

Essen, Germany: Tens of thousands demonstrate against far-right Alternative for Germany

Our reporters
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Several tens of thousands of people demonstrated against the Alternative for Germany's national party conference in Essen on Saturday. In the middle of the Ruhr region, where 40 percent of the approximately 5 million inhabitants have a migrant background, the fascists of the AfD debated their xenophobic and racist policies. While signs such as "The Ruhrpott is multi-coloured" were displayed outside, the Junge Alternative, the youth organisation of the AfD, distributed their own stickers with the slogan: "Deportation creates living space."

From Friday to Sunday, a total of almost 100,000 people demonstrated and protested. On Saturday, demonstrators tried to prevent delegates from travelling to and attending the event by blockading them early in the morning. Most of the 600 delegates were brought to the hall under police protection.

The WDR news outlet reported that an AfD politician broke through a police cordon, approached a female demonstrator and spat on her. When demonstrators tried to break through a police barrier, the police attacked them with pepper spray and batons. The venue, the Grugahalle, was cordoned off by the police. Several thousand officers from all over Germany, equipped with water cannons, were assembled to protect the AfD.

Many demonstrators held up "Never again" signs in reference to Hitler's Third Reich, while others recalled Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. Others spoke out against the AfD and racism with their own placards. A broad alliance of organisations had called for the protests—including the governing coalition in Germany, which in reality are themselves pursuing extreme right-wing and anti-refugee policies that serve to bolster the

fascists.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) distributed around a thousand leaflets with the article "What to do against the AfD?" at the large demonstration on Saturday. In discussions with SGP representatives, many expressed their concern and anger about the rise of the fascists, but also about the policies of the governing "traffic light coalition" (based on the party colours of the SPD-Green Party-Free Democrats).

As the distributed article states, the ascent of the AfD "is not the result of a mass movement from below, but a shift to the right from above. The fascists are being used and strengthened by the ruling elites to push through their policies of imperialist war, genocide, social inequality and dictatorship."

One participant in the demonstration recalled that Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), back in his time as mayor of Hamburg, had agreed the use of emetics against alleged drug dealers—"One of them died as a result." Another commented that the policies of the ruling coalition had simply been copied and pasted by the AfD.

Jamie, whose family is originally from Poland, fears the consequences of the AfD's policies. "If the AfD comes out on top, half of my family would be gone," he said. We have to therefore stand together. He was impressed by the demonstration, saying, "When 50,000 people demonstrate here, that can only make one happy."

He said that "half of all parties" supported the right-wing's "foreigners out" policy, including the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD.) The Greens were also breaking their election promises and supporting the

right-wing agenda. “First they say we won’t get involved in the Ukraine war, that we are helping, but not interfering. Then you hear that weapons are being supplied after all. It makes you wonder what that’s all about.” He would like to see a Germany in which everyone lives together peacefully and foreigners are accepted and made welcome.

Alex fled Russia to escape the repression of the Putin regime. He was at the demonstration with a whole group of Russian immigrants because he does not want to be deported to Russia, as the AfD demands.

“I am also in solidarity with other refugees who cannot return to their home countries.” They are safer here in Germany, he said. “It’s not paradise here, but we are safer than in our home countries.” He now works in Germany and knows that all workers in every country, including Ukrainian workers, want to live together peacefully.

SGP representatives also spoke to Alex and his group about the imprisonment of the socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who is accused of treason and Russian espionage by the Ukrainian secret service because he is an opponent of the war and calls for the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian working class.

While those responsible for the protests had issued the slogan “United against the right,” including the SPD and the Greens, the mood of many participants was more critical. They understood very well and were concerned that the coalition government’s war and social policies were driving voters into the arms of the AfD.

“The Socialist Equality Party supports the protests against the fascists,” declared SGP deputy chairman Dietmar Gaisenkersting in a statement made at the protests.

But we must warn: the fight against the AfD is a fight against those in power, including their parties in the Bundestag. The AfD is closely linked to the state apparatus and has been deliberately built up by the parties in the Bundestag in order to shift society as a whole to the right.

The German government’s “Zeitenwende” [turning point]—i.e., its support for the war against Russia in Ukraine and the genocide

against the Palestinians in Gaza—is incompatible with democracy. The massive opposition to this among the population is causing all of the political parties to close ranks in order to establish authoritarian forms of rule. It is the federal government, which includes the SPD and the Greens who have the nerve to turn up here with delegations, that is implementing the AfD’s policies.

Only last Wednesday the ruling coalition decided to rigorously deport foreigners if they even put a “like” on social media under posts that criticise government policy—for example, under posts that show the suffering of the people in Gaza and name those responsible: Scholz, Baerbock and Co. This is grist to the AfD’s mill and will further strengthen the party.

The fight against the AfD is therefore necessarily linked to the fight against the war and social policy of the ruling coalition. The defence against war, genocide and fascism requires the broad mobilisation of the working class, united across all borders, against capitalism, the root of all these evils. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party and its sister organisations in the Fourth International.



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