

Dangerous developments in Germany: AfD leader praises the Nazi Wehrmacht

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Just days before the federal election, the consequences of Germany's return to a policy of war and militarism are becoming ever more apparent. At a meeting of the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the state of Thuringia at the beginning of September, the party's leading election candidate, Alexander Gauland, called for Germany's Nazi past to be seen in a positive light.

No other nation had "so clearly come clean on a false past as Germany," Gauland roared out to his jubilant audience. Addressing the Nazi terror regime which ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945, Gauland declared: "We do not have to recriminate ourselves regarding these twelve years. They no longer impact our identity. And we will address this fact." Germans therefore "have the right not only to win back our country, but also our past."

By this Gauland means the glorification of the vile crimes committed by German militarism in the first half of the last century. "If the French are rightly proud of their emperor and the British proud of Nelson and Churchill, then we have the right to be proud of the achievements of German soldiers in two world wars," he said at the end of his twenty-minute rant.

Germany's past, he said, includes both the leader of a plot to assassinate Hitler, Graf von Stauffenberg, as well as the Wehrmacht general Erwin Rommel. It includes the Battle of Sedan as well as "the slaughterhouse of Verdun". This was "German history, and we will not allow any Turkish-born German to cast it aside." The AfD leader was referring to a previous statement in which he demanded that Germany's Integration Commissioner Aydan Özoguz be "cast aside" in Anatolia.

Representatives of Germany's mainstream parties reacted to Gauland's fascist tirade with feigned displays of opposition and calls for more state surveillance. According to SPD parliamentary faction head Thomas Oppermann, "The statements expose Gauland as an ultra-right militarist. I cannot imagine how one could summon up even a grain of pride regarding the millions of dead, barbaric war crimes and destruction of all of Europe."

For his part, the SPD's leading election candidate, Martin Schulz, called upon the country's intelligence agency to place the AfD under surveillance due to its extremist tendencies.

"The rhetoric of the people at the head of the AfD shows that convictions prevail not only in the party base, but also in the leadership, which are incompatible with the fundamental values of our constitution," Schulz declared in an interview in the current issue of *Der Spiegel*.

Representatives of other parliamentary parties took a similar line. Stephan Mayer, a speaker for the conservative union parties (CSU and CDU), told the business newspaper *Handelsblatt*, "Surveillance of the AfD by our domestic secret services should not be ruled out in future should the AfD become even more radicalized". The Green Party MP Volker Beck said: "I cannot understand why factions of the AfD and state associations such as the 'Patriotic Platform' and 'The Wing,' which publicly appeal to the far right, have not been placed under surveillance."

Do Schulz, Oppermann, et al. really think they can throw sand into the eyes of the vast majority of the population who are repulsed by the neo-Nazism and racism of the AfD? The fact is that the same parties and media which now rail against the AfD created the conditions for its rise to prominence. Seventy years after the downfall of Hitler, they bear ideological and political responsibility for the likelihood that this weekend a far-right party will once again enter the Bundestag.

For many years the media have provided a platform for the xenophobia and nationalism that are the hallmarks of the AfD. Seven years ago, the media hyped up the racist filth propagated by former Berlin finance Senator Thilo Sarrazin (SPD) in his book *Germany Abolishes Itself*. Barely a day goes by in the current election campaign without leading representatives of the AfD cropping up in prominent talk shows to spout their far-right nostrums at peak viewing times.

The leading political parties have asserted (so far) that they will not cooperate with the AfD after the election, but in effect they have largely adopted its program. In the course of the election campaign, the CDU/CSU, the SPD, the neoliberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Left Party and the Greens have all sought to outdo one another with demands for more rearmament and a more aggressive policy towards refugees.

The rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht and the trivialisation of its crimes is not only being carried out by Gauland, a man who, for forty years, was a leading member of the so-called

“Stahlhelm” wing of the CDU in the state of Hesse. Following the uncovering of a neo-Nazi terror cell in the Bundeswehr at the beginning of May, representatives of all of Germany’s leading parties lined up behind the army. Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who had initially made some critical remarks about the Bundeswehr’s links to the Wehrmacht, quickly shifted her line. Several army barracks still bearing the names of Wehrmacht generals are now not to be renamed—despite promises of the contrary.

The SPD also considers any criticism of the German army’s links to the Wehrmacht, however mild, to be beyond the pale. In an interview with the Bundeswehr Association, Schulz recently declared: “We in the SPD also regarded it as very unseemly when Frau von der Leyen recently placed members of the Bundeswehr under general suspicion.” Her action had “eroded trust”.

In his speech in Thuringia, Gauland merely expressed in an outspoken manner themes that the German ruling elite have been working on for a long time: It is seeking to minimise the historical crimes of German imperialism in order to prepare new wars and atrocities.

In January 2014, Humboldt University Professor Herfried Münkler, who has links to the highest government circles, stated in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “It is hardly possible to assume a responsible policy in Europe if one has the impression: we were guilty of everything. With regard to 1914, this is a myth.”

Just one month later, his colleague, Jörg Baberowski, told *Der Spiegel*: “Hitler was no psychopath and he was not vicious. He didn’t want people to talk about the extermination of Jews at his table.” Baberowski went on to defend Ernst Nolte, the historian at the centre of the famous *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute) in the late 1980s, who undertook his own fundamental revision of Germany’s past under the Nazis. According to Baberowski: “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right.”

There are many passages in Baberowski’s books in which he seeks to minimise the crimes of the Nazis. For example, he has asserted that Stalin’s army “forced” the Wehrmacht to carry out a war of extermination. The manner in which Baberowski agitates against refugees in countless articles and interviews also replicates arguments used by the AfD.

However, when the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth and students’ organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) publicly criticised Baberowski, leading media outlets and academics reacted with fury and lined up behind the right-wing extremist historian. Today, no one can deny that there is a direct link between the revisionist stench issuing from Humboldt University and the return of German militarism. The AfD is merely the sharpest expression of this development.

Gauland is a declared supporter of Münkler’s call for German hegemony in Europe to defend its global geopolitical

and economic interests. “What Herfried Münkler wrote about the *Macht in der Mitte* [Power in the Centre—the title of Münkler’s book calling upon Germany to once again become the “taskmaster” of Europe] was all very clever”, Gauland told *Die Welt*.

Baberowski is now moving in AfD circles. He presented his most recent book, *Räume der Gewalt* (Spaces of Violence), in the Library of Conservatism, an extreme right-wing think tank in Berlin, which Gauland and other AfD politicians regularly frequent. Other figures like Björn Höcke, the chairman of the AfD in Thuringia, have spread Baberowski’s agitation against refugees on their personal Facebook pages.

The representatives of the established parties may seek to distance themselves from the AfD in the election campaign, but what they really think of Gauland’s speech is reflected in their attitude towards Baberowski. The latter is not only a welcome guest in the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, associated with the CDU; he has also featured as guest speaker at meetings held by the Greens and the Left Party. The Social Democratic President of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, has even threatened critics of Baberowski with criminal prosecution, although a German court confirmed that Baberowski can be called a “right-wing extremist”.

The censorship of left wing and anti-militaristic websites by Google is not least a reaction to the criticism made of Baberowski by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Google’s search engine manager, Ben Gomes, met with German government representatives in Berlin in April. Since then, WSWS articles about Baberowski have virtually disappeared from Google searches in Germany.

As was the case on the eve of the First and Second World Wars, the German ruling class is once again seeking to intimidate and silence anyone who opposes war and militarism. Everything now depends on the independent intervention of workers and young people into political developments. This is the goal of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei*. The SGP is the only party standing in the federal elections on a socialist program directed against war and capitalism, and which fights to build an international movement of the working class against social austerity, racism and the return of barbarism.



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