

Representatives from Germany's parliamentary parties support far-right protests against coronavirus policies

Christoph Vandreier**23 May 2020**

The current series of demonstrations in Germany against coronavirus measures follow the pattern of earlier protests organised against refugees by the racist Pegida movement: a few thousand far-right extremists are cultivated and falsely described as "concerned citizens" in order to enforce a policy rejected by the vast majority of the population. In similar fashion these protests are being used to drum up support for the reckless policy of easing pandemic restrictions and intimidate all opposition.

The marches are clearly dominated by the far right. In some cities, they have been officially registered by representatives of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) or other right-wing extremists. In Gera, Thuringia, the far-right-winger Marek H. called for a demonstration in the city and notorious neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists have played a significant role in all of the demonstrations organised so far. On display at the protests alongside numerous German flags were ultra nationalist Reichsbanner flags, and protesters shouted out far-right slogans.

Bavarian Radio has reported on numerous regionally organised, closed chat groups of self-proclaimed "Corona rebels" who attend the weekly demonstrations dominated by far-right extremists. The Nuremberg group, for example, discussed taking along baseball bats to the protests as an "opinion booster." The group in Bavaria has 5,000 members, according to the state broadcaster.

At last weekend's central rally in Stuttgart attended by participants from all over Germany, its organisers sought to put on a friendly face. Rainbow flags were placed in front of the stage to cover the Reichsbanner flags waving in the background. The speeches from the stage were translated simultaneously into sign language, etc., etc.

The content of the rally, however, was clear. In his speech to the crowd two weekends ago, Ken Jebson, a

spokesman for extreme right-wing conspiracy theories with his own Youtube channel, downplayed the crimes of the Nazis and pumped out German nationalism. Last weekend, the podium was moderated by the entertainer Nana Domena.

Domena has for years worked closely with one of the central representatives of the German neo-Nazi scene, Frank Kraemer. Kraemer is a guitarist in the neo-Nazi band Stahlgewitter, which venerates Hitler, spreads racism and incites violence. Domena shares an internet program with this neo-Nazi and regularly invites other far-right extremists to propagate their ideology of hate. Domena is a black Afro-German and serves as a frontman and fig leaf for this fascist video mob. He played the same role in Stuttgart last Saturday.

The extreme right-wing protests are overwhelmingly rejected by the mass of the population. According to a recent poll by the research group Wahlen, 81 percent of Germans reject the demonstrations by the coronavirus deniers. Only 16 percent have a positive view of them. In addition, the already small number of a few thousand demonstrators two weeks ago dropped again last Saturday. In Frankfurt and Berlin, the number of counterdemonstrators far exceeded those attending the far-right protests.

Despite this, the German media has devoted massive detailed coverage to the protests. As was the case with the Pegida marches, government agencies are also involved. Germany's domestic intelligence service, The Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which shares close links to the milieu of the far right, declared that the demonstrations were "mostly carried out by constitutionally loyal citizens."

High-ranking representatives from all of the parties represented in the Bundestag have also given their support

to the coronavirus protests and distorted their content. In Dresden, the state premier of Saxony, Michael Kretschmer (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who governs in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, personally addressed a few hundred demonstrators—to engage them in discussion, as he said. The fact that he was not wearing a face mask and disregarded rules for maintaining distance was quite rightly perceived by many demonstrators as an act of solidarity and applauded.

The head of the Green faction in the Saxony parliament, Franziska Schubert, had attended a demonstration in the state a week earlier. She carried a sign bearing the message: “Ready to talk.” After the protest, Schubert told the newspaper *Die Zeit* she was against “blanket judgments” and “did not believe that political circles were doing everything right.” The demonstrators should not be treated “with condescension,” Schubert declared.

On the same Saturday, the former premier of the state of Thuringia, Thomas Kemmerich (Free Democratic Party, FDP), also took part in a far-right demonstration in the town of Gera. Like Kretschmer, he did not wear a face mask and did not comply with distance rules. Kemmerich, who had formed a government majority in the state with the AfD and CDU in February, did not even try to pretend he wanted to simply engage with participants—he marched alongside them.

Members of the SPD and Left Party also took part in the demonstrations last Saturday as speakers on the podium. Wolfgang Wodarg, who sat in the Bundestag for the SPD until 2009 and was a member of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for even longer, declared that the COVID-19 pathogen SARS-CoV-2 was less dangerous than flu viruses. “If we did not have the test, we would not notice anything,” the SPD politician stated, to the thunderous applause of those present.

In Aachen, the deputy parliamentary group leader of the Left Party in the Bundestag, Andrej Hunko, spoke to about a hundred participants. “I don’t want anything to do with genuine right-wing extremists or people who believe that corona is part of a master plan for the extermination of humanity. But that’s not the majority of people who are taking to the streets,” Hunko said. He failed to clarify what the difference was between “genuine right-wing extremists” and the neo-Nazis attending the corona demonstrations.

Hunko shared the platform in Aachen with speakers such as Ansgar Klein, who had organised an illegal demonstration in the city the previous week. Racist

supporters of Klein at the previous demonstration had hounded and harassed a group defending the rights of refugees, forcing them to quit the protest.

Alongside Hunko and Klein, Annette van Gessel from the online newspaper Rubikon also spoke at the demo. She made the ridiculous claim that the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, was on the phone night and day with multi-billionaires Bill and Melinda Gates. “So it’s not surprising that Angela Merkel has accepted the claim there can be no return to normality without a vaccine,” van Gessel said.

The fact is that the demonstrations against the coronavirus measures are being embraced by representatives of all of Germany’s parliamentary parties because they serve as a useful adjunct to government policy. In the face of all scientific warnings, federal and state governments are risking hundreds of thousands of lives by opening up shops, schools and day-care centres, while ramping up industrial production.

At the end of 2015, the Pegida demonstrations mobilised the far-right dregs of society to intimidate all those who had expressed their solidarity with refugees attempting to enter and stay in Germany, and to enforce the inhumane policies of the German government. At that time a succession of leading German politicians made pilgrimages to the marches and sang their praises.

The same social scum is being mobilised to enforce the policy of a return to work which is rejected by the mass of the population. The ruling class is once again using the backwardness and idiocy of the demonstrators to advance its far-right agenda. All those who oppose the easing of the country’s lockdown policies and is not prepared to risk his or her life for the sake of profits are to be intimidated in this way.

In order to counter this aggressive return-to-work policy, workers must take up a socialist program that focuses on people’s needs. This is the only way to fight the pandemic based on scientific knowledge and rebuff the far right-wing demagogues.



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