

Germany's Social Democratic president calls for tougher refugee policy and adaptation to AfD

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The Alternative for Germany's (AfD) electoral triumph has triggered horror and resistance from the vast majority of working people. But the ruling elite considers the presence of the right-wing extremists in the Bundestag (parliament) as an opportunity to shift official politics further to the right and make right-wing extremist positions socially acceptable once again.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats, SPD) left no doubt about this. He used his speech on German Unity Day on Tuesday to advocate cooperation with the AfD, call for a harder line on refugee policy, and speak the language of "German patriotism."

Although Steinmeier employed worn-out phrases and rhetorical devices, he was absolutely clear on the central issues. With regard to the AfD's electoral success he stated, "We cannot allow hostility to emerge from our differences—out of disagreements no irreconcilability."

This offer to reach an understanding with the AfD ran like a red thread through Steinmeier's entire speech. Sealed off from the population in a high-security zone, as even the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* remarked, he asserted in the Rheingoldhalle that "flight and migration" became the issue "that has affected our country more over the past two years than any other."

The humanitarian concern for the refugees' fate displayed by millions of people was thus placed by Steinmeier on the same level as the AfD's slogan that a limited acceptance of refugees was a "betrayal of our own people." In all seriousness, he described this neo-Nazi slogan as a moral pole against which it is necessary to remove "the walls of irreconcilability."

Steinmeier got to work straight away on this, propagating some of the right-wing extremists' central demands. Germany has to take back the right to decide who is being politically persecuted and who is fleeing from economic distress, blustered the president. In reality, not only are people who fled extreme poverty being deported en masse already, but also refugees from wars, who according to the Geneva Convention must be granted protection.

Instead, Steinmeier wants to organise migration according to the interests of German big business. He called for an immigration system "which directs and controls migration according to our stipulations."

Anyone coming to Germany must not only learn the language, stated Steinmeier, but also adopt certain convictions. "The rule of law, respect for the constitution, the equality of man and woman" are basic tenets of life in Germany, he said. This is based, among other things, on an "enlightened German patriotism."

This right-wing tirade from Germany's president can only be understood in the context of the deep gulf between the politics of the ruling elite and the sentiments of the vast majority of the working population. It is no accident that Steinmeier, Chancellor Merkel and Co. had 4,000 police officers to protect them from the population. Substantial sections of Mainz city center were transformed into areas on lockdown.

To impose war and social cutbacks, the ruling class is ready to mobilise the dregs of society and to resort to dictatorial measures. In this context, Steinmeier's speech is highly significant.

Four years ago, then-President Gauck used the period between the election and the coalition negotiations to

introduce for the incoming government a new foreign policy line, which had been previously worked out by influential think tanks, political parties and the newspapers. In his speech of October 3, 2013, Gauck called for a foreign policy shift in the direction of militarism and great power policies.

Following lengthy coalition talks, the Bundestag elected the new government of the Christian Democratic Union and SPD on December 17, 2013. Just six weeks later, new Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference in which he proclaimed the end of German military restraint and stated, “Germany is too big to comment on world politics from the sidelines.”

The return of German militarism was subsequently systematically implemented. The German armed forces are currently deployed in 18 foreign interventions, have stationed combat troops on the Russian border, and have been implicated in major war crimes in Afghanistan and Syria. Over the coming years, the astronomical sum of €130 billion in additional extra spending for the armed forces is planned.

The programme of the incoming government was also discussed in detail by think tanks and influential newspapers in the months prior to this year’s election. The unanimous tone was that Germany must dominate Europe and rearm itself as a military power so as to be able to play a global role and stand up to the United States. The new government has to launch a major military build-up to enforce the interests of German big business as far afield as the South China Sea, it was argued.

The AfD’s rise is the direct product of this policy, which has been advocated by all established parties. War and militarism are inseparable from nationalism, xenophobia and the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus. The right-wing extremists were deliberately promoted and built up by the media.

Now, their presence in the Bundestag is being used to shift the entire political framework further right and press ahead with militarism. Steinmeier left no doubt about this. As in 2013, the president’s speech on German Unity Day served to introduce the new government’s agenda.

In the case of the SPD politician Steinmeier, this also applies to the opposition. The SPD, together with the Left Party, are preparing to attack a coalition of the

CDU, neo-liberal Free Democrats and Greens from the right. SPD parliamentary group leader Andrea Nahles, as well as her counterpart in the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, have criticised Merkel’s refugee policy from the right and have adopted many of the AfD’s positions.



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