

German Christian Democrats call for collaboration with the far-right AfD

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9 November 2019

Following the recent election in the state of Thuringia, there is a growing chorus of voices within Germany's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) calling for collaboration with the extreme right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Meanwhile the Left Party, which won the largest vote in the state election and can fill the post of state premier for the next five years (with its state chief Bodo Ramelow), is seeking to form an alliance with the CDU. In this way the entire political spectrum is shifting to the right.

Shortly after the election, the deputy chair of the CDU parliamentary group in Thuringia, Michael Heym, demanded that a three-party coalition of the AfD, CDU and neo-liberal Free Democratic Party, be considered as a feasible alternative government for the state. Such a coalition would in practice have enough seats to govern. In an interview with journalist Gabor Steingart, Heym said that, in his opinion, the AfD was "a conservative party" and were "not all Nazis." He could well imagine a situation in the state parliament where the AfD would "tolerate" a CDU premier.

Meanwhile, 17 other CDU politicians have issued an "Appeal" demanding their party "actively participate in discussions with ALL democratically elected parties in the Thuringia state parliament." This includes, of course, discussions with the AfD.

In the state election the CDU lost a total of 36,000 votes to the far right AfD, which gained 23.4 percent of the vote and came second behind the Left Party. Now 17 leading CDU politicians are demanding "open-ended" talks with the AfD. According to the appeal, "a liberal society could not afford to ignore almost a quarter of the votes in these discussions."

The CDU functionaries issued a pro forma acknowledgement that their party should not form a coalition with either the Left Party or the AfD, but at the same time criticised the "haste to exclude," which "led to

a very difficult constellation for forming a government in Thuringia." Heym had "analysed the situation very correctly. We therefore expect the state executive to stand by him."

The Thuringia AfD is headed by Björn Höcke, the main spokesperson for the party's openly neo-fascist grouping, "The Wing" ("Der Flügel"). On Wednesday, Höcke responded to the offer from the CDU ranks and offered to support a CDU-led minority government.

In a letter to the state leaders of the CDU and FDP, Höcke proposed "talking together about new forms of cooperation." "An expert government sponsored by our parties, or a minority government supported by my party, would be a viable alternative to "a continuation of the status quo," i.e., the state's former Left Party-Social Democratic Party (SDP)-Green (so-called Red-Red-Green) administration, the letter read.

CDU General Secretary Paul Ziemniak called the proposal by the 17 politicians "crazy" and rejected any cooperation with the AfD as a "betrayal of our Christian Democratic values." This talk, however, is mainly directed at an upcoming CDU party congress, where intense conflicts are expected to dominate. In fact, the CDU has been preparing to cooperate with the AfD for some time and has contributed significantly to boosting the far-right party's prospects.

In particular, the ultra-conservative "Union of Values" faction inside the CDU favours political rapprochement with the AfD. Its most prominent member is the former head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency, Hans-Georg Maaßen, who personally intervened in the state elections in both Saxony and Thuringia to the applause of enthusiastic AfD supporters.

Friedrich Merz, the candidate of the Union of Values in the current struggle for the CDU leadership, has also called upon the party to open itself up to the far right. Merz blamed the "grotesquely bad" policies of the federal

government for the CDU defeat in Thuringia. “We are losing sections of the German army (Bundeswehr) and the federal police to the AfD,” he told the *Bild* newspaper. Merz is a lobbyist for one of the world’s largest asset managers, BlackRock, and heads the company’s German subsidiary.

It is not only the right wing in the CDU that promotes the AfD. The German federal government—a coalition of the CDU and SPD—has largely taken over the far-right AfD program with regard to immigration policy and military rearmament, entrusting the AfD in turn with the leadership of the German parliament’s committees for budget, law and tourism.

The AfD is also intertwined with the state apparatus. There are proportionally more civil servants, police and soldiers in AfD factions in state governments than in any other party. At the same time, the AfD is publicly demonstrating its fascist character in Thuringia.

According to a court ruling, AfD state spokesman Höcke can be described as a “fascist.” In September 2018 he marched together with Brandenburg neo-Nazi and AfD member Andreas Kalbitz at the head of a far-right mob in the city of Chemnitz. The mob harassed foreigners along the way and a Jewish restaurant was attacked.

Following the election in Thuringia, Höcke announced his “Deportation Initiative 2020” after being asked what he would do first in the event of entering the state government. He had previously demanded a “large-scale emigration project” to “forestall the impending death of our people [*Volk*] due to population exchange.” The measure would “involve a policy of tempered cruelty.” For his part Alexander Gauland, the leader of the AfD, described the period of Nazi rule in Germany as just a “speck of bird shit in over 1,000 years of successful German history.”

Research has shown that the AfD was not, as many claim, voted for by the “unemployed, the poor and the hungry.” Taking into account abstentions, only about 10 percent of voters in the prefabricated housing districts of Erfurt, where voter turnout was extremely low, voted for the far-right party, compared to a national average of 15.5 percent.

The Left Party also bears considerable responsibility for the AfD’s rise to prominence. The politics of its party leader Ramelow did not differ from those of other state premiers. Thuringia has been just as brutal in regard to its refugee and deportation policies as other states and has repeatedly deported young people to war-torn Afghanistan.

As far as police rearmament is concerned, the budget already adopted for 2020 allocates more than half a billion euros for domestic security, including more than 320 million for improved police equipment. “We want well-motivated police who like to perform their duties in Thuringia,” asserts the Thuringia Left Party’s website. The state’s CDU predecessor government had “repeatedly starved the police of funding.”

The state government has also taken up the proposal of the federal defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) to make public vows to the Bundeswehr “in early November as a sign of recognition for the soldiers.” In Thuringia, the vow will take place on November 7. Ramelow had earlier thanked German troops for their help in “coping with the refugee crisis” of 2015.

As for the secret services, Ramelow dropped his earlier demand for the dissolution of the country’s domestic intelligence service (BfV) even prior to taking office, although the agency had been spying on him for years.

Following the election, the Left Party has moved further to the right. While it was still celebrating its “historic victory in Thuringia,” Ramelow had declared his willingness to “speak with all democrats”: “Let us also explore what common powers exist in parliament.”

In Thuringia, the party had repeatedly managed to pull in the same direction on crucial issues “across all party-political lines” the premier declared. Already before the election, Ramelow stressed, with an eye to CDU leader Mike Mohring, that he was not scared “to discuss topics with a CDU party and faction leader.” Ramelow expressed his pleasure in going hiking with Mohring.

These developments make clear that it is pointless to rely on so-called “democratic” parties to fight the danger from the far right. Only an independent movement of the working class can stop its rise. Such a movement must address the cause of the shift to the right—the crisis of the capitalist system and the bankruptcy of the “left” parties—and take up the struggle for a socialist alternative.



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