

How to combat the far-right AfD?

Peter Schwarz
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Just days before the September 6 state election, Saxony-Anhalt, a small eastern German state of 2.1 million people, is moving to the centre of media attention. For the first time since the collapse of Hitler's Nazi regime 81 years ago, a far-right politician could become premier of a German federal state.

According to the latest Infratest-Dimap poll, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) holds a commanding lead with 42 percent, ahead of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on 22 percent, the Left Party on 11 percent and the Social Democrats (SPD) on 8 percent. The Greens, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) and the Liberal Democrats (FDP) are all fighting to clear the threshold for entry into the state parliament. Whether the AfD's lead candidate, Ulrich Siegmund, becomes the new state premier depends on how many parties fail to clear the 5 percent threshold and whether he receives support from other parliamentary groups. The BSW has already signalled its willingness to cooperate.

The leading media outlets and establishment parties are going to great lengths to present themselves as opponents of the AfD. On August 14, news weekly *Der Spiegel* ran with a cover photo of AfD lead candidate Ulrich Siegmund under the headline "Germany's most dangerous man." The incumbent state premier and CDU lead candidate, Sven Schulze, insists on maintaining the so-called "firewall" against cooperating with the AfD, as does Chancellor Friedrich Merz. The Left Party is prepared to vote for a CDU state premier in order to stop the AfD. And the campaign organisation Campact is spending more than €600,000 urging people to vote "tactically" and give their second vote to the SPD or the Greens to prevent an AfD single-party state government.

These are attempts—some naive, some deliberate—to mislead the public. Siegmund is not "Germany's most dangerous man." The fascist danger does not stem from the person of this 36-year-old businessman, who spent his earlier career studying the influence of scents on customers' purchasing behaviour. He switched from the CDU to the AfD 12 years ago, when he surrounded himself with neo-fascist advisers.

Nor does it stem from the person of AfD leader Alice Weidel, who rails against climate protection during prime time on Germany's public broadcaster ZDF and demands the deportation of 1.3 million Syrian refugees and an end to the naturalisation of migrants.

No one would take these bizarre figures seriously if they were not riding a right-wing wave that was generated not by themselves but by the ruling elites. They are the supply meeting a demand that comes not from the population but from the ruling class.

The rise of the AfD

The rise of the AfD can be understood only as part of the international shift to the right through which the ruling class is responding to the deepening crisis of world capitalism. Donald Trump in the United States, Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Marine Le Pen in France are all expressions of this development. Trade war, war, rearmament, social cuts, mass layoffs and the boundless enrichment of the wealthy are incompatible with democracy. They call for authoritarian forms of rule. This is why the ruling class, as in the 1930s, is once again turning to fascist parties.

The brutal sealing off of Europe's borders to refugees, Germany's return to militarism and war, the diversion of hundreds of billions of euros from social spending to rearmament, the devastation of the car industry, the decline of entire regions, the construction of a police and surveillance state and the downplaying of Hitler's Nazi regime by right-wing professors have created the poisoned climate in which the AfD flourishes.

Founded by conservative economics professors for whom the Merkel government's austerity policies did not go far enough, the AfD developed through several leadership changes into the far-right party it is today. Along the way, it was advised by Hans-Georg Maaßen, then head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), and promoted by the media. Its programme does not stand in opposition to the policies of the establishment parties but drives them to their sharpest conclusion.

The key points of the AfD's "government programme" for Saxony-Anhalt include a "deportation and remigration offensive"; incentives for German women to have more children to counter "the extinction of the German people"; a "strong state that upholds law and order"; commemoration of the "military sacrifices" of the First and Second World Wars; a school system that does away with "namby-pamby teaching" and is based on "authority"; the enforced conformity of culture and science with "German" values and traditions; rejection of "globalist climate ideology"; withdrawal from public broadcasting and "sound public finances" based on strict adherence to the "debt brake."

This is not a programme against rising prices, falling pensions, and crumbling schools and hospitals, as the AfD claims in its election campaign. "Adherence to the debt brake" and "sound public finances" mean further social cuts. The "strong state" is meant to suppress resistance to this, the commemoration of "military sacrifices" is meant to cultivate fresh cannon fodder for present and future wars, and an authoritarian school system is meant to drill children in the mould of the Prussian military state. Climate protection is to be sacrificed to unrestrained profit accumulation, while the "deportation offensive" serves to divide the working class and turn the most vulnerable members of society into scapegoats for the capitalist crisis. In Saxony-Anhalt, only 12 percent of residents have a migrant background,

compared with 31 percent nationwide.

The fraud of the firewall

Invoking the “firewall” against the AfD serves to divert attention from this convergence of programmes and political goals. The CDU will not hesitate to make common cause with the AfD once it judges the time to be ripe. The same applies to the other parties.

As early as 2020, the Thuringian CDU, acting in secret collusion with the AfD, helped elect FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich as state premier. The federal party called its Thuringian branch to heel only after a nationwide storm of outrage erupted. In 2025, shortly before the federal election, CDU leader Merz himself sent up a trial balloon. With the support of the AfD, his parliamentary group pushed an anti-migrant motion through the Bundestag.

At the international level, the Merz-Klingbeil government has long worked closely with far-right figures, including Donald Trump, Giorgia Meloni and Volodymyr Zelensky. Zelensky glorifies Nazi collaborators responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands as national heroes. His government has banned left-wing parties and imprisoned the socialist anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotyuk on charges of high treason. The German government has even declared support for Israel to be a “reason of state,” although the Israeli government is carrying out a genocide against the Palestinians and includes fascist ministers.

For its part, the AfD will have no trouble forgetting its tirades against the “legacy parties” as soon as it obtains even a small share of power. It will likewise quickly abandon its criticism of the war in Ukraine, since it fundamentally supports Germany’s return to militarism and an aggressive foreign policy.

The AfD’s entire populist demagogy is designed to capture the growing anger over the catastrophic consequences of government policy and channel it in a reactionary direction. In doing so, it does not shrink from any political deception. The party, which has anti-communism embedded in its DNA, has indulged in nostalgia for the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the election campaign. Siegmund has organised motorcades featuring hundreds of East German-made Simson “Schwalbe” motorcycles.

This has always been the method of the fascists. Hitler’s Nazi Party, whose goal was to smash the socialist workers movement, carried the words “socialist” and “workers” in its very name. It agitated against international finance capital but, once in power, revealed itself as a naked dictatorship of capital. Hitler crushed the workers’ parties and trade unions while leaving the captains of finance and industry untouched, provided they were not Jewish. Rearmament and the exploitation of forced labour allowed them to pocket enormous profits.

Donald Trump, the real estate swindler and casino operator from the New York establishment, posed during his election campaign as a champion of the excluded and oppressed.

Fascism and socialism

This right-wing demagogy only finds a resonance because there is no serious opposition to war and capitalism from the left. The trade unions, which smother every act of resistance against wage and social cuts and co-manage the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs in a “socially responsible” manner, and the Left Party, which mouths left-wing phrases while pursuing, in government, the same right-wing policies as every other party, bear particular responsibility for the rise of the AfD.

The AfD finds particularly fertile ground in eastern Germany, but it is also polling at 28 percent nationwide. The residents of eastern Germany lived through the destruction of industry following reunification with West Germany in 1990 and are now being hit by a fresh wave of inflation-driven income losses and plant closures. Saxony-Anhalt has lost more than a quarter of its population since reunification, falling from 2.9 million to 2.1 million. At 48, the average age is the highest of any German state.

The Left Party played a decisive role in this decline. In the 2010s, it achieved election results of around 30 percent in eastern Germany. But it fulfilled none of its left-wing election promises. Into this vacuum stepped the AfD. In Thuringia, where the Left Party held the office of state premier for 10 years, the AfD is now polling above 40 percent, just as in Saxony-Anhalt.

Leon Trotsky once described fascism as the “party of despair” and socialism as the “party of hope.” A vigorous struggle by the working class would give hope to many of those who are now voting for the AfD out of protest and despair; and would transform the political situation. But such a struggle is being blocked by the Left Party and the trade unions.

The Left Party’s policy of allying with the parties of war and austerity—the CDU and SPD—against the AfD can only strengthen the AfD. It thrives on its aura as an opponent of the “legacy parties.” It welcomed the *Der Spiegel* cover branding Siegmund “Germany’s most dangerous man” as a boost to its election campaign. Siegmund signed stacks of copies of the magazine and distributed them to supporters.

But the stranglehold of the bureaucratic apparatuses over the working class is beginning to loosen. Signs of a revival of the class struggle are multiplying worldwide. It is on this that resistance to the AfD must be based—not on parliamentary manoeuvres with the parties that have helped the AfD to rise.

The election programme of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) for the September 20 Berlin state election states:

The struggle against the AfD therefore requires a break with all capitalist parties and the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of an international socialist program. It is time to oppose the bankrupt profit system with an egalitarian, democratic and socialist society.



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