

Far-right Alternative for Germany sets the tone for German Grand Coalition government

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Last Thursday's debate in the Bundestag (federal parliament) was a particularly odious spectacle. In the face of increasing transatlantic tensions, the acute danger of war in the Middle East, and growing opposition to social inequality and militarism, the German ruling class demonstrated once again that it is moving further to the right ahead of the European elections.

Politicians from all parliamentary groups celebrated the 70th anniversary of the "Basic Law," as Germany's post-war constitution is called, and hypocritically paid lip service to "democracy," "peace" and "human rights." Only a short time later Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) came to the podium to present his latest anti-refugee law.

Even the name of the bill, "Orderly Return Law," recalls the darkest times in German history. The law means that rejected asylum seekers will be regulated, interned and deported en masse even more brutally. The law overrides basic democratic rights and treats rejected asylum seekers like criminals. Among other things, the bill provides for "refugees required to leave the country" to be placed in regular prisons. To this end, the separation requirement between prisoners and deportees is to be suspended.

With the legislative package, the grand coalition government of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) is implementing the policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Although the extreme right-wing party received only 12.6 percent of the vote in the last general election and is unlikely to fare much better in the European elections—the latest polls forecast it will achieve 12 percent—it sets the direction of the grand coalition in refugee policy.

In the Bundestag, Seehofer explained in the best AfD

manner, "We are improving the prerequisites considerably, so that the obligation to leave the country can be enforced." "Deportation custody and exit custody" were "indispensable tools" to "eliminate" obstacles to mass deportations. In this context, "the grounds for detention would be extended" and additional detention places created. "We must and want to remedy this deficiency by suspending the separation obligation of prisoners and deportees."

In a fascistic tirade, AfD spokesman Gottfried Curio pushed the xenophobic policy of the grand coalition to the extreme. Although the interior minister had "submitted a law for better deportation"—for example, "deportation detention" was a "necessary instrument to prevent the disappearance of deportees"—there was "a lot of doctoring of the symptoms." The "deportation quotas" were still "ridiculously low," and "without the consistent rejection [of entry] at the border," the "bow wave will continue to grow." Seehofer only wanted "to bail out with a sieve, instead of finally sealing the leak."

The extreme right can only act so aggressively because no one in the political establishment opposes it. SPD spokesman Helge Lind explained that he saw "no alternative to Seehofer's law." Clearly, what only disturbed him in Curio's tirade was "the choice of words." He said cynically, "Especially when we talk about such sensitive issues as 'return and deportation', it makes sense to pay attention to the language."

The speakers for the Left Party and Greens also raised merely verbal objections. In fact, they agree with the anti-refugee course of the grand coalition. Wherever they govern in coalition with the SPD and the CDU, or even head state governments, as with the Greens in Baden-Württemberg and the Left Party in Thuringia, they are responsible for conducting the same massive

and brutal deportations as anywhere else.

When Left Party domestic spokeswoman Ulla Jelpke said in her speech that “about 25,000 people are being deported year after year” and the “federal and state governments have long since implemented deportations with unprecedented brutality,” she was also speaking about the politics of her own party.

The Bundestag debate showed that the ruling class as a whole is not only oriented to the politics of the AfD, but supports the right-wing extremist party ever more openly. The recent attempt to elect AfD candidate Gerold Otten for the post of Bundestag vice president failed again, however. He received 205 “yes” votes and thus 107 more votes than the AfD commands in the Bundestag. Otten is a former member of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and a former professional soldier. According to Wikipedia, he is a colonel in the reserve at the Officers School of the Luftwaffe (air force) in Fürstenfeldbruck.

Attempting to conceal the close collaboration of the ruling class with the AfD at least somewhat, the media prominently reported a short exchange of verbal blows between the Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble and AfD parliamentary deputy Stephan Brandner.

Brandner claimed in his speech that Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) had “openly advertised a left-wing extremist event”—meaning the “rock against the right” concert in Chemnitz following the neo-Nazi riots last September—and had sent “congratulatory letters to inhumane, murderous regimes” such as Iran. Schäuble promptly admonished him with the words, “Herr Brandner, the Federal President is head of state of all of us. If he honours us with his participation in our debate, that is not an opportunity for you to criticize him. Please do not do that!”

Schäuble’s “collegial” criticism cannot hide the fact that the grand coalition is actually cooperating closely with the AfD in its entire domestic and foreign policy in order to implement its reactionary programme against the enormous social and political resistance in the population. For example, the current annual report of the secret service widely bears the imprimatur of the AfD. It defines the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) for the first time as a “left-wing extremist party” and an “object of surveillance,” and criminalizes anyone who conducts a socialist critique of capitalism, militarism and

nationalism. The SGP has filed a lawsuit against the report.

It is well known that the former head of the secret service, Hans-Georg Maassen (CDU) met several times before the publication of the document with leading AfD people, including the party chairman Alexander Gauland and Brandner himself. Brandner owes his office as chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs to the Social Democratic Bundestag vice president Thomas Oppermann, who had proposed him for a secret election.

And before this, with its decision to continue the grand coalition, the SPD consciously made the AfD the official opposition leader in the Bundestag. In this, Steinmeier played a central role; at the end of November 2017, he invited AfD co-chairs Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel to a joint meeting at his presidential residence, Schloss Bellevue. The meeting is documented in images on the Federal Press Office website.



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