

# German establishment parties block opponents of their right-wing policies from the ballot

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From the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the Left Party, all the parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) are trying to ban opposition to their right-wing herd immunity policies, blatant social inequality and growing militarism from the ballot paper. For months, they have refused to adjust the electoral registration requirements of new parties to the pandemic situation. This is particularly aimed at the candidates of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which opposes their right-wing policies.

According to electoral law, parties not yet represented in the Bundestag or one of the state legislatures must collect more than 27,000 signatures to be eligible for election throughout the federal territory. The signatures must be handwritten and then individually verified by the electoral office.

This undemocratic practice has always had the purpose of keeping new parties off the ballot. But amid the coronavirus pandemic, in which contact must be reduced to the essentials, it is tantamount to excluding any opposition. This is because “canvassing for signatures is largely based on personal contact and spontaneous conversation with strangers on the street, in public places and on the occasion of events,” as the Berlin State Constitutional Court stated. This is simply impossible under pandemic conditions.

Yet despite this clear situation, the parties in the Bundestag have refused to adapt the ballot access conditions to the pandemic since the time for collecting signatures began in June last year. Now, more than four-fifths of the time has elapsed and there is still no regulation.

Only after numerous state constitutional courts had called for a significant reduction in the number of signatures required, did the Greens introduce a bill on April 20 to reduce it to 30 percent of the original amount. The Berlin state constitutional court had previously set this size as the absolute maximum. In the debate, even Christian Democratic parliamentary deputy Ansgar Heveling had to

admit that a “reduction to 30 percent might not be sufficient to safely exclude a constitutional disadvantage.”

Nevertheless, the governing coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) sharply attacked the Greens’ bill. For example, Mahmut Özdemir (SPD) said that lowering the number of signatures would mean unequal treatment of those parties that had already collected the total number of signatures. He thus makes his months of inactivity the starting point for further attacks on democratic rights. Finally, he blatantly called on the parties to “canvass thousands of doors” to collect the required signatures “despite the pandemic.”

The CDU and SPD, fearing constitutional problems, nevertheless announced that they would introduce their own bill to lower the quota. According to press reports, the figure could be lowered to 25 percent—but there have been no official announcements on this yet. Since a decision is not expected until June at the earliest, parties wishing to contest the general election are being deliberately kept in the dark until shortly before the deadline for submitting signatures.

The actions of all the parties in the Bundestag are aimed at barring opposition to their right-wing policies from the ballot paper. Even if they were to reduce the number of required signatures shortly before the end to avoid an open breach of the constitution, the systematic delay is aimed at making it impossible for parties to participate in the elections.

In this context, even a reduction of the signature requirements is completely unacceptable from a democratic point of view. Under pandemic conditions, handwritten signatures should not be used as a criterion for electoral admissibility at all. The procedure could have been changed to online signatures at an early stage or suspended completely.

The insistence on handwritten signatures systematically favours radical right-wing parties that reject the social distancing rules and can easily collect signatures at

coronavirus deniers' demonstrations, for example. The socialist candidates of the SGP, on the other hand, will not risk the health of their supporters and passers-by even for a reduced number of signatures to comply with the undemocratic electoral law.

The fundamental attack on basic democratic rights is directed against the growing rejection of the right-wing policies of all Bundestag parties, which largely correspond to the programme of the far-right AfD. The herd immunity policies of the establishment parties at federal and state level have placed the profits of the corporations before the health of the population and are responsible for almost 100,000 deaths in Germany.

At the same time, billions of euros have been thrown at the banks and corporations. Amid the pandemic, the 10 richest Germans have increased their fortunes by 35 percent to \$242 billion. Billions are also being allocated to rearmament. Last year, Germany increased its military spending by 5.2 percent, more than any other country in the world. On the other hand, 40 percent of workers have had to accept income losses, some of them severe. Budgets for education, health and social services will be cut massively in the current year.

All the establishment parties are preparing to escalate these policies further after the elections. The CDU candidate for chancellor, Armin Laschet, stands for the "profits before lives" policy like no other and has regularly attacked the federal government's inadequate measures to contain the pandemic from the right. SPD chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz, who is currently federal finance minister, is directly responsible for the transfer of wealth from those at the bottom to those at the top and the vast sums spent on expanding the state's means of suppression at home and abroad.

The nominally left-wing opposition parties are not an alternative and even attack the reactionary policies of the grand coalition from the right on many issues. For example, the Green Party chancellor candidate Annalena Baerbock accuses the federal government of "passivity in foreign policy" and demands a more aggressive stance against the nuclear powers Russia and China. She wants to admit Ukraine into NATO and the EU and to upgrade a European army.

Sahra Wagenknecht, the lead candidate of the Left Party in North Rhine-Westphalia, is openly following Nazi traditions of thought. She agitates against immigrants, wants work only for Germans and defends German capital against its allegedly greedier foreign competitors.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei gives the enormous opposition to these policies a voice and a socialist perspective. That is why its candidates are to be kept off the ballot paper by undemocratic means. Herd immunity

policies, militarism and social inequality are incompatible with democratic rights for the people.

With its attempt to ban the SGP from the ballot paper, the government is continuing its efforts to suppress the party. Three years ago, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as Germany's secret service is called, had, for the first time, smeared the SGP as "left-wing extremist" and placed it under surveillance by the intelligence agencies. This was justified on the basis that the SGP, among other things, opposed "alleged nationalism, imperialism and militarism." After the SGP filed a legal complaint, the federal interior ministry justified its surveillance on the grounds that the SGP fought "for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society."

The party's response to this stated: "The attack on the SGP is, more broadly, directed against all left-wing and progressive movements. The attack invokes the criminal traditions of authoritarianism and fascism in Germany. The Interior Ministry's attack on the SGP is intended to set a dangerous precedent. It will be used to legitimize state action against organizations, groups and individuals who oppose social inequality, environmental destruction, state repression, the build-up of the military or other injustices of capitalist society."

The same applies to the measures against the electoral registration of opposition parties. The SGP is at the centre of these attacks because it opposes the politics of herd immunity and the massive shift to the right, thus expressing the broad opposition in the population. But the attack is directed against any form of resistance to capitalist barbarism.

The SGP, therefore, demands the admission of all parties regardless of the number of signatures of support. At the same time, we call on all readers who are eligible to oppose the attack on democratic rights and support the SGP's entry on the ballot.



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