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Germany

A strategy to beat back fascism

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The initiative taken by Germany's ruling parties to ban the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD - National Democratic Party) is a significant political fact. It is not aimed at a marginal groupuscule but at the party which is currently at the centre of the recomposition of fascism in Germany.

Bourgeois circles support this approach and the accompanying article by Gerhard Klaas sums up the reasons for this. The SPD, the Greens, the majority of the trade union leaderships and the PDS are content to call occasionally for ritual demonstrations and hope, beyond this, that legal procedures will solve the problem.

Inside the anti-fascist committees as in the currents and organisations to the left of the PDS, it seems hard to find an adequate political response to the official policy, and it is perfectly understandable. But the chance that this offers to strengthen and reorient the mass movement can be diverted down a dead end.

It is therefore necessary to debate the strategy of anti-fascists on this issue.

Political evaluation

To illustrate the problem of political evaluation of the problem, I quote the written contribution of a militant antifascist from Cologne, which is very characteristic: "State and legal measures should not be supported, for they will be turned against the left itself. The alternative that remains to us is to organise the daily civil and popular resistance. The struggle against racism and violence from the right should be led publicly in the street, in the workplaces, in private life and in the media [...] It should not be forgotten that the police and the judiciary, who do not work openly under the eyes of the broad public, are themselves auxiliary forces of racism in the framework of the official policy relating to 'foreigners'."

Among currents owing an allegiance to the ideas of Leon Trotsky an argument of this kind could well be convincing.

It is true that Trotsky and the Left Opposition, in the final years of the Weimar republic, had strongly and rightly polemicised against the view of the Social Democrats that the rise of Nazism could be fought by legal means and police repression by the bourgeois state, even in a democratic parliamentary regime.

On the other hand, they had also shown the possibility of linking the immediate needs felt by the masses (starting notably with the need for self-defence) to a perspective of mobilisation with revolutionary potential. Today in Germany, we seem to be far from that situation.

What is done by the Left is primarily propaganda, explaining that the mobilisations which the governmental parties call for serve only to camouflage their own racist policy, which is hypocritical; that the motives for their change of line fit in with the interests of big capital; that the initiative for the banning of the NPD serves to falsely reassure people and could be used against the 'far left' organizations; that the banning will not lead to a real dissolution of the NPD, and so on.

However, explaining these indisputable truths does not constitute a real political response or a strategy for how the

mass movement could progress.

It is true that tens, indeed hundreds, of thousands of people in Germany are ready to mobilise against the criminal acts and inhuman propaganda of the neo-Nazis and against the NPD in particular. In comparison to that, it is only a small minority who mobilise in defence of asylum seekers and the victims of multiple forms of discrimination (for whose oppression the government parties are politically responsible).

Link

In order to link the two movements, we cannot start only from the higher political consciousness of those who are ready to mobilise against the existing government, but must also take account of the consciousness of the majority, who wish 'only' that the racist attacks should stop and that the NPD and its ilk disappear, but do not see (or not yet) the link between the rise of violent neo-Nazism and the government's policy.

The first thing to grasp is that the ruling parties (the SPD and the Greens) are running a certain risk with their initiative. Not only the risk that the Supreme Court could come down against the banning of the NPD.

There is another danger: the procedure before the Tribunal could last nearly two years. It is a long period, during which attacks could continue and a mass movement would have the time to ripen, reflect, and draw conclusions, go further, perhaps even grasp the extent to which the official policy is complicit with neo-Nazism or at least encourages the rise of neo-Nazism.

In these conditions to say that the banning of the NPD would accomplish nothing is to turn one's back on the concerns of youth, trades unionists and so on. They hope that this banning will serve precisely to beat back the Nazi threat. It would be better to explain how the banning of the NPD, imposed from below, could lead to a real dissolution of the NPD and a real blow against neo-Nazism and the far right as a whole.

Back to zero

It is clear that if the NPD is not banned by the Supreme Court, we start again from zero. It is clear that also a ban in two years time is too late every day there are new attacks, and the NPD is preparing to reorganise in the event of a formal suppression of the party. Another thing must also be explained: if the NPD is banned not for its continuity with historic Nazism and not for its racist politics, but as a "subversive", "anti-constitutional" organisation, nothing will be gained either. The antifascist committees, the far left organisations and even the PDS could be the next victims of bans founded on the same jurisprudence.

We can also explain that there is enormous complicity between certain sectors of the police apparatus and the far right and that this apparatus is not then a serious guarantee for a true dissolution of the NPD. One can add that even a genuine dissolution of the NPD resolves nothing for there will still be the 'independent companionships', the violent Skinheads organised locally and their subculture, and so on.

The conclusion must be that it is necessary to mobilise at the base to gain a true dissolution of the NPD and beat back the far right. This could be agreed by the mass of people ready to do something against the far right and the minority who already make the link between the fight against neo-Nazism and a critique of government policy. In

activity, the majority could more easily learn about the hypocritical nature of the official policy.

Not to speak of a too distant past (Weimar Republic and so on), we only have to go back a decade or so towards the end of the GDR, when there was a mass movement against that regime's political police, the STASI. Rank and file "committees for the dissolution of the Stasi" were formed.

The idea was good: self-activity at the base is the best point of departure for destroying a coercive apparatus. In the framework of the unification of Germany under capitalism and the reign of the West German bourgeoisie, the movement at the base became decomposed, and the dissolution of the STASI became the task of another state apparatus: that of the Federal Republic of Germany. The result was that the emancipatory élan of the mass movement was broken and, among other results, that there was the rise of the neo-Nazi movement.

This experience should lead us today to the constitution of broad "committees for the dissolution of the NPD", of a mass character. Their point of departure would be that they are favourable to the banning of the NPD to bring about its dissolution and to the decomposition of the far right milieu as a whole.

These committees would bring together the existing anti-fascist committees and movements and far left organisations, the PDS, trades unionists, trade union sections or unions, some sectors of the SPD and of the Greens and more generally all the individuals ready to mobilise against the NPD and the far right in general.

Objectives

The objectives of these "committees for the dissolution of the NPD" could be the following:

- Throughout the banning process before the constitutional tribunal, to observe what happens and react by mobilisation if the proceedings drag and if the argument of the tribunal turns towards "the struggle against extremism in general", and so on;
- During this time, to study closely the reality and the activities of the NPD as well as the far right as a whole in the towns and the regions and make public this reality;
- To organise self-defence against the Nazis if necessary and organise the defence of their habitual victims (political refugees, immigrants, their cultural centres and meeting places, the offices of Jewish communities and their cemeteries, the disabled, and so on);
- To choose centres of activity of the far right extremists as targets for the mass mobilisations for the dissolution of the NPD and its ilk, of course before the tribunal makes its decision;
- If the tribunal finds in favour of the banning of the NPD, to be ready to organise the concrete dissolution of this organisation and other similar or worse organisations at the local level;
- To form with others "committees for the dissolution of the NPD" at the regional and national level to choose the dates of big unitary antifascist demonstrations at these levels.

Such an orientation could offer a field of activity to all those who wish truly to beat back the far right. It combines the will to mobilise against the NPD and the far right with a political approach to the legal process unleashed by the parties in government.

If the creation of such a movement succeeded, it would contribute a great deal more than a passive 'wait and see' attitude on the one hand, and propagandist self-marginalisation on the other.