

Silent Conformism and the Politics of Disgust

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This year the German campaign is even more boring than usual. Mother Merkel rules supreme, and Schulz has begun two weeks before her coronation to beg for adoption as her favorite son. One way he tries to endear himself to her is by helping her denounce all disrespectful utterances, on whatever and from whomever, as playing into the dirty hands of the AfD. This is the new right-wing party that Merkel by mistake helped come to life when she threw open the German borders in 2015, to get rid of her image as German and European “ice queen”.

Can Germany really want to rule Europe? Should Brussels be allowed to dictate to Poland and Hungary? What is to be done about debt and stagnation in the Mediterranean under the euro? How long can the ECB continue to print cash? What do zero interest rates do to private pension plans? What are German troops doing at the Russian border? What sort of immigration regime should Europe have, or Germany as part of Europe? How can German pensions remain the way they are without raising the age of retirement? What to do about growing inequality in German society? Or about continuing climate change? How to heal the growing rift with the Turkish community in Germany? None of these questions ever come up. Merkel doesn't raise them, and all “responsible” parties, i.e., those that can hope to be invited into the cabinet by her, follow her lead, above all Schulz and the SPD, for fear of being accused by her henchmen in politics and the press of aiding the AfD.

Not that the AfD was asking these questions. Perhaps they would like to, but they never get there, because of their own ineptitude but also because all good Germans have joined “all responsible political forces” in finding them too disgusting to listen to. The level of political

conformism in today's Germany is breathtaking. At the same time, the AfD is no doubt the dumbest new party that has ever appeared on the German scene. Its leaders are a bunch of infighting egomaniacs, ganged up with a good selection of proto-fascist fanatics. "Politically" the party specializes in dirty language to catch the attention of those that have long fallen out of bourgeois civility and sunk to the bottom of an increasingly divided society – among them no doubt the *desperados* that are devastating the beaches of Mallorca. A party with no money, no political talent, no respect in civil society, no intellectuals, no backing among the *haute bourgeoisie*, only foulmouthed talking – and still, they can expect ten percent of the vote, and possibly more. Nowhere is the disintegration of Germany society more visible than in the rise of this party of what would in any good society be born losers.

Note, incidentally, that the AfD has its strongest regional basis in the former GDR, which used to be the home turf of the left party, DIE LINKE. Almost three decades after unification, East Germany is full of people who feel insulted by lack of respect for their history and way of life, who feel that the new capitalist economy and society has devalued everything that they have stood and worked for. Part of the story is that the average per capita income in East Germany is still only 73 percent of the West German one, no change in sight. This, and the very nasty politics it produces, might be a reminder for German politicians of what can go wrong with a premature monetary union imposing a hard currency on a soft economy, as in 1990. But those willing to consider this can be counted on the fingers of one hand.