Hesse, Germany: Right-wing extremist propaganda at state expense

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24 February 2020

Shortly before the right-wing extremist terrorist attack in Hanau February 19, the Hesse state government sent posters to all schools slandering opponents of fascism and capitalism as "left-wing extremists."

The poster series, "Enlightened instead of autonomous," aimed at 9th and 10th grade students, could have been designed at the party headquarters of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). It is a work of anti-communist propaganda. It shows how the establishment parties are systematically creating a political climate boosting the AfD and encouraging right-wing extremist perpetrators of violence. No matter how many people are murdered by fascists, "The enemy is on the left!" runs their motto.

Of the 10 posters claiming to educate pupils about "extremism," eight are devoted exclusively to "left-wing extremism." The topics range from anti-fascism, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, to anti-globalisation, anarchy and autonomous currents and socialism.

As an example of alleged "left-wing extremism," poster 9 ("Anti-capitalism and left-wing extremism") quotes the statement that capitalism is "responsible for poverty and hunger, for social inequality and exploitation, for environmental destruction and war."

"Left-wing extremism" is also represented by the demands to "overcome capitalism, nationalize the banks, insurance companies and media, radically redistribute income and wealth from top to bottom, or from rich to poor" and to "abolish private property," the poster reads. "Such a radical upheaval of property relations," it says, "would violate the Basic Law, as the German constitution is called".

Poster 8 ("Anti-fascism") condemns "left-wing extremist anti-fascism," which it identifies with the slogan "Behind fascism is capital—the struggle for liberation is international". Thus, only a "democratic anti-fascism," which does not question the existing capitalist social order is permissible.

"Left-wing extremists have their own conception of what and who is a fascist," it continues. "For them, fascism is an extreme form of capitalism. For them, anti-fascism is not only the action against 'Nazis,' but also the struggle against the democratic constitutional state and capitalism ..." Anti-fascism serves the "left-wing extremists" as justification for actions against "other parties and their politicians," against "scientists who come to results that do not fit into the extreme left-wing world view," etc.

It continues in this style. In order to emphasize anti-communism, socialism is consistently equated with Stalinism. Any criticism of capitalism, be it of the consequences of globalisation, social inequality, war and right-wing violence, is synonymous with "left-wing extremism."

After numerous teachers complained about the poster series to the German Trade Union for Education and Science (GEW), the union commissioned two experts, didactics professor Martina Tschirner from Goethe University and high school teacher Dr. Christoph Bauer, to produce a scientific report. The result is devastating.

"The material to be evaluated—'Enlightened instead of autonomous'—clearly shows itself to be scientifically, pedagogically and didactically untenable," says the 22-page expert report. "There is no trace of critical reflection, independent judgement and scientific orientation." The two experts conclude, "In our view, the material should be removed from schools immediately."

The experts' criticism is directed against the concept

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of extremism presented by the poster series, which was directly adopted from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as the German secret service is called. “The texts and design of the posters are so close to the publications of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution that one is inclined to call the poster series a didactic and illustrated report on the secret service,” write Tschirner and Bauer. “Socialist ideas of an egalitarian (equitable) society are equated with clearly racist ideas that glorify National Socialism [Nazism].”

This is correct. Some of the poster texts are taken almost literally from the 2017 Annual Report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, for which its then head Hans-Georg Maassen was responsible. Maassen had to resign later because he defended a right-wing extremist march in Chemnitz. Since then, he has openly promoted the politics of the AfD as the figurehead of the so-called Christian Democratic “Union of Values.”

The 2017 secret service report, for the first time, named the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) as a “left-wing extremist party” and “object of surveillance.” It did so exclusively because of the SGP’s socialist policies. Its agitation, according to the secret service in its justification, is directed “against the existing state and social order, which is generally denigrated as ‘capitalism,’ against the EU [European Union], against supposed nationalism, imperialism and militarism.” The Verfassungsschutz (secret service) does not accuse the SGP of any violations of the law.

At another point, the secret service denounced the view as “left-wing extremist” that “capitalism” was responsible for “all social and political grievances such as social injustice, ‘destruction’ of housing, wars, right-wing extremism and racism, as well as environmental disasters.”

In August 2018, the SGP warned that the decision to attack it had been taken at the highest levels of government. The grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) has reacted to growing resistance to its right-wing policies by strengthening extreme right-wing forces: “The attack by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution ... is aimed at the SGP, but targets anyone who is fighting against social inequality, militarism and oppression and who advocates a socialist perspective,” the SGP cautioned.

The Hanau killings, the latest in a long line of fascistic terrorist attacks, has confirmed this warning. Seventy-five years after Hitler’s death, fascists in Germany are raising their heads again—not because they have mass support, but because they are encouraged and supported by the state and the establishment parties.

The Hesse state legislature, a coalition of the CDU and Green Party, is responsible for the poster series “Enlightened instead of autonomous.” The propaganda has been financed by the Ministry of the Interior and distributed by the Hesse Centre of Competence against Extremism (HKE). Four ministries—the CDU-led ministries of the interior, culture and justice and the Green Party-led Ministry of Social Affairs—as well as the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the State Office of Criminal Investigation and the Hesse State Centre for Political Education are represented in the HKE steering group.

The Hesse CDU has a long, right-wing past. Alexander Gauland held leading positions in it for 40 years before founding the AfD in 2013 and becoming its leader. Volker Bouffier, the current Hesse state premier, covered up the involvement of the secret service in the murder series carried out by the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) as Hesse’s state interior minister, and to this day keeps the relevant files, which could also provide information about the murder of Kassel’s District President Walter Lübcke, under lock and key.

The Greens, who have been coalition partners of the CDU in Hesse for six years, have no problem supporting a policy that gives the AfD a boost and leads to racist terror, as in Hanau. They too are a right-wing, bourgeois party, which, in the face of growing dissatisfaction and opposition, supports stepping up the repressive powers of the state and militarism.

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