

# German Social Democratic Party follows the path of far-right Alternative for Germany

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In the new edition of news weekly *Der Spiegel*, ex-SPD leader and acting foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel calls for his party to adopt the right-wing, nationalist policies of Alternative for Germany (AfD). Under the heading “Longing for Homeland,” he writes that concepts such as “identity”, “leading culture” (*Leitkultur*) and “homeland” (*Heimat*) not only concerned conservatives, but would have to be adopted by the Social Democratic Party.

Gabriel asked, “Is the desire for a secure ground under your feet, which lies behind the term ‘Heimat’ here in Germany, something we understand, or do we see it as a retrograde and even reactionary image from which we can no longer obtain anything? In the face of a far more diverse composition of our society, is the longing for a ‘leading culture’ only a conservative propaganda instrument, or does it conceal the desire for an orientation in a seemingly always impersonal world of post-modernity in our electorate too?”

The “search for identity” was a core problem that the SPD must pay much more attention to and place at the centre of its politics, writes Gabriel. He is fully aware that with this orientation, he is adopting the positions of the extreme right. It was no coincidence, he writes, “that the right-wing thinkers in Europe often refer to themselves as an ‘Identitary Movement’.”

To justify this adoption of AfD positions, Gabriel engages in sowing conceptual confusion about “modernity”, “postmodernism” and the “anti-modern.” He describes the post-war period, with its policy of social partnership when the SPD was able to carry out temporary social reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, as the “modern age.”

After the globalization of production undermined this policy of social reformism, “post-modernity” had begun with the liberalization of markets and the flexibilisation of working conditions, he said. The rise of right-wing populism was often understood as a reaction to the achievements of modernity, “in a sense, as an anti-modern rebellion against the status quo,” writes Gabriel.

That was wrong, however. Right-wing populism was not a countermovement to this modernity, but on the contrary, an

“expression of a yearning for precisely this modernity.” It was far more likely to be “a countermovement against the postmodernism that emerged at the end of the last century.” In other words, Gabriel refers to right-wing populism as an expression of the yearning for social reforms and stable conditions under the leadership of the SPD.

Leaving aside the sociological muddle, and looking at social reality, a very different picture emerges.

After the colossal crimes of German imperialism in two world wars, fascist terror and the Holocaust, the ruling class in Germany was forced to behave itself temporarily and make social concessions after 1945. The SPD played a key role in ensuring the survival of German imperialism in the post-war decades. It carried out military rearmament in the 1950s and, by the late 1960s, approved the emergency laws (*Notstandsgesetze*).

Under leader Willy Brandt, the SPD brought in the rebellious students off the streets and opened the way for the German economy to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with *Ostpolitik*. Above all, it endeavoured to suppress socialist perspectives in the working class through various concepts of social partnership, co-determination and the so-called humanisation of the world of work.

As the increasing globalisation of production undermined this policy of social reforms and the much-vaunted “Rheinisch capitalism” was replaced by neoliberalism and “shareholder value,” the social cuts and unlimited flexibility of work and living conditions did not begin with opposition from the SPD but with and through the SPD. It was an SPD government in alliance with the Greens which passed the Agenda 2010 welfare and labour “reforms” almost 15 years ago, consigning millions of working class families to hardship and misery with the Hartz IV laws.

Everyone knows that the SPD has been in government for 15 years over the past two decades and has appointed the Labour and Social Affairs ministers. More than anyone else, the SPD is responsible for massive cuts in welfare, wages and pensions, and the associated social misery of recent years. The SPD is known and hated as the Hartz IV party.

Now the SPD is going one step further and adopting the right-wing slogans of the AfD. This is directly related to the return of German big power politics and a massive militaristic rearmament exercise. A few weeks ago, at the beginning of December, Gabriel gave a keynote speech on foreign policy in which he pleaded for a turn away from the US and for interest-oriented German great power politics.

In this speech, Gabriel stressed that the time for uncritical subordination to the United States was over. Germany would have to represent its interests in a more self-confident and consistent manner in the future. It was wrong to wait for the decisions in Washington and then respond to them. The German government would have to analyse more coolly where it “crossed swords” with the US and develop a more independent policy toward the US.

Again and again, Gabriel emphasized that German great power politics should not be inhibited by moral values: A “values orientation, as we Germans like to claim for our foreign policy, will certainly not be enough to assert ourselves in this economic, political and militarily egoistic world.”

Now it becomes clear what lies behind these words. The return of German great power politics requires the overcoming of moral inhibitions in all areas and the abolition of democratic structures. As in the last century, great power politics, militarism and war preparations can only be pushed through if the most reactionary elements of society are mobilised against the working class based on right-wing racist and nationalist campaigns.

The SPD is placing itself at the head of this campaign and is adopting the politics of the AfD. Gabriel shamelessly says that he speaks for those who have “advanced” in society. “The majority of us have also made their social advancement,” he writes in *Der Spiegel*, and no longer live in the districts in which many SPD voters live.

Then he makes fun of those who expect the SPD to turn to the left. “If I wanted to be ‘redder’, then I do not mean primarily the sometimes folkloristic debate about whether the SPD should become more ‘left-wing’,” he writes, adding that this quickly becomes exhausted in “classical instrumental questions about redistribution.” It is not about redistribution but about identity, he says. Gabriel’s colour is the blue of the AfD.

On this basis, Gabriel calls for forming a grand coalition with the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union, and leaves no doubt that he wants to take a leading position in such a coming government.

The Left Party supports this course. Two weeks ago, on the occasion of Gabriel’s foreign policy speech, the leader of the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch said, “I expressly welcome it, if Germany wants to take another course in

regard to US policy. It is high time that the moral cowardice stops regarding the United States, that Germany confidently plays a role in the world, in the European context.”

Everyone knows the consequences of this policy and knows where it went the last time the German “master race” played a “self-confident role in the world.”

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is the only party that opposes this rapid development to the right. It confirms how correct the SGP’s warning was of a political conspiracy taking place within the framework of the talks about the formation of a new government.

When negotiations failed a few weeks ago over a “Jamaica coalition,” named after the party colours of the Christian Democrats, Free Democrats and the Greens, the SGP called for new elections. “The ruling elites cannot be allowed to resolve the political crisis and establish a new government among themselves,” wrote the SGP at that time. “The result would be a right-wing, authoritarian regime beyond any democratic control and beholden to the interests of the capitalist state.”

Gabriel’s call for the adoption of AfD policies confirms this warning. Under these conditions, the demand for new elections gains burning actuality. “Under present conditions, this is the only way in which the working class can intervene into political events, bring their interests to bear and combat the far right’s political offensive,” the SGP statement of November 23 said. The “SGP would utilize the election campaign to fight for a programme that expresses the interests of the German and international working class, connecting the struggle against war with the fight against capitalism, and provide a socialist way out of the blind alley in which the current social order finds itself.”



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