

Far-right Alternative for Germany holds party conference

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The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party conference, which took place last weekend in Essen, was dominated by the recent European elections and the upcoming state elections in three eastern German federal states. Although the far-right party fell short of the projections in spring polls in the European elections, it nevertheless became the second strongest party in Germany and even the strongest in the East. The AfD now hopes to win the state elections in Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg in September.

The congress therefore sought to create a picture of unity and harmony. Disputes did not take place. The party Executive was re-elected in record time. The two chairmen, Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, were each confirmed in office with around 80 percent of the vote. Controversial motions were withdrawn by those proposing them after intense pressure behind the scenes.

Notorious fascists, such as Thuringian party leader Björn Höcke, remained in the background and withheld provocative statements. The top European candidate Maximilian Krah, who was sidelined by the party leadership after the trivialisation of Hitler's SS, did not even appear at the party congress.

Previous AfD party conferences were marked by fierce clashes and sometimes by coup-like changes in leadership, with the party moving ever further to the right. For example, at the 2015 party congress, which also took place in Essen, the party founder Bernd Lucke was overthrown and replaced by Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen, both of whom have since also left the party.

Alexander Gauland, the AfD's father-figure, therefore once described the party as a "fermenting heap." In the meantime, the fermentation process has been completed and the heap has matured into a toxic, high-percentage alcoholic beverage. Neo-Nazis and fascists, who used to cause disruption, are firmly anchored in their leadership structures.

The AfD has learned from Giorgia Meloni and Marine

Le Pen. The Italian head of government has declared Mussolini history without ever distancing herself from her admiration for the Duce or from party members who continue to pay homage to him. Le Pen strives to "de-diabolise" the Rassemblement National.

However, this has not changed the extreme right-wing orientation of the two parties. Meloni and Le Pen have merely come to the conclusion that they cannot currently come to power with openly displayed Nazi slogans. They owe their electoral success not to a radicalized, fascist mass movement, but to anger and frustration at the policies of the other parties and the fact that they pave the way for them by adopting their xenophobic and authoritarian policies.

While Meloni and Le Pen are more moderate on the outside, they pursue the strategy of anchoring their control over the state and security apparatus, the judiciary, education and cultural life and making the media equal. Here, too, the other parties are paving the way for the right-wing extremists by suppressing social protests and censoring dissenting opinions, in particular the opposition to the Ukraine war and the Gaza genocide.

Behind the facade of unity, the fascist core of the AfD was plain for all to see in Essen. While the fascist networks used to clash with more moderate elements, they now dominate the entire party.

The far-right "Wing" was formally dissolved four years ago for tactical reasons and its leader Björn Höcke, who was sentenced to two hefty fines in recent days for using banned Nazi slogans, restrained itself at the party congress. But Höcke remains AfD leader and top candidate in Thuringia and hopes for a breakthrough in the state election in September that will further increase his weight in the federal party.

A motion originally supported by Höcke to replace the current dual leadership with a single party leader—himself—was withdrawn in order not to endanger

the image of unity. But Höcke made it clear that this is only a temporary retreat. “At the moment, I do not yet see the single leader who could succeed as an integrative force and person in this phase, in order to really lead this party into the future over many years,” he said. In two years, however, this will probably be the case.

Höcke’s “Wing” is no longer the only far-right network in the party. The currently sidelined Maximilian Krah has also gathered a considerable following around him. At the party congress, party leader Alice Weidel reassured his enraged supporters by insisting that Krah’s future in the party is not necessarily over. She compared the AfD to a football team and explained: “Even talented players can lose their way. If someone has to go to the substitute bench, they’re not out of the squad yet.”

The network around Sebastian Münzenmaier, member of the Bundestag (federal parliament), also plays an important role in the party. According to media reports, it led the organisation of the party congress. It negotiated the list of candidates for the top positions behind closed doors, which then largely came to pass.

The daily *Taz* wrote about the network: “The young careerists are in no way inferior to the ethnic Wing in terms of radicalism, but are not only well-connected in the East, but also with the state leaders in the West, who prefer to paint a more moderate picture outwardly.”

Münzenmaier is a member of a far-right student corporation practicing mandatory fencing and a convicted football hooligan. He joined the AfD in 2013 via the Islamophobic party “Die Freiheit” (Freedom) and was elected to the Bundestag in 2017, where he is a member of several committees and the AfD parliamentary committee. According to research by Bavarian Radio, he employs John Hoewer, who as a board member of the association “One Percent” has close links to the “Institute for State Policy,” the *Compact* magazine, the Identitarian Movement, the neo-Nazi NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany), Italian fascists and other ultra-right forces.

The broad support for fascists was also evident again and again in elections and votes. For example, Höcke confidant Stephan Brandner was confirmed as party deputy leader with 90 percent after he demanded the arrest of the government in his speech with the words: “Turn the ballots into arrest warrants!” He received more votes than the two party leaders.

Brandner was voted out of his position as chairman of the Bundestag Judiciary Committee after the attack on the Halle synagogue due to antisemitic outbursts—an

unprecedented event in the 70-year history of the Bundestag. He was originally nominated for the chairmanship by the Social Democrat parliamentary group leader Thomas Oppermann.

The radical COVID denier Christina Baum received 43 percent in the election of the executive, but was defeated by the party’s chief ideologist, Marc Jongen. The federal chairman of the Junge Alternative, Hannes Gnauck, who the Bundeswehr has banned from barracks and wearing uniforms due to his right-wing extremist activities, was elected to the executive.

The Junge Alternative openly displays its fascist standpoint. At their booths at the party congress there were fan articles for Krah and for the far-right slogans that were cheered in a club on the island of Sylt, packs of stickers with the keyword “remigration,” and much far-right literature. They also took aim at the German national football team because there were too many migrants playing in it. “Diversity instead of fatherland,” as Höcke complained bitterly.

Around 100,000 people protested and demonstrated in Essen against the AfD party congress. The WSWS reported on this. Most came because they wanted to prevent a return of fascism and reject the racism of the AfD. But the organizers, a broad alliance of organizations and parties, offered no prospect of achieving this. On the contrary, with their right-wing policies of dismantling social services, rearmament, war and deportation, they strengthen the fascists.

The fight against the AfD “is not a question of parliamentary arithmetic, but of class struggle,” stated a leaflet distributed by the Socialist Equality Party at the demonstrations. “The policies of the SPD, Greens and Left Party have strengthened the AfD and will continue to do so if no one opposes them. The struggle against the AfD requires the development of an independent movement of the working class and youth that combines resistance to war, fascism and social inequality with the struggle against its cause, capitalism.”



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