World War I in 1914, the Social Democrats mobilised Freikorps mercenaries at the end of the war to violently put down the revolutionary uprisings of workers and soldiers, and assassinate their leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Later on these Freikorps forces formed the backbone of Hitler’s Stormtroopers.

The SPD is returning to the tradition of “the Bloodhound”, i.e., Gustav Noske, the first Social Democratic defense minister who played a key role in suppressing workers in 1919.

The Left Party also supports this political course. It has organized its entire campaign around forming a future federal coalition government with the SPD. The

Left Party’s leading candidate, Sahra Wagenknecht, has long been denouncing refugees along lines similar to those of the AfD.

The SPD today has nothing in common with the working class. It is a right-wing state party, which exclusively defends the interests of the banks, large-scale conglomerates, the secret services and army. Its transformation shows that, under the conditions of the intensified crisis of world capitalism, not a single problem—the defence of refugees and democratic rights, opposition to social decay and redundancies, the struggle against war—can be solved within the framework of the establishment parties and institutions. The working class must prepare for fierce class struggles.

This is the importance of the Socialist Equality Party’s election campaign. The SGP (*Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei*) is the only party that advocates a socialist program. It combines the struggle against war and the arming of the state with the defence of democratic and social rights. It fights for the establishment of an international movement of the working class to overthrow capitalism:

“We defend democratic fundamental rights and the right to asylum and reject every form of nationalism and xenophobia. Attacks on refugees are directed against all workers. That is why a joint struggle against capitalism by all workers is necessary—irrespective of their origin.”

We call upon all readers of the WSWS to support the election campaign of the SGP and join the party.



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