

Germany: Tens of thousands demonstrate against nationalism

Our correspondents
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Tens of thousands of people followed Sunday's call by the alliance "A Europe for All: Your Voice Against Nationalism!" and participated in demonstrations in seven German cities. According to the organizers, a total of 150,000 people took to the streets. The police reported significantly lower numbers. In Berlin, where originally 50,000 participants had been expected, there were only 20,000, according to organizers.

"A Europe for All" has been supported by more than 400 initiatives, voluntary associations, trade unions and church organizations, including Campact, ProAsyl, Greenpeace, Attac, the Paritätische Gesamtverband, Naturefriends Youth, Pro Asylum and Pier.

While many came to demonstrate against nationalism and racism and for human rights, democracy and social justice, the main objective of the demonstration organisers was to mobilise support for the European Union and the pro-EU parties—the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party and Left Party—a week before the European elections.

The alliance's call characterised the European elections to be held May 26, 2019 as a "decision on the future direction of the European Union." In order to "prevent the advance of the nationalists," it appealed "to all citizens of Europe: Vote on May 26—oppose nationalism and racism: for a democratic, peaceful and solidary Europe!"

Although the statement does not provide any specific electoral recommendation, the participation of leading representatives of the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party in the demonstrations left no doubt who was meant. In the German government and in the European Union, these parties play a leading role in realizing the very policies that the demonstrations were supposedly opposing.

As a governing party, the SPD supports sealing off Europe's borders to refugees, a massive increase in military spending and the establishment of a European army. The same applies to the Greens on the opposition

benches. Syriza, the sister party of the Left Party, is ruling Greece in coalition with the extreme-right Independent Greeks (ANEL) and has pushed through the EU's brutal austerity programme against the people.

In Cologne, SPD leader Andrea Nahles and the SPD lead candidates Katarina Barley and Udo Bullmann participated in the demonstration. In Berlin, Green Party leader Annalena Baerbock, and the party's lead candidate, Ska Keller, along with Left Party leader Katja Kipping participated.

"We hope that this now gives a push, a pro-European push throughout Europe," commented Nahles on the demo in Cologne.

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD), who together with the fascist Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro recently called for the overthrow of the Venezuelan government, tweeted, "Thank you for this signal. We want Europe for the many—not Europe for the few. A Europe of togetherness—not a Europe against one another. We have to show that at the polls on May 26th."

In Cologne, where, according to the organizers, around 45,000 people gathered, supporters of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) distributed thousands of leaflets titled, "No to war against Iran!" receiving much support for this sentiment.

"This is a very threatening situation. I am afraid that we will meet next time for a demonstration because a new war has started in the Middle East," said Alexandra, a student from Cologne. Some participants also took dozens of leaflets to pass on to friends.

The Socialist Equality Party set up an information stand at the demonstration, where it campaigned for an SGP vote on May 26, and held numerous discussions. Many young people came to the stand and wanted to know where the SGP differed from other parties that call themselves left-wing and socialist, what socialism means and how it can be realized.

Dietmar Gaisenkersting, an SGP candidate in the European elections, said that only an independent movement of the working class could build a socialist society. This required an irreconcilable political struggle against the influence of the SPD, the Left Party and the trade union bureaucracy, which defend capitalism and pushed through the policy of social devastation and the arming of the state at home and abroad against the people. The Fourth International, whose German section is the SGP, was today the only party advocating an international socialist programme, not trying to alleviate the symptoms of an incurable system, but fighting for the overthrow of capitalism, he said.

Gaisenkersting emphasized that the SGP rejected the European Union as the instrument of domination of the most powerful banks and corporations and fought for the United Socialist States of Europe.

On self-made posters, Marco and Ulla from Cologne denounced the official refugee policy and big business lobbying, the lack of transparency and the power of the banks and corporations and spoke out against racism.

When they saw that the SGP was fighting for the release of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, they were very interested. “It can’t be that Assange is extradited to a country where he faces torture and the death penalty,” Ulla said indignantly. She had a high opinion of “all those who rebel against the powerful and those in power.” She said, “Whether resistance fighters in the Third Reich or journalists and whistle-blowers today like Assange and Manning: You would have to put them on a pedestal.”

Lara, who is studying in Aachen to become an environmental engineer, barely knew where to start when asked about the reasons for her participation in the demonstration. “You have to stand up for democracy, social justice and such like. That right-wing governments in Europe, such as in Poland or Hungary, are in power is already extreme. I also find it completely incomprehensible that refugees are simply left to drown in the Mediterranean, that you look away.”

Lara believes that “people are becoming more political, also because the far-right are acting so self-confidently.” This, of course, also has to do with the benevolent media coverage, if you remember, “how they reported about [far-right group] Pegida, that was blatant,” unlike currently on the “Fridays for Future” climate change demos.

“How these were either not reported in the media or played down, was already noticeable,” she said. “Hundreds of thousands of people are demonstrating around the world, and they’re so excited that they’re not

in class. That’s how Germany has been doing politics for years—all we hear about is trivia, instead of discussing why the students are taking to the streets, why they have to skip class.”

At the Berlin demonstration, the WSWs spoke with Jochen, a pensioner who had come to protest against growing nationalism.

The extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) “and the whole far-right are a scandal,” he said. Especially with a “history like Germany,” something like that should not be. In other European countries, such as Italy, where the fascists have also ruled once, more and more right-wingers are coming into governments.

When asked about the role and responsibility of other parties for the rise of the right, he said: “Yes that’s correct. Above all, the Christian Democrats (CDU) have actually adopted the policy of the AfD for a long time and thus justified it. And the SPD is doing the same too.” On the other hand, all the parties had not done anything to oppose the AfD, quite the opposite, they were courting them, he said.

He and probably most of the others on the demonstration wanted “refugees to come here and be well treated. This whole right-wing policy is rejected by most people.” He used to think that the EU could counteract nationalism in Europe, but today he had “little hope that the EU will improve anything.”

In Berlin, in addition to the demonstration “A Europe for All” there was another protest by Berlin artists and representatives of cultural institutions, which marched from the Volksbühne theatre to the Brandenburg Gate. This involved about 5,000 people and was somewhat more critical of the EU.

At the rally, writer Ingo Schulze demanded, “It is not enough to behave in a cosmopolitan and colourful manner and wave the EU flag. Glorification of the EU in its present structure and functioning is just as narrow-minded and wrong as a return to the nation-state.”



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