

Germany's parliamentary parties elect far-right AfD candidate to Gera city council

Martin Nowak
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The latest developments in the east German city of Gera underline the sharp turn to the right by the ruling class. Last Thursday, a retired doctor and member of the far-right, racist Alternative for Germany (AfD), Reinhard Etzrodt, was elected chairman of the city council in the third largest city in the state of Thuringia. His appointment was the first time in post-war history that a far-right candidate filled such a post. Etzrodt received 23 of 40 votes cast, although the AfD has just 12 seats on the city council. This means the right-wing extremist was elevated into office with the support of Germany's mainstream political parties.

Etzrodt is a leading representative of the "Wing" faction of the AfD in Thuringia led by the Björn Höcke wing and has links to neo-Nazis and far-right terror groups. According to media reports, he took part in the "Thügida" demo in Gera in June 2015. The far-right march was organised by members of the fascist German Democratic Party (NPD) and the "European Action" movement, which has since dissolved. Former cadre of the core cell of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) and activists of the fascist network "Combat 18"—banned at the beginning of 2020—also took part in the protest.

Etzrodt's participation in the march alongside far-right terrorists was no accident but rather reveals the real character of the AfD. Just a few days ago, the party was forced to sack Christian Lüth, the head of the press office of the AfD parliamentary group. Lüth had proudly described himself as a "fascist" in chat discussions and, according to research by the TV station ProSieben, ranted, in the course of a secretly recorded conversation in a bar, that migrants should be "shot or gassed." When asked whether he wanted to bring more migrants to Germany, he replied: "Yes, because it's better for the AfD. We can still shoot them

all afterwards. That's not an issue. Or gas them, whatever you want. I don't care!"

Following Etzrodt's election, all of the establishment parties sought to maintain their hands were clean. The new Thuringian state chair of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Mario Voigt, declared his faction had "clearly agreed not to vote for the AfD candidate," while the Left Party and the Greens accused the CDU of doing exactly that. "If red-red-green did not vote for the AfD candidate, which one can assume, then in terms of arithmetic there must have been votes from the CDU for Etzrodt. So that's clear," declared Daniel Reinhardt, who sits on the Gera city council for the Left Party.

What is "arithmetically" clear is that the fascist candidate received support from the ranks of mainstream parties. There are currently 42 seats divided between 11 parliamentary groups on the Gera city council. The AfD has 12 MPs, the Left Party eight, the CDU six, the Citizenship Gera group three, the alliance "For Gera" three, the Greens three, the SPD three, and one each for the Free Voters, the Liberal Alliance, the neo-liberal FDP and The Party. Even if one assumed—which is unlikely—that all the representatives of smaller factions voted for the AfD, Etzrodt would still have received only 21 votes. In other words: at least two pro-AfD votes came from mainstream parties with representation in the German parliament.

There are some indications that the votes may have come from the CDU and FDP. In November 2019, the deputy chair of the CDU parliamentary group in Thuringia, Michael Heym, and 17 other CDU state politicians spoke in favour of "open-ended" talks with the AfD. Heym referred to a "bourgeois right-wing majority" and speculated on the possibility of a CDU-FDP government tolerated by the AfD. This was an

option raised at the time by the fascist chairman of the Thuringia AfD, Björn Höcke, and this strategy was then implemented after the state election. In February this year, the state chairman of the FDP, Thomas Kemmerich, was elected state premier with the votes of the CDU and AfD. Following spontaneous mass protests all over Germany—20,000 alone took to the streets in the Thuringia state capital, Erfurt—Kemmerich resigned from his post.

This, however, had no impact on the right-wing policy of the CDU and FDP. In the course of a right-wing demonstration in Gera against coronavirus restrictions, Kemmerich marched alongside well-known neo-Nazis. The protest was organised by the Gera-based entrepreneur Peter Schmidt, a non-aligned member of the CDU Economic Council. Introducing Kemmerich as a speaker at the demonstration, Schmidt declared him to be the “only legitimate prime minister.”

The claim by the SPD-Left Party and Greens that they represent a “left alternative” to the brown alliance of CDU, FDP and AfD is pure hypocrisy. In Thuringia, in particular, the Left Party, SPD and Greens are also prepared to strike deals with the fascists. In March, for example, state Premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) help secure the AfD deputy Michael Kaufmann the post of vice president of the Thuringian parliament. He had “decided very fundamentally ... to clear the way for parliamentary participation, to which every faction has a right,” Ramelow said at the time.

The SPD and the Greens are also quite prepared to line up with the AfD and other right-wing extremist parties. Also last Thursday, the SPD voted in Eisenach, Thuringia, together with the AfD and NPD in favour of an application to fill a position on the local Board of Trustees.

One year ago, representatives of the SPD, CDU and FDP elected the deputy chairman of the Hessian NPD, Stefan Jagsch, to lead the Altenstadt community of Wetterau. Shortly afterwards, it was revealed that the SPD city council faction in Sassnitz in Rügen was working together with the AfD and that Green Party politician Uwe Börner had formed a municipal council faction with the AfD in Gohrisch, Saxony. At about the same time, SPD candidate Udo Wernitz raised the prospect of a coalition with the AfD in connection with state elections in Brandenburg.

At the start of this year, the Left Party, SPD and Greens voted in the Mecklenburg town of Waren/Müritz in favour of a motion from the AfD. In May, the city parliamentary group led by the Left Party politician Ingo Paeschke cooperated with the AfD on a building project in the Brandenburg town of Forst. Paeschke even held a joint press conference with the right-wing extremists.

In May, Günter Schulz from the Bavarian SPD was elected deputy mayor of Höchstadt with the votes of the AfD; in September, the SPD broke ranks with its Left Party-Green coalition partners to vote for an AfD counter-motion in the district assembly of Berlin-Pankow.

The cooperation between the AfD and nominally “left-wing” bourgeois parties is now so widespread that Gera AfD city councillor Dieter Laudenbach said after the latest election, “I don’t know whether the CDU voted for our candidate, and I think it is highly conceivable that the votes also came from the Left Party or the SPD.”

Regardless of who ultimately voted for Etzrodt and the AfD last Thursday, the election is a warning and contains important lessons. In the midst of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the German ruling class is once again relying on a fascist party to enforce its policies of social cuts and militarism against growing social and political opposition on the part of workers and youth. As was the case in the past, the struggle against fascism and war requires the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme.



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