

The fight against the far-right Alternative for Germany requires a socialist perspective

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality
28 May 2018

The SEP and IYSSE distributed the following statement at demonstrations in Berlin on Sunday against the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), which held its own national demonstration in the city. Tens of thousands of workers, youth and professionals took part in the counter-demonstrations, which dwarfed the pro-fascist rally.

Tens of thousands are protesting today in Berlin against the Alternative for Germany (AfD) because they want to oppose the nationalism and racism of the right-wing extremists. The fascist politics that led to the most terrible crimes in human history must never again prevail! The barbarism and catastrophes of the past must not be repeated!

Many ask in horror how it can be that the extreme right is marching again in Berlin, of all places.

The answer requires a Marxist understanding of politics and history. Like the rise of the Nazis, the AfD is not an accident. Under conditions of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the eruption of wars around the world, and the growth of conflicts between the major powers, the extreme right is being promoted by the ruling class to impose its deeply unpopular policies—militarism, the expansion of the powers of the state at home and abroad, and massive social cuts. Without an understanding of this context, it is impossible to fight the AfD.

The fact that the fight against the right-wing extremists cannot be oriented to the capitalist state and its parties, but requires the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective, is demonstrated by the origins of the leading AfD politicians. Many are recruited directly from the state apparatus—mainly from the military, the judiciary and the police—or previously belonged to an establishment party.

AfD Chairman Alexander Gauland was a high-ranking official of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) for 40 years before he founded the AfD in 2013. Guido Reil, one of the organizers of today's AfD march, is a member of the IG BCE mining, chemicals and energy union and was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for 26 years before joining the AfD two years ago. Georg Pazderski, chairman

of the AfD in Berlin, is a former colonel in the Bundeswehr (armed forces).

The extreme-right dares to raise its head so provocatively because the grand coalition government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, and the other parties in the Bundestag (parliament), have largely adopted their programme. In her inaugural government statement last week, Chancellor Angela Merkel pledged once again to implement NATO's target for military spending of 2 percent of the gross domestic product—that is, to increase the military budget from the current €37 billion to more than €70 billion by 2024.

At the same time, she conspicuously praised the so-called “anchor centres” advocated by Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union—CSU), where asylum seekers are kept locked up prior to deportation. It is, she explained, about “creating a functioning culture of repatriation in Germany. Those who do not have the right to stay, have to leave.”

The right-wing agenda of the grand coalition is supported by the Left Party and the Greens. At several points during her speech, Merkel was applauded by the Left Party and Green Party deputies as well as those from the government parties. The parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, pleaded for “an independent and confident European foreign policy” and spouted crude anti-Americanism to the applause of the AfD. The AfD had previously adopted Wagenknecht's notorious anti-immigrant slogan: “Whoever abuses our hospitality has no right to our hospitality.”

There is hardly a political demand or statement of the AfD that has not been echoed by a representative of the establishment parties. The fascistic hate speech against “headscarf girls” and “other good-for-nothings” delivered last week by AfD parliamentary group leader Alice Weidel in the Bundestag could have come from the Social Democratic Party's Thilo Sarrazin. In an interview in 2009, the former finance minister in the Berlin state government stated, “I do not have to recognize anyone who lives off the

state, rejects that state, does not care for his children's education, and constantly produces new little headscarf girls."

The "180-degree turn" in Germany's attitude to the Second World War demanded by Björn Höcke, on the far-right of the AfD, in his notorious Dresden speech is the outcome of a process long underway. In early 2014, a systematic revision of history began. As then-President Joachim Gauck and members of the government announced the return of German militarism at the Munich Security Conference, an article titled "Culpability Question Divides Historians Today" appeared in *Der Spiegel*. The article argued for a reassessment of German guilt in the First and Second World Wars, citing two well-known professors at Berlin's Humboldt University, Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski.

Münkler, a government foreign policy adviser, described as "outrageous" the claim that Germany bore major blame for World War I. He had previously given the reason for this historical revision in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: "It is difficult to conduct a responsible policy in Europe with the notion that we are to blame for everything. In relation to 1914, that is a legend."

Baberowski, who also has close ties to high government circles and the military, downplayed the crimes of the Nazis during the Second World War. He defended Ernst Nolte, the most famous Nazi apologist among German historians of the post-war era, and declared: "Hitler was no psychopath and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table."

When the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP) and its youth organization, the IYSSE, protested against this scandalous whitewashing of Hitler and the right-wing offensive of which it was a part, they were hit by a storm of slander. In line with the AfD and numerous right-wing publications, the Social Democratic president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, and bourgeois media outlets such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Cicero*, *Die Zeit* and *taz* denounced the SGP and the IYSSE, accusing them of bullying a respected professor.

Now the AfD itself is clarifying the connection between historical revisionism at Humboldt University and the return of German militarism. AfD Chairman Gauland referred directly to Münkler in his Bundestag speech last week demanding the return of Germany to a militaristic and great power foreign policy. He declared, "As a 'power in the middle,' as a mediating power, as Herfried Münkler sees us, Germany must develop a common line for the policies of the Europeans." Then he approvingly quoted Münkler's rejection of a "value-bound" foreign policy from his book on the Thirty Years War.

Baberowski is now known as the organizer of the so-called "right-wing salon," which includes Sarrazin, Gauland's personal adviser Michael Klonovsky, and right-wing journalists such as Dieter Stein (*Young Freedom*), Karlheinz Weißmann (*Cato*) and Frank Böckelmann (*tumult*). At the beginning of this year, this fascistic network, founded in 2015, produced the "Declaration 2018," which denounces alleged "illegal mass immigration" and solidarises itself with xenophobic demonstrations.

The fact that the ruling class is united in defending Baberowski and now adopts the programme of the AfD—xenophobia, militarism and police state measures—demonstrates that social inequality and militarism are incompatible with democracy. Leon Trotsky, the most outstanding Marxist of the 20th century, wrote in 1929 of the rise of National Socialism: "The extreme tension of the international struggle and the class struggle results in the short circuit of the dictatorship, blowing out the fuses of democracy one after the other. ... What is called the crisis of parliamentarism is the political expression of the crisis in the entire system of bourgeois society."

The most important lesson of German history is that the fight against fascism and war is inseparable from the struggle against its cause, capitalism, and against all parties that defend this bankrupt system. The Socialist Equality Party warned four years ago: "The propaganda of the post-war decades—that Germany had learned from the enormous crimes committed by the Nazis, embarked on a peaceful foreign policy and developed a stable democracy—has turned out to be a myth. German imperialism shows itself again, as it has historically developed, in all its aggressiveness, at home and abroad."

The provocative demeanour of the AfD and its integration into the state and official politics show how far this dangerous development has already progressed. To prevent the ruling class from once again pursuing its reactionary goals with fascist methods, an international socialist movement must be built that merges the growing opposition to social inequality, the rise of the far right and war with the fight against capitalism. What is needed is the construction of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International as the new revolutionary mass party of the international working class.



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