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Germany

Where does Pegida come from?

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Instead of simply rejoicing at the processes of decomposition in the ranks of the organisers of Pegida (and above all of Degida in Dresden, which at its last Monday demonstration could only mobilise 2,000 people) we should rather analyse the social and ideological bases of this right wing populist movement. Because if it is true that the mobilisations against Pegida were much more impressive than the Pegida mobilisations (except in Dresden) and that this most recent attempt to create a racist and Islamophobic mass movement seems to have foundered, there is on the other hand in Germany a broad latent base for this kind of radicalisation which could at any time manifest itself if there are new initiatives of the Pegida type.

According to a study carried out by a team around the political scientist Hans Vogtlander of the Technical University of Dresden [1], the typical Pegida demonstrator lives in Dresden or Leipzig and is aged around 50, draws an income slightly above the average and does not feel linked to a specific religious grouping or political party. The representative nature of this study is doubtful, since two thirds of those questioned chose not to reply to the questions.

According to sources originating from the Antifa milieu (far left and radical left), the NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, a well organised party of the traditional far right) gave the signal not to talk to the press – the “lying press” (“Lügenpresse”) and “the system” are the current expressions taken from the historic Nazis used by far right circles as well as by a number of the organisers and participant in the Pegida demonstrations. If so, that confirms the influence of the far right within Pegida. However, it also invalidates the results of the study in question, since only a minority responded to the questions.

The extremism of the milieu

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of December 24, 2014 evoked a more profound study on Islamophobia in Germany based on a representative telephone poll carried out by Heinz Bude and Ernst-Dieter Lantermann from the university of Kassel in 2011 at the initiative of the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* [2]. All those of a clearly Islamophobic tendency were particularly proud of their German ancestry and are particularly mistrustful of the state and its institutions. But within this there are three distinct groups with different characteristics.

The first group represents the “extremism of the milieu” for the authors of the study. Those in this group are sure of themselves and believe they have realised their aspirations in life. 38% of them have impression of being among the “winners” from the economic development of recent years (against 14% who see themselves as losers). However, more than half are pessimistic about the future. They want a society again based on the traditional values of discipline, security and professional performance and a return to clarity in social life, without disturbance from those who think and live differently. Satisfied with themselves, they judge others harshly, and fear their situation could deteriorate. 50% of those in this group are aged 50 or more, 14% 30 or less. This group represents 9% of the population.

Those in the second group live in precarious social and financial situations, with little training or education and are less sure of themselves. They have not realised what they wanted in life and more than two thirds of them believe they never will. More than half of this group think they have lost out in relation to recent economic development. Those in this group fell socially marginalised and fear becoming victims of a growing “foreign” part of the population. 63% of them are over 50, 11% less than 30. This group represents about 13% of the population.

The members of the third group are well educated and trained. They feel themselves socially recognised, but nonetheless live in precariousness. They have the impression that they have done gained what they deserve. 43% of them feel they have lost out from economic development, and 72% are profoundly pessimistic about the future. They are “open” to other cultures, but not to the Muslim world. 71% of those in this group feel that Muslim culture has no place in the Western world, nearly half wish to limit Muslim immigration and nearly a third wish to ban any public demonstration of the Muslim religion in Germany. In this group, half are aged 50 or more and 17% 30 or less. 13% of the German population are in this group.

Radicalised petty bourgeoisie

The social base of the historic Italian fascists and German Nazis was primarily petty bourgeois. It isn't necessary to be poor and precarious to be part of the potential for populist mobilisations of the right and far right. But precariousness and the fear of social decline play their roles. Also there is a specificity to racist prejudices against the Muslim world.

The middle classes tend to be in the camp of the probable winners. It is then a workers' movement on the defensive for decades and the continuing crisis of credibility of socialist and emancipatory responses to serious social and economic problems which feed the potential of far right initiatives and reactionary radicalisations. The price to pay for the decline of revolutionary hope is the rise of counter-revolutionary despair.

It is true that some déclassé elements inside the working class have joined the camp of petty bourgeois revolt, and it is true also that in Germany neo-Nazis have attempted to break through among unionised youth milieus in a number of industrial enterprises. However, the fundamentally petty bourgeois character of the far right potential remains.

It is then important that the fight against this tendency combines the broadest possible unity of action against the far right and right populist mobilizations with an explicit critique of the established policies with relation to the treatment of refugees and immigrants as in the social and imperialist foreign policy areas. We should stress the true conflicts of interests and contrast them with the purely ideological and illusory conflicts.

Specificity of Dresden?

It is true that in Dresden the Pegida movement has had some spectacular successes in mobilisation. Why? Germans call Dresden “the valley of the ignorant” (“Das Tal der Ahnungslosen”). This is because West German television could not be received in Dresden at the time prior to the overthrow of the GDR. Leipzig saw the mass demonstrations every Monday against the regime of the SED (the single ruling party under the GDR). In Dresden, passivity was the norm.

Juliane Nagel, the sole Saxon deputy for the Die Linke party, who won his seat in the state parliament by direct election in his constituency, has attempted an explanation [\[3\]](#): The inhabitants of Dresden experienced the rule of the SED, and then after 1990 the uninterrupted rule of the CDU at the head of various coalitions. It was also quite an authoritarian regime, characterised for example by a more severe repression against far left anti-fascists than elsewhere in Germany. For Nagel, this created propitious conditions for the development of the Pafida/Legida movement.

The CDU is especially right wing in Saxony. The minister-president of the Land of Saxony, Stanislaw Tillich, has

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proclaimed the need for “dialogue” with the Pegida demonstrators, while responding to chancellor Angela Merkel’s statement that Islam was part of Germany (a statement she was quick to relativise) that if so, it wasn’t part of Saxony. Also Dresden has for a long time been the scene of very strong far right mobilizations on February 13, the anniversary of the Allied bombing of the city near the end of the Second World War.

The official government policy has already decided to implement a number of the demands of the Pegida demonstrators. For example, the Saxon minister of the interior has stated that Tunisia will be declared a “safe” country so as to deny any claim for asylum for refugees from that country. Also the general secretary of the CDU in Saxony has said it is necessary to “revise” asylum rights as a whole.

Juliane Nagel points to a manifest cooperation of the Pegida movement with the right populist AfD in Dresden. The leadership of the AfD in Dresden is opposed to the federal AfD leadership represented by Bernd Lucke. It does not wish to reduce the party’s profile to opposition to the Euro, and wants to exploit the themes dear to those radicalising to the right: action against refugees, against “unassimilated” immigrants and against Muslims. There is a manifest continuity, at least in Saxony, between the right wing of the CDU, the AfD, Pegida, the NPD and militant Nazi circles.

[1] http://tu-dresden.de/aktuelles/newsarchiv/2015/1/pegida_pk

[2] <https://linksunten.indymedia.org/de/node/130385>

[3] <http://www.sozone.de/2015/02/gesprach-mit-juliane-nagel-zu-legidapegida/>