

Germany's Christian Democrat leader moves closer to far-right AfD

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In the traditional “summer interview” of Germany’s top politicians, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz announced closer cooperation with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Speaking to broadcaster ZDF on Sunday in his hometown of Arnsberg, he said the “taboo of AfD participation in government” only applied to “legislative bodies—from the European Parliament to the state parliaments.”

At the municipal level, the situation was different, he said. If a district administrator in Thuringia and a mayor in Saxony-Anhalt were elected by the AfD, these were democratic elections: “We have to accept that. And of course, in local parliaments, we have to look for ways to jointly shape the city, the state, the district.”

On Monday, Merz partially retracted his comments after he met with considerable opposition within his own party. Several state leaders—including Hendrik Wüst (North Rhine Westphalia), Boris Rhein (Hesse), Tobias Hans (Saar), Kai Wegner (Berlin) and Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder (Christian Social Union, CSU)—publicly distanced themselves from Merz’s comments.

Merz claimed he had been misunderstood. Political cooperation with the AfD “remains a taboo at all levels.” But this is pure eyewash. What he said in his interview is part of a massive shift to the right that all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) are currently undergoing. If some CDU representatives nevertheless speak out against open cooperation with the AfD, it is because they think the time is too early. There is a broad opposition to the right-wing extremists among the population, including in parts of the CDU’s electorate. Hardly anyone wants the Nazis back.

But the claim that there is a “taboo” or a “political firewall” separating the “democratic parties” from the AfD is absurd. In truth, the AfD, launched ten years ago as a nationalist anti-Euro party, has been used and promoted by the state apparatus, the secret services, and the media to promote and enforce the return of militarism and German great power politics.

Notwithstanding its openly fascist wing and its

relativisation of Nazi crimes—former AfD leader Alexander Gauland’s trivialisation of Nazi rule as just so much “bird shit” in an otherwise glorious German history is still well remembered—the AfD has been systematically integrated into the political system. Its members sit in the Bundestag and—with the exception of Schleswig-Holstein—in all state parliaments. If one adds up the parliamentary allowances, parliamentary group subsidies, lump-sum expenses, and state party funding, the AfD is financed every year to the tune of hundreds of millions from the state coffers.

AfD representatives chair important parliamentary committees, are quoted extensively by the media and are regular guests on political talk shows. The federal government and all Bundestag parties have adopted the AfD’s positions on important issues of military rearmament and refugee policy.

Now a new stage of cooperation is being prepared in the form of direct government participation by the AfD. Not least, Merz’s advance served to probe the terrain. Part of this shift to the right is the replacement of Mario Czaja by Carsten Linnemann as CDU Secretary General. The spokesman for the arch-conservative CDU Economic Association, Linnemann advocates radical law-and-order policies and favours police state measures.

Immediately after his appointment as the second man in charge of the CDU, Linnemann called for fast-track legal proceedings against youths (some with a migration background) who had fought in a Berlin swimming pool. “There needs to be fast-track proceedings against perpetrators of violence, the judicial system needs to be organised accordingly,” Linnemann told the *Bild-Zeitung*. “Anyone who attacks people in an open-air swimming pool at lunchtime must sit before a judge in the evening and be sentenced. Even on weekends.” The Criminal Procedure Code provided for this and the sentence must also be fully exhausted, up to and including imprisonment, he said.

In the same newspaper, Linnemann also called for an “overhaul” of unemployment benefits, called Bürgergeld. Those who can work and receive these benefits must also

take a job, he said. “Otherwise, they cannot expect any help from the state. That is why, when we come to government, we will take on the Bürgergeld,” he declared. In other words: If you do not work, you should not eat. The AfD applauded.

Cooperation with fascists is also being pushed at the European level. The leader of the conservative European People’s Party (EPP), Manfred Weber (CSU), is trying to build a party alliance in the European Parliament with the right-wing populist European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) group and the far-right ID (Identity and Democracy) group.

The ECR is an alliance of right-wing and fascist parties, including the AfD and the fascist Fratelli d’Italia, whose leader Giorgia Meloni has been head of the Italian government since last autumn. The ID group includes far-right and separatist parties such as the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Danish People’s Party, the Italian Lega, and the French fascists of Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National).

Above all, EPP leader Weber is courting Italian Prime Minister Meloni and her fascist Fratelli d’Italia. He has largely adopted the position of the fascists in repelling refugees from Europe’s borders and has held talks with Meloni on several occasions. In doing so, he is acting in collusion with the EU Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), who, together with Meloni, agreed the dirty deal against refugees with Tunisian President Kais Saied.

Weber told the *Tagesspiegel*: “If Ms. Meloni continues to focus on cooperation and European solutions as she did with the Tunisia agreement, she is as much a contact for us as Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala and many liberals.”

Meloni’s admiration for Mussolini and Italian fascism is well known. As a teenager, she had joined the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which stood for the continuity of Mussolini’s fascists and was involved in the far-right terrorist attacks of the 1960s and 70s. After the MSI renamed itself as Alleanza Nazionale in 1994 and eventually dissolved into Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, Meloni and others founded the Fratelli d’Italia in 2012 to continue the MSI tradition.

But it is not only the CDU and CSU that seek partnership with Meloni and the Italian fascists. Earlier this year, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) rolled out the red carpet for Meloni and assured her of his “firm determination” to work together.

The strengthening of the AfD and the preparations to bring it into government have deep objective causes. They are rooted in the terminal crisis of capitalism and serve to prepare massive social and political attacks on the working class. The extreme increase in social inequality, the escalation of the proxy war against Russia and growing

international rivalries are destroying the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy and social compromise.

In 1933, a conspiracy of the political, economic and military elites brought Hitler to power because they needed the Nazis to crush the workers’ movement and wage a war to conquer “Lebensraum”—i.e. raw materials and exploitation opportunities for German capital. For the same reasons, fascist parties are again being built and promoted everywhere today.

In the US, President Donald Trump tried to prevent the election of his successor Joe Biden with an attempted coup on January 6, 2021. Meanwhile, the Republicans, one of the two major bourgeois parties, are dominated by fascists. Nevertheless, Biden insists on working with his “Republican friends.”

In France, the far-right Rassemblement National became the second strongest party in the last two presidential elections. In Italy, Mussolini’s successors now provide the prime minister. And in numerous smaller European countries—Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Finland—far-right parties were or are involved in government.

But if CDU leader Merz or EPP leader Weber think they can bring the far-right AfD into government without there being an uproar against this, they are mistaken. The memory of Nazi crimes is deeply anchored in the consciousness of large parts of the population in this country. And the demand “Never again fascism!” is still alive.

While the ruling class continues its reactionary great power policy with war and dictatorship, the working class worldwide is beginning to fight against wage cuts and social cuts. This movement must be linked to the struggle against war and dictatorship and tied in with the revolutionary, socialist traditions.

It is not possible to fight fascism with repressive state measures or in alliance with supposedly democratic, bourgeois parties. What is necessary is the building of a party that unites the international working class in the struggle against social inequality, fascism, war and their cause, capitalism, and thus puts an end to the right-wing spectre: that party is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the Fourth International.



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