Sound the alarm! Political conspiracy and the resurgence of fascism in Germany

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Last week's decision of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) in the federal state of Thuringia to collaborate with the extreme right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the selection of a governor exposes the filthy state of German politics. Seventy-five years after the collapse of the Third Reich, a party led by apologists for Hitler and out-and-out Nazis is accepted by the ruling elite as a legitimate political partner.

The rise of the political right in Germany during the past decade has been among the least covered stories in the international media. But in the aftermath of the events in Thuringia, even the *New York Times* has come to recognize that the resurgence of German fascism as a significant political force cannot be ignored. In an article in its edition of February 7, the *Times* wrote:

> Sometimes, it takes an earthquake to reveal what's below the surface.
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> In the eastern German state of Thuringia this week a regional election displayed the disastrous state of Germany's political center—and how far the country now stands from the anti-fascist consensus it proclaims to maintain.
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> The Weimar Republic, Germany's first, short-lived experience of democracy until it was abolished by the Nazis, has become a popular reference point in the current Germany.

The *Times* acknowledged that the collaboration of the CDU and FDP with the AfD "broke a taboo that has been in place in German politics since the end of the Nazi era. Mr. Kemmerich [of the FDP] became the first high-ranking German politician since World War II to be elected by relying on votes from a far-right party."

The decision of the CDU and FDP to collaborate with the AfD, the *Times* continued,

> is especially worrying in Thuringia, where the AfD is not only the second strongest party in the regional parliament, but also more extreme than in any other state. The AfD's boss there, Björn Höcke, is the leader of a hard-line movement inside the party known as "Der Flügel"—The Wing. In a 2018 book, he warned of the "coming death of the nation through population replacement." Last year, a court ruled that he could legally be termed a fascist.

The *Times* concluded:

> For the far right, this week has been an outstanding success. AfD's leaders have long predicted—and hoped for – a convergence between centrist and conservative parties. On Wednesday, when shaking hands to congratulate the newly elected Thuringia governor, Mr. Höcke smiled. The scene reminded many Germans of a famous picture from 1933 in which Adolf Hitler greets Paul von Hindenburg, Germany's president at the time.
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> Germany in 2020 is not Germany in 1933. But German politics have shifted in recent years in a disturbing way. Centrists and the far right share talking points on immigration. They share what they perceive as a common enemy in the left. And now, for the first time in decades, they even share a governor.

Readers of the *Times*, having previously read or heard almost nothing in the media about the existence of a serious neo-Nazi revival in Germany, might be led to believe that the events in Thuringia are a sudden and unforeseen development.

This is far from the case. The events confirm the persistent warnings of the German Trotskyists of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), published in numerous articles posted on the *World Socialist Web Site.* The political manoeuvring in Thuringia—the very state that played a major role in the growth of Hitlerism—is the outcome of a political conspiracy involving all the main parties of the German political establishment, unfolding for more than five years, to actively encourage and legitimize the growth of a neo-Nazi political movement.

The use of the word "conspiracy" in explaining the rise of the AfD is entirely appropriate. The major difference between the AfD and the Nazis of the 1920s and 1930s is that this modern-day fascistic organization is not based on a mass movement. Arising out of a split with the CDU and FDP at the beginning of 2013, a large proportion of AfD members have been recruited directly from the state apparatus—above all from the military, judiciary and police. Most of their personnel were previously members of another establishment party. For example:

• AfD Honorary Chairman Alexander Gauland, who glorifies the Wehrmacht and describes Hitler and the Nazis as merely "bird shit in over 1,000 years of successful German history," was a high-ranking CDU functionary for 40 years.

• Guido Reil, who is a leading AfD deputy in the European Parliament, is a member of the IG BCE industrial trade union and was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for 26 years before joining the AfD in 2016.

• Georg Pazderski, Chairman of AfD Berlin, is a former army officer who served in NATO headquarters, including the United States Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa and with the Allied Joint Force Command Lisbon.

In its efforts to promote the growth of the AfD, the ruling class has been confronted with one fundamental problem. The fascists are hated by the overwhelming majority of the population.

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When the AfD entered the Bundestag (federal parliament) in September 2017 with only 12.6 percent of the votes, there were spontaneous mass protests throughout the country. After the fascist riots in Chemnitz in September 2018, in which the AfD played a central role, hundreds of thousands took to the streets. In Berlin alone, a quarter of a million people demonstrated on October 13, 2018. Spontaneous mass protests against racism and fascist violence also took place after the terrorist attack on the synagogue in Halle last October and most recently following Kemmerich's election in Thuringia.

In the face of massive popular hostility, the elevation of the AfD into positions of power has depended upon the complicity of the major parties. The decisive mechanism for leveraging the influence of the AfD has been the Grand Coalition federal government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats.

After the 2017 elections, all parties in the Bundestag spent more than six months behind closed doors working out the framework for a new government. In the process, far-reaching agreements were reached, particularly regarding the comprehensive remilitarisation of Germany, massive attacks on social and democratic rights, and systematic cooperation with the AfD.

At the end of November 2017, Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier invited the then AfD cochairs Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel to a joint meeting at his official residence, Bellevue Palace. The meeting is documented in pictures from the Federal Press Office. When the Grand Coalition came to power in March 2018, it adopted large portions of the policies of the extreme right and swiftly integrated the AfD into the political system.

The SPD played a key role in this process. As a consequence of the SPD's decision to rule jointly with the CDU, the AfD—though it had received the support of one-eighth of all voters—became the official opposition party. This vastly increased the parliamentary and media presence of the AfD. Gauland and Co. have been able to spread their fascist filth in the media at the beginning of every Bundestag session and during prime time. Notorious right-wing extremists have been hoisted to the top of important parliamentary committees with the support of the SPD.

Accommodating the AfD, the justification of Nazism and the fight against the socialist left—two core issues of the AfD—are an essential component of the Grand Coalition's arsenal. In 2018, the government-mandated report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution [*Verfassungsschutz*], as Germany's secret service is called, cited the SGP as an "object of surveillance" on the grounds of its intransigent opposition to the AfD and imperialist militarism and its advocacy of an anti-capitalist socialist program.

The AfD and "The Wing" are sympathetically referenced by the *Verfassungsschutz* as "victims" of alleged "left-wing extremists". It is a matter of public record that right-wing terrorist networks extend far into the army, police and secret services. They maintain death lists with tens of thousands of targets. Their activities are largely ignored by the German state even after the murder of prominent CDU politician Walter Lübcke on June 2, 2019. It is widely suspected that Lübcke was murdered because of his criticisms of the AfD. Within a few weeks, reporting on the assassination of a high-ranking politician was dropped by the media.

The politically spineless Left Party [*Die Linke*]—which hangs on to the coattails of the SPD—is reacting to developments in Thuringia with yet another cowardly shift to the right. It is not only courting the CDU, but also indicating that it is prepared to collaborate with the AfD.

There is another critical element in the rise of the AfD and the deliberate legitimization of neofascist politics in Germany. In order to overcome the resistance of the population to the revival of militarism and authoritarianism, there is an effort among German academics to create a new historical narrative based on ferocious anti-Marxism, the trivialization of Nazi crimes, and the rehabilitation of Hitler.

The central role in this insidious process has been played by the administration of Humboldt University in Berlin, which has provided unstinting institutional support for Professor Jörg Baberowski, the head of its Department of East European Studies. Baberowski is notorious for his lying claims that "Hitler was not vicious" and that the *Führer* did not want to know anything about Auschwitz and the mass extermination of the Jews.

The university's president, Sabine Kunst, a former functionary of the SPD, has declared that criticism of Baberowski is "unacceptable." Even after Baberowski, who conducts himself in the manner of a Nazi gauleiter, physically attacked a left-wing student at the university—an event captured on video and viewed on YouTube more than 20,000 times (see video)—Kunst refused to permit criticism of Baberowski.

With the support he has received from Humboldt University, Baberowski has become an increasingly prominent political figure. He is scheduled to deliver a major speech at a public event commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the collapse of the Third Reich. He will, with high-level political support, utilize the opportunity to deliver an anti-communist tirade.

The political situation in Germany demands the attention of the European, American and international working class. In the light of history, it is impossible to adopt a complacent attitude toward the resurgence of neo-Nazism in Germany.

However, there is a fundamental and profound difference between the situation that exists today and that of the 1930s. Fascism is by no means a mass movement in Germany. There exists among masses of German workers, students, artists and intellectuals an intense hatred of the Nazi past and all those who trivialize its crimes. All over Germany, there are memorials that recall the crimes of the Nazis and honour the memory of its millions of victims. The horrors of the Third Reich are deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the German people.

At the same time, the intellectual and political traditions of Marxism are rooted profoundly in the culture of the country, despite all the efforts of the official parties, corrupt media and academic mandarins to eradicate them. One can be certain that the bicentenary of Friedrich Engels' birth in November 1820 will be warmly commemorated throughout Germany.

But the very absence of mass support accentuates one striking and dangerous similarity to the political process that led to the victory of the Nazis in 1933, and that is the element of conspiratorial activity within the political establishment to strengthen the extreme right. This process—and its reactionary consequences—have been exposed by the events in Thuringia.

The only party that consistently fights against the growth of the AfD and the return of fascism and militarism in Germany and internationally is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. Its warnings have been confirmed. As SGP leader Christoph Vandreier wrote in his invaluable exposure of the political conspiracy underlying the rise of the AfD:

> The AfD has neither a mass base of support nor combat-ready units like Hitler's SA (storm troopers) which recruited its members among uprooted war veterans, socially ruined members of the petty bourgeoisie, and despairing unemployed workers. The AfD's strength arises exclusively out of the support it receives from political parties, the media, the government, and the state apparatus.

As is the case throughout the world, a process of political radicalization is underway in Germany. The events in Thuringia, which have shocked the public, will accelerate this process. But its timely and politically

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conscious development requires the building of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* and the International Committee of the Fourth International as a revolutionary party of the German and international working class.

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