

# The extreme right and the turn toward militarism in Germany

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Last week's party congress of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the xenophobic, anti-immigrant party of the extreme right, marked a new stage in the legitimization of fascistic politics in Germany. Seven decades after the fall of Hitler's dictatorship, the German media treated the congress of fascists as a major and legitimate political event, while German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier made a show of inviting two AfD leaders to his official residence for coalition talks.

Even though the right-wing extremist and Volkish nationalist wing under Björn Höcke dominated the congress, the establishment media and politicians criticised the AfD not for its extreme militarism and xenophobia, but for its lack of unity.

As the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* complained on Monday, the AfD displayed "an embarrassing chaos." And this after its parliamentary group had presented itself as "united and politically capable." The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* expressed a similar view, complaining that "not only the moderates, but also the radicals were merely observers of a leaderless party." The news channel Phoenix even broadcast the congress live on television and commented on the disputes between the various party factions as if it were a sports match.

The AfD congress must be taken with the utmost political seriousness. The AfD is a vehicle for far-right forces that advocate the filth long considered to have been left behind in Germany: racism, Volkish nationalism and militarism. Alexander Gauland was elected as the party's new co-leader, a man who praised "the achievements of German soldiers in two world wars" during the federal election campaign and demanded that the federal ombudsman for integration, Aydan Özoguz, a German of Turkish descent, be

"disposed of" in Turkey. Economics professor Jörg Meuthen was confirmed in his position as party leader.

The AfD will thus be led by two figures with close connections to the far-right extremist wing within the party. Both participated this year at a meeting organised by Höcke at the Kyffhäuser, a monument from the era of the Kaiser, which in the 1920s became a meeting place for Volkish nationalists and later the Nazis. In 2016, Höcke blustered there—in the presence of Gauland and Meuthen—about the "furor Teutonicus" (Teutonic fury) and the emergence of a "new mythology" for the German people.

Gauland's election is directly bound up with an intervention by the Höcke faction. To block the election of the "moderate" candidate, the state leader of the AfD in Berlin, Georg Pazderski, the Höcke faction inserted Doris Sayn-Wittgenstein into the race. The spokeswoman for the AfD in Schleswig-Holstein delivered a provocative speech, agitating against anti-fascists and defending the neo-Nazi Identity Movement. She not only paved the way for Gauland, but stood in the traditions of her class—the German high nobility. Heinrich Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, one of her forefathers, was a highly decorated officer in the Wehrmacht. He was, among other things, a participant in the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

The right-wing extremist and militarist traditions and cliques that twice drove the world into catastrophe during the 20th century are able to raise their heads again so aggressively only because they enjoy support from the state apparatus. The AfD party congress was secured by heavily armed police, who sprayed demonstrators with water cannon as the AfD delegates cheered them on. "Stand firm. In this spirit, let the water flow! It always hits the mark," the AfD-affiliated Dresden judge Jens Maier enthused on Twitter.

Over the past week, the head of state, in the person of President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, gave his blessing to the right-wing spectacle in Hanover. After a meeting with Steinmeier at Bellevue Palace, AfD parliamentary leader Alice Weidel tweeted, “Yesterday, Alexander Gauland and I were guests with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. As well as the exploratory talks on forming a government, the topic was the election of our federal executive in Hanover.”

It is no mere coincidence that Steinmeier, in his attempt to install a right-wing government, praises the AfD. When he was foreign minister, Steinmeier proclaimed the “end of military restraint” in 2014 and was heavily involved in the right-wing coup in Ukraine. Under his direction, the Foreign Ministry initiated a so-called review process in order to break through the deep-rooted popular opposition to militarism and war. Steinmeier authored strategy papers advocating the militarisation of Europe under German leadership, and he boasted in a series of speeches and articles about “Germany’s new global role.”

The AfD’s militarist positions overlap with those of leading personnel in the state and military, and are largely shared by all parties in parliament. In its programme, the AfD demands “the return of the armed forces to combat readiness,” given “the current threats facing Europe and the US’ new geopolitical orientation.” They have to be “reformed in a such way that their combat readiness is guaranteed in deployments of the highest intensity. For this, comprehensive structural, personnel and material changes are essential.”

A few days prior to the AfD’s party congress, the general inspector of the German armed forces’ military services spoke in virtually identical terms in a panel discussion.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party)—the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—analysed the objective driving forces behind the return of German militarism as early as September 2014 in a resolution in which we warned, “The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learned from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had ‘arrived in the West,’ had embraced a peaceful foreign policy and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours as it emerged

historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad.”

This prognosis is now being confirmed, underscoring the urgency of the building of the SGP. All other parties—with the Left party in the lead—are opposed to new elections because they fear a socialist development in the working class much more than the rise of the far-right. The SGP is the only party opposing this madness. We call for new elections to build a socialist alternative to capitalism, fascism and war.



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