

# More than a million people in Germany demonstrate against the return of fascism

Marianne Arens, Christoph Vandreier  
22 January 2024

Well over a million people demonstrated across Germany over the weekend against the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD). After it was revealed that politicians from the Values Union bloc between the AfD and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), together with business representatives, were discussing plans to expel millions of people with an immigrant background, masses of people took to the streets in dozens of cities.

Everywhere, the number of participants was many times higher than expected by the organisers. In Munich alone, over 200,000 people took to the streets. Leopoldstrasse and Ludwigstrasse were so crowded that there was a risk of suffocation. The organizers, who had expected 25,000 participants, canceled the march and urged the participants, via police announcements, to go home.

In Berlin, the organisers claimed 350,000 participants, while the police reported 100,000. The field in front of the Reichstag building was so densely packed that 17 June Street was declared part of the protest area. Originally, the organizers had registered only 1,000 participants.

The rallies also mobilized record numbers in Cologne (70,000 participants), Hamburg (80,000), Bremen (70,000), Frankfurt (40,000), Hanover (35,000), Dortmund (30,000), Stuttgart, Karlsruhe and Heidelberg (20,000 each), Halle and Kassel (15,000 each), and numerous smaller cities, where thousands of participants exceeded the expected number many times over. In eastern Germany, where the AfD is particularly high in the polls, up to 60,000 people participated in Leipzig, 40,000 in Dresden and 12,000 in Chemnitz.

The demonstrations show the depth and breadth of opposition to the return of fascism and war within the German population. After the terrible experiences of two world wars and the Holocaust, the rejection of German imperialism and militarism is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the masses.

The demonstrations were dominated by homemade cardboard signs, with inscriptions such as: “That’s how it started back then,” “Now we have to do what our grandparents neglected,” “Hate is not an opinion,” “Whoever is silent agrees,” “Colorful instead of brown,” “Fascism is not an alternative,” and “Deport the AfD!”

The mass mobilisation against the fascist AfD is also objectively directed against the right-wing policies of the federal government and all the parties in the Bundestag (Parliament), which only last week severely restricted the right of immigration and made deportations easier. The government and parliamentary parties are also implementing the AfD programme by supporting the genocide

in Gaza, together with massive rearmament.

The demonstrations are part of an international movement of the working class against the policies of anti-immigrant chauvinism, austerity, dictatorship and war pursued by all capitalist parties.

For weeks, millions of people worldwide have been protesting against Israel’s genocide in Gaza which is actively supported by all imperialist governments. In France, 150,000 people took part in demonstrations on Sunday against Macron’s new immigration law, which bears the signature of the fascist Marine Le Pen. In Germany, large protests by farmers against the coalition government’s austerity policy are continuing, and a powerful strike movement of the working class is developing throughout Europe and worldwide.

But the demonstrations against the AfD are marked by a contradiction. While the majority of participants are resolute and serious in their opposition to right-wing politics, most of the protest organizers are doing everything they can to blunt the movement and subordinate it to the government and the parliamentary parties, which are themselves responsible for the rise of the AfD. In many places, representatives of the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and CDU were invited to speak. Slogans such as “All together against the AfD” were intended to cover up the yawning gap between the right-wing policies of the government and the sentiment of the anti-fascist demonstrators.

At the demonstration in Flensburg, which was attended by 10,000 people, a speaker was interrupted by the organisers for criticising the government’s refugee policy. In various cities, the organizers banned Palestinian flags. In Berlin, there were repeated provocations against demonstrators who protested against the genocide in Gaza, which is strongly supported by the AfD. The group “PA Allies” reported that the demonstration organizers of “Fridays for the Future” (FFF) excluded them from the protest.

Many participants disagreed with the official pro-government orientation of the demonstrations.

Sophia, who works as a social worker in a refugee shelter, explained to the *World Socialist Web Site* in Cologne that in opposing the AfD she was also protesting against the government’s deportation policy. Deportations “have increased sharply and have become more inhumane,” she said.

Even protecting people’s health counts for nothing. “People who are pregnant or sick are deported,” she said. “I had an elderly woman with cancer who constantly had to go to oncology for treatment. She had been certified by the doctor as unable to travel,

and she was nevertheless deported.” The Foreigners Agency in Cologne, Sophia said, simply ignores the existing laws.

On the adoption of the Repatriation Improvement Act last Thursday in the Bundestag, Sophia said, “They have only legalised what was already common practice.” She continued:

One of the affected groups now increasingly being deported is the Roma. They were also heavily persecuted under the Nazis. One would think they would be given special protection here in light of Germany’s historical responsibility. But that is not the case.

Bahar, who works in the public sector, also wanted to “make a statement against the AfD and right-wing extremism” by participating in the demonstration. But, as she emphasized:

If we only oppose the AfD and its racist politics but do nothing against the shift to the right in the middle of society—namely against what the CDU, FDP (Free Democratic Party) and SPD (Social Democratic Party) are propagating—then I think we have understood nothing about how right-wing politics finds its way into the “normal” party structures. If we exclude this from the debates and do not mention it, then we have a very poor chance of positioning ourselves as a society against the shift to the right.

At the demonstration in Berlin, Katharina told the WSWS that she sees a clear link between the government’s refugee policy and the rise of the AfD:

Here, hatred is blatantly directed against refugees and foreigners, and the problem is actually with politics. The government is partly to blame for the fact that these people have to flee.

She also criticized FFF for its solidarity with Israel, saying:

I find it difficult. One of the co-organisers is FFF, who have now distanced themselves sharply from Greta Thunberg. She correctly said that there is no climate justice on occupied land. Nevertheless, I think it is important to be represented here today. That does not mean that I now support every organizer. But I’m fully behind the reason why we’re standing here. But I can’t fight for climate justice and support genocide at the same time. It doesn’t go together.

She said she was convinced that it is necessary to confront the government to stop the far right:

Many people want to take a step back because they know that the German government supports Israel. Some dare not say anything against it. That’s where you should actually stand behind Greta in the organization.

Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP) representatives distributed thousands of copies of the statement “How can the far-right Alternative for Germany be beaten?” at demonstrations throughout the country, explaining how fascism develops out of capitalism. The statement declares:

The AfD is not a foreign body in an otherwise healthy organism but the worst symptom of a thoroughly sick system. Just like 90 years ago, the deepening capitalist crisis is once again leading to fascism and war.

The SGP is fighting to carry the struggle against the return of fascism into the working class and to arm it with a socialist program. To this end, the statement asserts:

It is important to develop these growing protests into an international movement against capitalism itself. Only if the power of the banks and corporations is broken and the basis for war and inequality is removed can the development towards dictatorship be stopped. This requires a struggle against the government and its pseudo-left appendages, which paralyse the struggles and defend capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**