Liberal newsweekly Die Zeit defends far-right publishers at Frankfurt Book Fair

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The latest edition of the liberal newsweekly *Die Zeit* exemplifies the manner in which the ruling elite in Germany and its leading media are systematically promoting the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and legitimizing radical right-wing politics. Under the headline "Off in the Corner," *Die Zeit* writer Mariam Lau complains that the Frankfurt Book Fair, which opens its doors to the public today, has "put right-wing publishers on a side table."

Openly expressing her solidarity with the far right, Lau complains that after last year's "turmoil, attacks and police operations around publishers of the New Right," the administrators of the fair have decided to position the publishing house of right-wing weekly *Junge Freiheit*, together with two others, "in a kind of tube," a "dead end on the edge of Hall 4.1, which is used for antiquarian booksellers."

She adds that *Junge Freiheit* editor Dieter Stein was "certain" that the aim was to "bully" and suppress his publication. And publisher Götz Kubitschek, one of Germany's leading right-wing ideologues, had "already drawn conclusions" and decided to stay away from the book fair this year.

The mantra of the extreme right as a kind of persecuted and oppressed minority turns reality on its head. In fact, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and other right-wing extremist organizations receive massive support from the highest levels of the state apparatus—not only from the secret service and the police, but also from the government and the establishment parties, whose policies are adapted to the demagogy of the far-right. At this year's Frankfurt Book Fair, two extreme right-wing figures are prominently represented: Björn Höcke of the extreme nationalist and völkisch wing of the AfD, and the social democratic racist Thilo Sarrazin.

The vast majority of the population is appalled that far-right publishers, purveyors of eugenics such as Sarrazin and open fascists such as Höcke are even given the opportunity to spread their hate speech at one of the major international book fairs. But if it were up to Lau, the right-wing radicals would not only be given a more central place at the fair, any protest against them would be prohibited.

She writes: "People want to 'show attitude,' as they did last year when members of the trade association carried signs 'Against Racism' and for 'Freedom and Diversity' through the halls." This "form of discursive hygiene from above" is irritating," she complains, "especially with regard to *Junge Freiheit* ."

Lau tries to palm off *Junge Freiheit* as "moderate," fully aware of the type of filth this house organ of the extreme right has been unleashing since its founding in 1986. "There are undoubtedly aggressive appeals against multi-culturalism, the legacy of 1968, Merkel's refugee policy and contemporary education policies," she writes. "This newspaper is on the extreme right and is national-conservative. Nor does it come without a declaration of hostility."

In fact, it promotes representatives of the völkisch-nationalist wing of the AfD such as Höcke.

Lau's brief for far-right publications and her embrace of their vocabulary ("discourse hygiene") comes as no surprise. Last year in Die Zeit she defended right-wing extremist Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski, who wrote that "Hitler was not vicious," making common cause with his relativization and belittling of Nazi crimes. And a few weeks ago under the headline "Or should you let it be?" she argued for an end to private refugee rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Before saving people from drowning, those involved should think about how

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Italy would “dress, shelter and nourish thousands of people,” Lau wrote.

This barely concealed call to let people drown triggered a storm of indignation. Even the *Die Zeit* editorial board had to apologize for the article. On the other hand, Lau was celebrated by the right-wing extremist publications she now openly promotes. “The text is modest in form and in substance” and “offers a long-overdue debate,” commented *Junge Freiheit*. “If a high-profile *Zeit* journalist raises… the voice of political reason, that provides a glimmer of hope.”

Lau’s article and her alliance with the far right underscore the shift to the right in the official media and in academia. In his 1933 article “What is National Socialism?” Leon Trotsky described masterfully how the German university professors followed in “Hitler’s wake with all sails unfurled, once his victory was sufficiently clear.” So too today, a whole layer of petty-bourgeois scribblers and “intellectuals” are enchanted by the extreme right and its nationalist and racist agitation.

A particularly disgusting example is the *Spiegel* columnist and *Freitag* editor Jakob Augstein. Augstein celebrates the latest contribution of AfD Chairman Alexander Gauland in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as “a sage text about the German—and the Western—misery.” This follows articles making clear that the “sage text” is largely borrowed from a speech by Adolf Hitler!

In another commentary, under the headline “Dread and Knowledge,” Augstein pleads openly for a radical right-wing government in Germany. “The fixation on the right wing stifles politics,” he writes. “The AfD must co-govern.” Democracy, he continues, is “not just what one likes, but what is possible and what is needed. If in polls nearly 20 percent vote for a party, that must be reflected in politics.”

Augstein's commentary speaks volumes about an entire milieu that is politically corrupt to the bone. The multi-millionaire *Spiegel* heir, who personifies like no other the right-wing turn of the Social Democratic Party, Left Party and Greens, has drawn the conclusion that an AfD government is ultimately best placed to protect his wealth against the mounting social and political opposition of workers and young people, and to re-militarize Germany after two lost world wars.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) is presenting the book *Why are they back? Historical falsification, political conspiracy and the return of fascism in Germany* at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The book shows in detail how the rise of the AfD was ideologically and politically prepared by professors, the media and the bourgeois political parties. The author, SGP Deputy Chairman Christoph Vandreier, has played a leading role in the fight against the right-wing offensive. In the book, he explains why this struggle requires a socialist perspective.

Vandreier writes in the foreword: “The book is written not from the standpoint of a neutral observer, but as a contribution to the struggle against the return of militarism and fascism. It is to help ensure that this time, the Nuremberg Trials are conducted before the catastrophe occurs, and not afterwards.” Alongside fascists like Gauland and Höcke, their enablers such as Lau and Augstein also belong in the dock!

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