

Tens of thousands protest in Giessen against the far-right Alternative for Germany

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Several tens of thousands of young people from across Hesse and beyond protested in Giessen on November 29 against the founding of a new youth organisation by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Driving the protests was an alliance called “Widersetzen” (“Resist”), consisting mainly of groups such as “Students against the Right,” “University Students against the Right,” “Apprentices against the Right” and others. They had already called nationally for a school strike against the AfD on Friday, November 28, and in the weeks beforehand.

Protected and shielded by the state authorities in Giessen, the AfD founded its new version of a Hitler Youth movement under the name “Generation Germany.”

Journalists from public broadcasters, reporting from the AfD assembly in the Giessen exhibition halls, expressed shock, saying the new organisation was “obviously firmly right-wing extremist.” The demand for “the mass deportation of millions” had been greeted with frenzied applause. The delegate Alexander Eichwald, who delivered a speech to the assembled fascists, mimicking Hitler’s distinctive verbal style, received more than 12 percent of the votes in the preliminary elections.

“We cannot allow right-wing extremist, fascist politics to spread more and more in the public arena,” Zita, Leo, Felix and Jule from Darmstadt told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “This also has to be stopped when it comes in the guise of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) or other establishment parties.” The four agreed that capitalism must be abolished, and that none of the establishment parties aims to do so, not even the Left Party.

The centre of Giessen was full of young people, both school pupils and young workers, who had travelled from all over Hesse and beyond by car, train and in around 200 buses to protest.

Ali from Wetzlar, who had come to Giessen with his

brother Ismail, told the WSWs that 10 years ago he had still hoped that the political situation would constantly improve. But today, he said, one could already see from Trump in the United States “how brutal everything has become.” Both reported that many of their acquaintances in Wetzlar had just recently been laid off at the Buderus steelworks. “For several years now, you can simply feel that everything is moving more and more to the right.”

The protesters were confronted with massive police violence: around 6,000 officers with water cannon, drones and helicopters, as well as dog and mounted units, were on the scene. The police used batons and pepper spray against the blockades to ensure that the AfD event succeeded.

The decision to hold an AfD event in Giessen, a city with a long anti-fascist tradition, was a deliberate provocation. In the working class city and in the neighbouring town of Wetzlar, home to the Buderus steelworks, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the unions have traditionally been strong; in recent years (especially since the Nazi murder of the Kassel district president Walter Lübke) there have been numerous large demonstrations against the AfD.

Protests therefore had to be expected. The Hesse state Interior Ministry took advantage of this by using the day to conduct a major police operation. The exhibition halls were cordoned off completely and across a wide area; police escorted AfD participants partly across the premises of the municipal utilities towards the venue.

The city centre was closed to cars, and most shops had shut. Many houses displayed banners against fascism.

On Berliner Platz, the SPD, the Left Party, the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), the Verdi union and the SPD’s Young Socialists (Jusos) had gathered with organisations such as the Workers’ Welfare Association (AWO), “Grandmothers against the Right” and Amnesty

International to hold a so-called “festival of democracy” with mulled wine and music.

Here, the hypocrisy was palpable. Because the establishment parties all collaborate with the AfD and pave the way for it politically in various legislative bodies, their speakers effectively had nothing to say. Their speeches were full of hollow phrases such as “Giessen remains colourful and strong,” “We will not let our diversity be taken away” and: “How great that so many people have come” (although there were only a few hundred people on Berliner Platz).

The cynicism was breathtaking. The mayor of Giessen, Frank Tilo Becher (SPD), who presented himself on stage as an anti-fascist, had, together with the CDU-led state Interior Ministry, strategically planned the police operation for this day. This was claimed to be necessary out of a “democratic obligation.” Yet it was a truly fascist crowd that had gathered in Giessen.

For comparison: when protests took place against the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, there was never any talk of such a “democratic obligation.” Those protests were repeatedly banned and brutally attacked by police.

Speaking to the WSWS, many expressed their anger and made clear that the official propaganda is increasingly met with distrust.

Jacqueline, a Giessen resident, said: “One only has to look at European Union policy at the external borders of Europe. The general European asylum law was adopted two years ago in the European Parliament by the Greens and the SPD. These are the laws that the CDU is now implementing at national level. This is pure AfD policy, implemented by the Greens, the SPD and the CDU.”

Ilja, from “Students against the Right,” reported on the behaviour of the police towards the young people. “The police are deliberately trying to intimidate us. Police vehicles with clearance equipment were positioned on all the bridges to make it obvious that they were prepared to act against us.” He said students had called for a large school strike on Friday. “The school authority then suddenly lifted compulsory attendance for that day and announced that no buses would run. Nevertheless, 800 people came to our protest.”

From the establishment parties, which attempted to co-opt the protest, there were practically no political statements on how fascism can actually be stopped—other than reactionary appeals to the bourgeois state. Only the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), put forward a

clear, well-thought-out perspective. In the statement “The fight against the AfD requires a fight against capitalism,” which also appeared on the WSWS over the weekend, it reads:

[T]he AfD is being ever more openly integrated into the political establishment, and substantial parts of its programme—such as the persecution of refugees and the massive rearmament drive—are being implemented by all the parliamentary parties. ... A serious struggle against the fascist danger requires a clear understanding of the causes of this shift to the right: escalating militarism and the deep crisis of capitalism. It requires a socialist perspective that abolishes the foundation of war and fascism: the capitalist system.

The statement received a strong response, and many young people agreed that the establishment parties, including the Left Party, are moving further and further to the right in their policies. The protest in Giessen was therefore an expression of a new movement against war, fascism and social devastation, which is developing across Europe and must be armed with a clear socialist perspective and leadership.



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