

Thousands demonstrate in Berlin against ultra-right Alternative for Germany

Our correspondents
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Ahead of the first sitting of the newly elected parliament (Bundestag) today, more than 10,000 people demonstrated on Sunday in Berlin against the political shift to the right. More than 90 deputies for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) will be members of the new Bundestag. For the first time since the downfall of Hitler, open Nazis, racists and xenophobes will enter parliament.

The participants at Sunday's protest included many families and young people. They came with homemade placards and banners. Many expressed their dissatisfaction with current political developments to the WSW.

Tobias thought it was "intolerable" that AfD members would be entering the Bundestag. "With our history, you can't sit at home when such people are back in parliament again," he said. He saw the cause for the far right's rise in deteriorating social conditions. Fears of social decline have been created with the casualisation of the labour market and creation of precarious working conditions, he added, which are then exploited by the right-wingers with their slogans.

Ann-Christin, 32, works at the League for the Protection of the Environment and Nature. When she saw the election result, she felt compelled to think of her grandmother and the stories from the Second World War. "It reminded me of voices which said: you must ensure that something like that never happens again," she said.

Ann-Christin saw it as a "big problem" that the AfD's positions will now be treated as mainstream with their entry into the Bundestag. "All of a sudden it will once again be totally normal for people to have these opinions," she added. This horrifies her. She does not believe that many people agree with the AfD, but considers most of their support to be protest voters.

The "Demo against Racism and Hate in the Bundestag" was organised by the activist groups Avaaz, Campact and

Breaking the Ice, and publicised mainly over Facebook. The main organiser was the teaching student and founder of the group Intercultural Peace, Ali Can, who came to Germany several years ago as a refugee.

None of these forces had a perspective to offer for the struggle against the right. Although the official call for the demonstration warned against racism, xenophobia and historical revisionism in parliament, it completely omitted mention of the political and social roots of the AfD's rise. It concluded by appealing to "all," including "trade unions" and "politicians of all parties," to jointly demonstrate "for a cosmopolitan and diverse Germany."

Among the official supporters of the demonstration were organisations which are directly responsible for the rise of the far right in Germany and throughout Europe. The German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB) has supported the federal government's brutal austerity policies for years and promotes nationalism. The same applies to the EU parliamentary group DiEM25, which includes politicians from Greece's Syriza, Spain's Podemos and the British Labour Party.

Representatives of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) explained at the demonstration that the struggle against the AfD required a political reckoning with all of the established parties and a socialist perspective. "Under conditions of the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, the ruling class has deliberately built up neo-fascist forces so as to enforce their policies of militarism, the strengthening of the domestic state apparatus and social cutbacks," their joint statement declared.

The established parties' opinion of the right-wing extremists is shown by their attitude to Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski. Even though he downplays the crimes of the Nazis ("Hitler was not vicious"), he is not only a welcome guest within the CDU-

aligned Konrad Adenauer Foundation, but also at panel discussions organised in the past by the Greens and Left Party. The Social Democratic president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, threatened Baberowski's critics with criminal prosecution, even though a court ruled that he can be fairly described as a "right-wing extremist."

A speech by an eyewitness and Holocaust survivor, Peter Neuhof, showed just how alive the experiences are that Germany's ruling elite is trying to revise. With words of warning, the 92-year-old, whose father, a Jewish communist, was murdered in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, recalled the 1930s. At that time, the Nazi party was an "Alternative for Germany" for many, he said. He referred to Wilhelm II's statement, "The German spirit shall revive the world," and compared it with the man from "Braunau—that is Hitler." The result of such politics is well known, he said.

"And now Germany for the Germans? Where will this politics lead?" Neuhof asked and quoted a survivor from Buchenwald concentration camp, "Never again war! Never again fascism!" However, he continued, "German troops are once again stationed on many fronts, led by a minister who calls herself defence minister. No wonder that a party with the old stench of fascism could establish itself. That is precisely the AfD, for which, to cite Brecht, the 'womb is still fertile'."

Neuhof appealed to his audience not to allow the history of the 1930s to repeat itself. The AfD is a "gathering place for right-wing viewpoints," and remaining silent or looking the other way offers no solution, he said. "Refugees whose lives are not safe in their own countries are coming here today. They are coming because they don't want to live in poverty anymore—conditions for which our society is jointly responsible, for war and poverty." This was followed by long and sustained applause.



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