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## ***Germany: Far-right AfD's party conference strengthens völkisch-nationalist "wing"***

The völkisch-nationalist "The Wing" (Der Flügel) group in the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) around Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz has emerged strengthened from the federal party conference, which took place last weekend in Braunschweig.

The representatives of The Wing, who previously dominated the eastern German regional associations with their racist, neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic views, are now firmly integrated into the leadership of the federal party and set the tone there. The new party leadership has been formed as the result of an agreement between the previous leadership and the extreme nationalist group. Those exposed as right-wing radicals have moved up into the new executive committee. Old leadership members who had expressed criticism of The Wing were frozen out.

The 600 party congress delegates elected 44-year-old Tino Chrupalla as successor to Alexander Gauland, who resigned his party co-chairmanship for age reasons. The painter and decorator from Saxony had been personally chosen by Gauland, but was also expressly supported by Kalbitz, Höcke and Alice Weidel, chair of the Bundestag (parliamentary) faction.



**AfD leader Alexander Gauland speaks during a rally in Erfurt, Germany, Wednesday, May 1, 2019. (AP Photo/Jens Meyer)**

Although Chrupalla himself is not a member of Der Flügel, he maintains close contact with it. He had the support of the eastern German regional associations, which are dominated by supporters of The Wing. He recommended himself to the party conference with the remark that he wanted to be a “strong voice for the East.”

As a member of the Bundestag, Chrupalla attracted attention with his aggressive attacks on immigrants and journalists. At election campaign events, for example, he warned against a “repopulation” of Germany. In a letter to his AfD Görlitz district organisation, he called for the denunciation of media representatives: “Background information about decomposition agents disguised as journalists is always welcome, of course.”

The 78-year-old Gauland remains the dominant figure of the AfD, despite his having given up the party co-chairmanship. The function of honorary chairman was created especially for him, and he continues to lead the Bundestag faction together with Weidel.

Jörg Meuthen, who has jointly led the party since 2015—first together with Frauke Petry and then with Gauland—was confirmed in office, along with Chrupalla, by a clear majority. Although the economically liberal economist is described by the media as a “moderate,” he has long collaborated with Höcke and other exponents of the völkisch “wing.”

Alice Weidel, who used to keep her distance from The Wing, is now also working closely with Meuthen. In September, she appeared at the Institute for State Policy in Schnellroda. The arch-nationalist think tank of journalist Götz Kubitschek is regarded as the ideological centre of Der Flügel. The party conference confirmed Weidel as a member of the executive board without any opposing candidates and she was elected deputy party leader.

Several members of the party executive who had previously criticized The Wing, however, were not re-elected. For example, the regional chairmen of Berlin and Rhineland-Palatinate, Georg Pazderski and Uwe Junge, both former Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) officers, are not part of the new executive committee.

Albrecht Glaser, a former Christian Democratic Union (CDU) member and 2017 AfD candidate for the office of Federal President, had to give way as deputy federal chairman to Der Flügel supporter Stephan Brandner. Brandner was only recently voted out as the chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Bundestag because of anti-Semitic and xenophobic statements—an unprecedented event in the seventy-year history of the postwar German parliament.

While the party conference saw the AfD shift its leading personnel to the right, at the same time it sought to maintain a certain verbal moderation. Gauland began by saying that the AfD had to prepare itself for government participation. “The day will come when the CDU has only one option: us,” he stressed in his opening speech. That is why it should not be given unnecessary pretexts that made cooperation more difficult, he added.

Gauland’s successor, Chrupalla, also called on the delegates to act more moderately. At the same time, he explained with a clumsy openness that this was a purely tactical manoeuvre. “Only with convincing content will we be able to open up new groups of voters. With drastic language, you often do the opposite—especially with women,” he said.

In view of the massive loss of votes by the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democratic Party (SPD), Gauland, who himself was a high-ranking CDU official for 40 years, firmly expects that parts of the CDU, and possibly also the SPD, will sooner or later turn to the AfD and form a government with it. He sees Thuringia as a test case, where a government majority without the AfD is hardly possible after the state elections on October 28.

The recent party conference in Braunschweig reveals that in the AfD a right-wing radical fascist party is developing, which is more and more openly associating itself with the traditions of the Nazis. The responsibility for this lies with the establishment parties and especially with the grand coalition. With its anti-refugee policy, its massive military spending and its attacks on the working class, it is putting the AfD’s programme into practice, while at the same time doing its utmost to promote the extreme right-wing party.

The Verfassungsschutz (secret service) pursues AfD opponents as “left-wing extremists,” while defending and advising the AfD. When Hamburg students protested against Bernd Lucke, the founder of this right-wing extremist monster, returning to their university as a professor, the media was outraged by the “suppression of freedom of expression.”

The ruling class needs a right-wing fascist party to suppress growing resistance to militarism, the stepping up of the powers of the repressive state and social inequality. For the same reason, a conspiracy of right-wing politicians, industrialists, financial magnates and the military brought Hitler to power in 1933. This is the case not only in Germany today, but in many other capitalist countries of the world—from the US to Brazil to Eastern Europe.

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