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Germany

Banning the NPD?

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"Forward in the struggle against the regime of the governing politicians! We create now the anti-capitalist economic order!" says the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD - National Democratic Party of Germany).

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/neonazis.jpg>]

Neo-nazis on the march!

In 1969 the NPD was represented in seven regional parliaments and had nearly 28,000 members. However, until recently it had become reduced to a party of 'traditionalists' limited to a propaganda activity banalising the crimes of the Third Reich, while trying to mobilize petty-bourgeois resentments.

Faced with its crisis, the NPD responded by emphasizing a völkisch anti-capitalism (this term designates in Nazi ideology the 'natural' ethnic unity of the German people/nation against its 'artificial' division into antagonistic social classes) and by keeping its distance from the anti-Communist camp of the parties of the traditional bourgeois right.

Udo Voigt, president of the party since 1996, incarnates the new line well: he emphasizes his rejection of Communism primarily because of its internationalist aspect.

In an interview in the respectable daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Voigt claims: "We have more in common with the PDS than with the parties of the right". [1]

The extra parliamentary tactic of the NPD

According to the intelligence services specialising in the struggle against 'extremism' (Verfassungsschutz or 'protection of the Constitution') at both the federal and L nder (state) level, as well as independent observers, the new strategy has allowed the NPD to score some successes, above all in the new L nder of the ex-GDR which the party has chosen as "the main battlefield".

In the east of Germany, but also in the west, the NPD recruited heavily in the milieu of the far right organizations dissolved in the 1990s. Since then, it has relied more on extra parliamentary mobilisations.

Propaganda in favour of acts of violence against refugees and immigrants, leftwing militants and disadvantaged minorities in general (including particularly the disabled!) is left to die freien Kameradschaften ('independent companions'), the bands and singers of the Skinhead-Nazi subculture, with whom they have close relations and who they can mobilise for public demonstrations.

The last report of the federal Verfassungsschutz spoke of 6,000 members of the party, and growing. In summer 2000, when the far right became an issue in the mainstream media, several hundred new recruits joined the party.

In the L nder of Saxony (in the ex-GDR) for example, the structures of the NPD are much stronger than those of the Greens. The NPD has more than 1 000 members and is represented in the municipal councils and in the constituency councils. Other parties and groupings of the far right, like the Republikaner (REP), the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) and the Bund Freier B rger (which remains marginal) can only dream of such success.

"Anti-capitalism of the right"

The specific reason for the success of the NPD is its extra parliamentary tactic.

It has succeeded in linking itself to a veritable subculture, and its propaganda in the area of economic policy has played a significant role. Whereas the REP and the Bund Freier Bürger who seek acceptance by the established, 'moderate' milieus of the right have largely adapted to the neo-liberal line of the Austrian FPÖ– (which is in their eyes the model to follow), the NPD fulminates against the "anti-popular policy of trans-national capital and the federal government which is in its service".

The formula is that of Michael Nier, a member of the commission for economic policy that the leadership of the NPD created in 1998. Originally from Chemnitz, this character was a lecturer in "Marxism-Leninism" in the technical universities of Dresden and Chemnitz before 1989. Another member of this commission is Reinhold Oberlercher, from Hamburg, a former leading member of the Socialist Students League (SDS) [\[2\]](#)

This "anti-capitalism of the right" is in no way an invention of the NPD.

Already at the time of the Weimar republic, "anti-capitalism" was a constitutive part of the so-called 'conservative revolution'. Its adherents interpreted capitalism as a cultural phenomenon which destroyed the unity of the nation, presupposed to be a natural given. In consequence, such "anti-capitalism" has no material base and is in the first place anti-democratic and anti-liberal (that is political liberalism). Marxism itself is treated as sub-species of liberalism.

The relations of production and questions of property play no role in this concept. In the programme of the NPD one can read: "The objective of the national democratic economic policy is the synthesis of the freedom of the entrepreneur and of social responsibility". It is why the party favours "the free entrepreneur conscious of his social responsibility" and wishes above all to strengthen the position of small and medium entrepreneurs as "a vital part of our national economy".

At the centre of the NPD's critique is the sphere of circulation: monopolistic capital as opposed to productive capital of course, that is also closely related to the party's anti-Semitism - for finance capital, not linked "to the soil", will be in contradiction with the means of material production well rooted in the soil of the nation.

Another characteristic of this critique of capitalism of the far right is the strong personalisation of the argument. Exploitation is the work of "corrupt politicians", "bigwigs" and "speculators"; it is not analysed using the instruments of the critique of political economy but rather described in the categories of ethical or moral order.

Some of the anti-fascist organisations correctly stress the need to distinguish our-selves from such an "anti-capitalism" by correcting certain "modes of argument in the framework of the critique of neo-liberalism and globalisation". For them, it is necessary "to rethink certain theoretical bases of our own action" so as "to be able to reject false partners".

Looking at it more closely, one can say there are many aspects marking the difference between a genuine anti-capitalism and a demagogic one. For the "anti-capitalism" of the far right does not obviously question a policy in favour of German economic hegemony inside the world markets.

At the same time, it makes itself champion of an aggressive protectionism (in appearance, through demands directed

against the big companies active at the international level), which was reflected in the declaration of the NPD at the federal elections of 1998 in the following fashion: "Banning flights of capital to the low wage countries", "public programmes of job creation", "use profits to create jobs".

The strategists of the NPD are conscious that the form of the party in itself is not a guarantee of success. Franz Schwerdt, a leading member, suggests, "in our country, politics is not carried out only in the parliaments". Hence the necessity to, "create a nationalist environment which is not exclusively linked to the party".

The results of some studies on trade union youth are in this context pouring oil on the fires of the NPD. These studies show that among such youth the proportion of people voting for the far right is higher than in the rest of the population, with support for the demand "work for Germans first!" Jürgen Schwab, editor in chief of the NPD organ *Deutsche Stimme*, wants to win them "for the future of the German national movement".

The most aggressive section of the NPD in this area, where the aim is to recruit and win new allies through agitation on the theme of "anti-capitalism", is in Saxony, where it is also numerically the strongest.

A base for such new alliances will be found, among others, in resistance to the privatisation of public services and "against the destruction of the German culture and mentality".

A phenomenon long banalised

The young Skinheads who are mainly responsible for the acts of violence of an anti-semitic, racist and neo-Nazi nature are under the influence of the NPD although not normally found at the leading levels of this well rooted party.

At the crossroads between these Skinheads and the NPD there are the *freien kameradschaften*. Some representatives of the internal political security service (*Verfassungsschutz*) speak of the first signs of a "brown terror", while claiming that the latter do not from a logistical point of view carry the same potential as the [left-wing urban guerrilla] *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction) of the 1970s.

Many politicians, in the ranks of the SPD too, like to compare "the extremisms of right and left", often to demonstrate that both "threaten the rule of law". It is notable that the head of the internal security service, minister of the interior Otto Schily (SPD and ex-Green) is still trying including in his most recent report to minimise far right acts of violence through statistical manipulation.

Thus when it comes to "violence of far left motivation", the crime of "resistance against the public authority" figures in the statistics, but for the far right this crime is not taken into account. The "violence of far right motivation" is limited to homicides, attempted homicide, physical wounding, firebomb attacks and crimes against national security. In 1998 the *Verfassungsschutz* had recorded 708 crimes of this type and by 1999 it was 746.

In September 2000, sections of the liberal bourgeois press exposed this arbitrary administrative behaviour. The dailies *Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) and *Frankfurter Rundschau* showed that instead of the 26 deaths attributed to far right violence since 1990 by the administration, the correct figure was 93 victims. In spite of this, Schily continues to obscure the facts although he now speaks of 36 victims.

A climate favourable to the far right

A recent study (Ahlheim/Heger) on xenophobia in Germany describes the climate which makes such acts possible and explains the successes of NPD propaganda. The result of the study, which is based on figures from 1980-1998, are alarming and confirm other studies on the link between the social situation and racist resentments.

According to these results, 53% of the unemployed in the East have xenophobic feelings as against 37% of the unemployed in the West. East and West, unemployment and lack of job security coincide with an upward tendency of xenophobic prejudices.

The authors of the study claim the assumption that it is the behaviour of immigrants which engenders racism is erroneous. For it is precisely in the regions where the immigrant population is lowest that "xenophobic sentiments are at their sharpest".

For example the proportion of "foreigners" (Ausländer) in the new Länder of the ex-GDR is very much lower than in the old Länder of the west. Nonetheless, the study shows that "xenophobia is more widespread in the east than in the west of the Republic".

The study also makes it clear that the debate on "the struggle for the future of the location of German production" since the beginning of the 1990s has encouraged the view that "the foreigner is above all perceived as a 'competitive factor' in the areas of well-being, employment and housing".

The evaluation of the empirical data shows that the subjective perception of the personal social situation plays the same role as the objective social situation as a cause of xenophobic resentments. Among the pessimists in the controversy over the spatial location of German manufacturing, racist attitudes are more widespread.

The authors of the study sum up the result of their research in the following manner: "The flexibility and absolute mobility that capitalism, victorious on the world scale, demands of individuals everywhere has its consequences. The power of the market destroys the traditional social, cultural, religious milieus and decomposes familial, neighbourly and local relations [...] It is precisely there that the 'modern nationalisms' promise to rebuild social relations and restore a meaning to life".

The growing popularity of the positions of the far right is also the result of the racist propaganda of the Christian-conservative parties who have made it their hobbyhorse in recent electoral campaigns. Last year alone there was the collection of signatures against the right to dual citizenship (the right to be a naturalised German while remaining a citizen of another country) in Hesse; and the "Children not Indians" campaign ("Kinder statt Inder", a slogan invented by the CDU leader in Rhineland-Westphalia, Rüttgers) led against work permits introduced to attract a qualified labour force (above all in information technology) from India. All this in a situation where the SPD continues a harsh policy of deportation of political refugees and an austerity policy against the destitute, justified by the "constraints of globalisation".

To this add the general disarray vis-à-vis established politics fed by the various corruption scandals. In the future, the process of European capitalist unification, austerity programmes under the patronage of the European Commission, and the undemocratic nature of European Union institutions could strengthen the parties and movements of the far right.

The demand to ban the NPD

In February 2001 the government, parliament and the chamber of the L ander (Bundesrat) demanded the banning of the NPD before the Supreme Court. There are two main reasons for this.

First, German entrepreneurs and the government fear that investment from overseas will be put off. The attacks perpetrated against synagogues and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries could have this effect. The attack in D usseldorf, against Jewish immigrants from the ex-USSR was noted with great emotion in the USA.

The second reason relates to the growing international competition for highly skilled workers. In April 2000, during the computing trade fair, CEBIT, in Hanover, the biggest of its kind in the world, Chancellor Gerhard Schr oder (SPD) said for the first time that Germany also would need this kind of workforce. Neo-Nazi attacks obviously do not encourage people to come to work in Germany.

A more or less camouflaged thesis has arisen in Germany that racism and the rise of the far right are in some way reactions "of legitimate defence". A view that has its adherents even in the academic social science milieu, for example among the devotees of the "risk society" [3] who believe that the young Nazis are only victims of 'modernity'. This is absurd.

The successes of the NPD, the murders and attacks committed by youth with neo-Nazi motivations in Germany is not explained solely by the precarious social situation of the guilty but also by a racism propagated officially by the state for some years. From the beginning of the 1990s, this official propaganda suggested a massive danger, warning against "the flood of asylum seekers" and crying "the boat is full".

The successes of the NPD are also the consequence of the weakness of the majority of leftwing forces. The official policy of the trade unions is aligned on the defence of the "German base of production" instead of envisaging the possibilities of an internationalist and anti-racist policy.

The anti-racist and anti-fascist movements in Germany have until now not succeeded in linking up with the mobilisations of the unemployed and the insecure. An important part of the academic left plays with post-modern "discourse theories" or concern themselves with identity questions rather than political problems.

The PDS emphasizes social problems, but at the same time it tries to be recognised by the established political forces as "constitutional party" and participates in governmental coalitions with the SPD, for example in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. As junior partner of the SPD at the level of the L ander, it takes responsibility for antisocial austerity measures. That does not help its credibility. The new leadership of the party, elected at its recent congress in Cottbus, now wants "to positively engage with the national question". [4]

A breach that must be enlarged

But as the bourgeois parties with their own motives, of course have opened a breach in the struggle against the neo-Nazis, there are also new possibilities for the left to go beyond ritual anti-fascism. The anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations have more publicity than before. That gives them the possibility to emerge from their isolation and address a broader public.

Banning the NPD?

The banning of the NPD could slow but not stop the current evolution. For the positions of the NPD are found in the heads of many people, largely beyond the members of this party, notably in the ranks of the CDU and CSU.

The rise of far right parties and movements can only be stopped by a powerful counterforce which propagandises vigorously for the principles of equality, which genuinely poses the social question and fights for a socialist, democratic and internationalist alternative to capitalism.

[1] PDS, Party of Democratic Socialism, implanted mainly in the ex-GDR (German Democratic Republic) where the majority of its cadres come from the former governing party, the SED (United Socialist Party) is to the left of social democracy. SPD, German social Democratic Party, currently at the head of the coalition government with Die Grünen (Greens), dropped any reference to Marxism at the congress of Bad Godesberg in 1959. CDU, Christian Democratic Union, and CSU (Christian Social Union, its autonomous branch in Bavaria) constitute together the main German conservative party and is currently mired in financial scandals when Helmut Kohl (CDU) was Chancellor.

[2] German New Left group of 1968 fame - Ed.

[3] A paradigm associated with German sociologist Ulrich Beck - Ed.

[4] See Winifried Wolf, "A good Germany?" IV January 2001