

Demonstrators block neo-Nazi march in Berlin-Spandau

Katerina Selin
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Around 1,500 demonstrators blocked a march on Saturday of some 700 neo-Nazis from the northern Berlin district of Spandau to a former allied prison for war criminals, where they intended to commemorate Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess. Condemned to lifelong imprisonment at the Nuremberg Trials, Hess committed suicide in the prison thirty years ago, on August 17, 1987.

Andreas Geisel (Social Democrats, SPD), Berlin's state senator for the interior, approved the neo-Nazi commemorative march. Geisel rejected repeated demands for the fascist protest to be banned, attempting to justify his position by referring to "freedom of speech."

The neo-Nazis were ordered to follow certain procedures. However, despite a court order to avoid any glorification of Hess in writing, speech or pictures, they carried a large banner with the Hess citation, "I regret nothing." The police, who were at the scene with 1,000 officers to seal off the march and protect the right-wing extremists from counter-protesters, did not intervene.

Instead, police bullied counter-demonstrators and prevented them from reaching the rally in front of the former prison. "We will not tolerate outright blockades and we will prevent them," the police warned over Twitter. Officers intervened against counter-protesters who blocked the route of the neo-Nazis.

After a number of sit-down protests and resistance against the right-wing agitation, however, police officers were forced to disperse the neo-Nazi march.

A broad coalition of organisations, including political parties, trade unions, church groups, and organisations like the Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime, called for the counter-protest. Concerned about the rise of far-right forces internationally and the rise of nationalism, many people not affiliated with any

of these organisations, especially youth, joined the demonstration.

Their protest is an expression of mounting international opposition to nationalism and right-wing extremism. Many are shocked at the latest developments in the United States, where President Trump has solidarized with Nazi and fascist groups.

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) members and supporters distributed hundreds of election statements and the leaflet, "German politicians and media promoted the ideology on display in Charlottesville," and were met with strong interest.

While the vast majority of counter-protesters came to resist the neo-Nazis, the establishment parties used the demonstration for their election propaganda and attempted to portray themselves as opponents of the far right.

At the counter rally, only around 200 people were present, the majority of whom were flag-waving SPD supporters. This was in part due to the bullying of the police, who prevented counter-protesters from reaching the rally's location. It is also true, however, that many people had come to the demonstration to stop the neo-Nazis, not to hear the speeches of representatives of parties whose policies have encouraged and strengthened the far-right for years.

The first speaker was the chairman of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) in Berlin-Brandenburg, Doro Zinke, whose comments were restricted to a few phrases and critical remarks about the actions of the police. Other speakers included Petra Pau, vice president of the German federal parliament and the Left Party's lead candidate for the federal election; Renate Künast from the Greens; and Hubertus Heil, the SPD's general secretary.

All three clad themselves in the mantle of left-wing

democrats and anti-fascists. Pau pledged the unity of all “democrats.” “It is nice,” she said, “that we are gathered here today along with colleagues from the federal parliament, Berlin state senate, municipal assemblies, the trade unions, churches, and democratic organisations.” During election campaigns, one could “argue about everything under the sun, about interventions by the German army, about the cause of old age poverty or the criminals in the diesel emissions affair. But when the issues at stake are citizens’ rights and democracy, we have to defend them together.”

She did not utter a single word about the political shift to the right in Germany, where all parties are now unanimously agitating against refugees. She did not mention the murders by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), even though as a representative on the NSU investigative commission she is well informed about the close connections between the intelligence agencies and the series of murders by the right-wing extremist terrorist group.

Künast warned of a shift to the right in Germany, led by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Pegida. She stated on the violence in Charlottesville, “We don’t want American relations, but to preserve our democracy, which begins with dignity.”

Hubertus Heil (SPD) agreed with his fellow speakers. In the struggle against the Nazis, he said, it was necessary, in spite of political disagreements, to stand together. In the same breath, Heil defended the police from criticism and claimed that they also opposed the Nazis.

This is as cynical as it is dishonest. In reality, the police frequently tolerate and protect right-wing extremist gatherings, including the recent festival “Rock against foreign invasion” in Thuringia. And in the federal election campaign, hardly a day goes by without politicians from the SPD, Greens and Left Party agitating like the AfD against refugees, promoting nationalism, and appealing to the far-right to enforce their policies of militarism, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus, and social cuts.

The SPD in particular is responding to mounting popular opposition by adopting the AfD’s xenophobic rhetoric. Just days prior to the demonstration, SPD Chancellor candidate Martin Schulz called for a ruthless crackdown by the police against alleged criminal immigrants. The Green Party’s Boris Palmer,

along with Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine from the Left Party, have been railing against migrants and refugees for some time. Wherever the Left Party, Greens and SPD serve jointly in government, they organise brutal deportations and strengthen the police.

All of the red-red-green slogans against the right cannot conceal the fact that they are themselves guilty of acting as “racist cheerleaders” and “advocates of nationalist conceptions and falsifiers of history,” as the official leaflet calling for the demonstration describes it. This is also clearly demonstrated by the defence of right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski (who claimed that “Hitler was not vicious”) by the SPD president of Humboldt University.



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