



Germany: Crisis, pandemic and the looming flood of corona deniers

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The second wave of corona deniers, ranging from Querdenken 711 ("Lateral Thinking 711") to the Alternative fuer Deutschland, AfD and various right-wing groups to the Reich Citizens, the Identitarian Movement and open fascists, threatens to become a veritable flood.

Some 40,000 people gathered in Berlin on August 29, that's twice the number from August 1. There is no doubt that the influence and mobilising power of the extreme right has increased. This was clear to everyone from the hundreds of Reich Citizens who stormed the steps up to parliament, as well as to the perhaps 2,000 leftists protesting against the whole reactionary demo.

In front of the Russian embassy and along Unter den Linden, numerous German Imperial flags, as well as those of Russia and the US were visible - all of them apparently faithful symbols of democracy, presenting the rule of Trump, Putin and the German Reich as real alternatives to the "Merkel dictatorship".

Behind all the talk of democracy, fundamental rights and the need for a constituent assembly, there is a call for an authoritarian, plebiscitary "order" that would guarantee German citizens security and "freedom" once again.

No doubt the various forces in the movement understand different things by this. But their unifying bond is not only the rejection of all the government's corona measures and denial of the real danger the pandemic poses to the health of millions, but the demand for the abolition of all (!) public health regulations.

This alone shows the real, reactionary character of the mobilisation, irrespective of the presence of right-wing extremists. The demands of Querdenken 711, various conspiracy theorists, anti-vaccination activists and "sceptics" ultimately amount to nothing less than the abolition of all health protection - in effect, a death sentence for tens of thousands. The fact that a few confused members of the so-called peace movement are also involved in this process does not make things any better.

Nazis and right-wing extremists

There is no doubt that most of the 40,000 or so participants in the rally, let alone the much more numerous supporters throughout the country, are not Nazis and have no plans to join a fascist or openly right-wing extremist group such as the Third Way, the NPD, the Reich Citizens' Party or the Identitarian Movement in the near future. The situation is probably different with the right-wing populist AfD, which has meanwhile jumped on the bandwagon of the movement. It rightly sees the chance to win not only members but also voters in large numbers.

The various radical right-wing to fascist groups are trying to present themselves as the most determined part of the movement, as its nationalist, militant, fascist arm, and thus also to address the existing real anger and existential fear of the masses. They are, as became clear once again on 29 August, recognised as allies by the organisers of Querdenken 711. They are also not merely "tolerated" by the great mass of the demonstrators. They are seen as allies against the government and its "Corona dictatorship". Therefore, the accusation that they were marching with Nazis cuts no ice with them. They know that anyway, accept it and probably even believe they can exploit the right-wing extremists for their own purposes.

Such mobilisations, however, are undoubtedly a fertile breeding ground for the extreme right. The spectacular media stunt of "storming" the parliamentary steps is evidence of that. In total, there were several thousand Nazis and right-wing extremists making up at least 10 percent, maybe even 20 percent, of the participants.

Right-wing populism

The fact that the majority were not fascists is no reason for complacency. The main criticism, not only from government and bourgeois media, but also from many left-wing groups and counter-mobilisations, is that Michael Ballweg and Querdenken 711 let themselves be "instrumentalised" by right-wing radicals, Nazis, Reich citizens, the QAnon sect and others. This is short-sighted, as if the only problem with Ballweg and his movement was that the Nazis take part in it.

What that ignores is that a new and dangerous right-wing populist movement has emerged in recent months. Originally directed primarily against the government's corona measures, it is now demanding an end to the "Merkel regime" and her "dictatorship". Ballweg's movement not only seeks cooperation with AfD and even more right-wing forces like the Identitarian Movement or figures like Ken Jebsen, but has also met Max Otte from the Union of Values.

Querdenken 711 is one of the right-wing populist forces that have emerged in many countries in recent years. Irrational, anti-scientific criticism of the corona danger and health protection measures links it with a demagogic criticism of the "elite", which would drive "honest working" people, that is, above all, diligent (small) entrepreneurs, to ruin. The Corona measures thus turn out to be part of a conspiracy by Bill Gates, Angela Merkel, the "mainstream" virologists ... who want to re-model the economy in their own interest with unfair, conspiratorial means and, moreover, dominate the world with their Corona dictatorship.

In doing so, the deniers take up real problems such as the erosion of democratic rights and the imminent ruin of many "hard working people", by which they mean merchants, capitalists (except people like Bill Gates) as well as workers. It is not recession and the market economy that are to blame for the crisis, but rather its limitation by the closure of companies, schools and public institutions in the interest of the health of the population.

The call for freedom and democracy is, of course, given a quite unique meaning. It is not the real attacks on "democracy", such as the disenfranchisement of migrants, the sealing off of the EU's external borders, the restrictions on the right to strike and demonstrate, that are criticised, but compulsory face masks in shops and on public transport. The main dangers are supposed to be restrictions on business life such as social distancing rules and hygiene regulations in restaurants and shops, at schools and in the world of work.

Where the call for "freedom" becomes concrete, it turns out to mean the ruthless pursuit of the commercial interests of small businesses. In return, it is accepted that there will be health risks to other people, customers and employees. Corona denial thus becomes a central component of a policy of unbridled selfishness, of the freedom of the private owner.

Growth

Even though everything about the arguments and objections about Corona is wrong, perverse, even dangerous to the public, the question arises why such a policy, such a movement, is growing - not only from Nazis and right-wing radicals, but also from the petty bourgeoisie, the middle classes, from entrepreneurs as well as from politically backward and frustrated workers.

The reason is simple. The existential fears of the petty bourgeoisie, small entrepreneurs and even more so of the masses of the population are real. The current capitalist crisis is already having devastating effects - even though some of these are still "socially" cushioned.

Of course, in the end, it will not be the small businessmen and women and the petty bourgeoisie who will be hit hardest, but the working class in the form of threatened mass layoffs, particularly women, migrants, refugees and precarious workers.

All the same, large sections of the working class were suffering long before the crisis, basically since the Hartz laws and Agenda 2010. Ballweg and Querdenken 711 are not really talking about them, there are no concrete demands for them in all the speeches. You will look in vain for any reference to the fight against redundancies, the demand for nationalisation without compensation of companies threatening redundancies, the advocacy of poverty-proof pensions, unemployment benefits or a minimum wage of 13.50 euros/hour from these "lateral thinkers". No surprise to find nothing to protect the health of employees or people at particular risk from corona. Such measures are rather seen as part of a "dictatorship" which would harm people by restricting "the economy".

This inhuman ruthlessness, which could not be justified without Corona denial, does make sense from the point of view of the individual entrepreneur. Since they cannot, or can only partially, pursue their business because of hygiene protection measures, those measures have to go. With this demand, she/he tries to get the politically backward workers on board, who would then be "allowed" to work again.

In the last decade and especially in the current crisis, an important part of the petty bourgeoisie is not only worried about its existence, it is also increasingly losing confidence in "its" parties and the established political system. This was already evident in the so-called refugee crisis. Mass migration was presented as a conspiracy of the "elite", an attempt to repopulate, just as the so-called climate sectarians fear their own ruin when it comes to environmental protection and ecological restructuring. The Corona deniers represent another form of this, which threatens to further strengthen right-wing populism and, in its wake, fascism as well.

Right-wing populism recruits its followers primarily from those classes and strata which for decades were the pillars of the post-war order, the Federal Republic's democracy. Querdenken 711 could, in conjunction with the AfD and all its wings, contribute to a further revival and expansion of this reactionary petty-bourgeois force in both movement and party form. Its aim, as with similar formations in the USA, Latin America or other European countries, is the "radical" transformation of the existing system, that is, the strengthening of its authoritarian, repressive, bonapartist and anti-democratic elements. Nationalism, racism and a reactionary racist and antisemitic discourse form the necessary cement to hold together the opposing social groups which populism seeks to unite. The "people", the imaginary unity of all classes, must be conjured up to pave the way for an authoritarian rule of capital.

This is another reason why fascist or semi-fascist movements can easily tie in with groups such as Querdenken 711. Right-wing populism thus represents a double danger. On the one hand, the threatening transformation of the political conditions in the interests of the ruling class, which in this process relies on a reactionary popular movement against the left and the working class. On the other hand, it also prepares the ground for an even more radical, fascist solution to the crisis, should the authoritarian, bonapartist transformation of conditions prove insufficient or impossible.

How to lead the fight?

The threat posed by right-wing populism, therefore, should certainly not be underestimated. Overcoming it will clearly need more than just education or anti-racist or anti-fascist counter-mobilisations.

Right-wing populism ultimately draws its strength from the crisis-ridden upheavals in society, from the real or threatened ruin of entire strata. It can therefore only be stopped if this breeding ground is removed. This in turn requires the working class to appear as a social force, as an alternative to the ruling class and its government.

But this is precisely where a crucial problem lies. The trade union leaderships, the heads of the works councils, the reformist parties, the SPD and Left Party, appear as the government's assistants, better crisis managers, partners of big business at national or local level or, as in the case of the Left Party, at best as left-wing advisors to the government.

This makes it possible for right-wing populism to pose as an apparently radical opposition. In the deepest crisis of capitalism, it represents a policy that denounces the government, that promises radical change and a fight against the "elite" and the "dictatorship". It thus meets a real social need for change despite its reactionary demands and its irrationalism. It recognises, in a reactionary way, that the system itself is the problem.

The government, but also the leaderships of the workers' movement, represent the status quo. Andreas Geisel, the Berlin Senator of the Interior and right-wing Social Democrat, would like to ban all demonstrations that are directed against the bourgeois system and capitalism or "defile" the symbols of this order. With the attempted ban of the demonstration of the Corona opponents he failed in the courts, but the next restriction of democratic rights is already being prepared.

Of course, this will certainly not only be directed against Nazis or the right, but, as always, against the left and the working class. With the same reasoning used to justify banning the Corona demonstrations, any blockade against housing evictions, any militant mass demonstration, can also be illegalised. The fact that Geisel and the state bureaucracy and police apparatus are planning exactly this has already been sufficiently proven with the eviction of the left-wing local pub, Syndicate.

In the struggle against right-wing populism and fascism, we must therefore not rely on the state or on bans, which will ultimately be directed as much against the left and the working class. We must mobilise ourselves. It is a disgrace that only 1- 2,000 people demonstrated against the Corona deniers on 29 August, that, with few exceptions, not only the trade unions and all mass organisations, but large sections of the "radical" left were noticeable only by their absence. August 29 must be a wake-up call, an alarm signal to everyone.

A 40,000 strong march should make it clear that we must not wait any longer for the reformist and trade union apparatuses to build a movement against passing on the costs of crisis and pandemic. The fight against right-wing populism will not be decided by counter-mobilisations alone. We must start to build a movement that demonstrates a class-struggle alternative to the policy of crisis management in the interests of the corporations.

It must of course try to force the trade unions and reformist apparatuses to fight. That is another reason why it is necessary to take the initiative, with demonstrations and actions, to support collective bargaining struggles, anti-racist and anti-fascist mobilisations and the environmental movement, in order to develop the necessary strength to force the big organisations to mobilise in the first place.

An anti-crisis movement can thus become a focus for the struggle in factories, offices, schools and neighbourhoods. Now is the time to wake up, or there will be a much ruder awakening later on.

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