

# International VIEWPOINT

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## Bosnia: A war of our times



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# Racist attacks shake Germany

**AUGUST 25, 1992 will go down as a notorious date in recent German history. On that day some 2,500 fascists and a jubilant crowd of thousands of onlookers succeeded in forcing refugees to leave their hostel in Rostock in East Germany.**

**On the same day, leaders of the opposition Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in spite of resistance from the party rank and file, made it known that they would support government-proposed amendments to the constitution to restrict asylum rights, thus making it possible for the change to gain the two thirds majority in parliament required for a constitutional change to become law.**

**DAVID MULLER**

**I**T WAS just a year ago that Nazis found themselves able to force the closure of the local immigrant hostel in Hoyerswerda. Even before that the rightwing parties in the government coalition, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) had started to make asylum an electoral issue.

However this time the spirits they have raised have escaped their control with militant neo-fascists using the racist atmosphere to launch violent actions such as in Rostock. For the first time since the downfall of the Nazi regime they have been able to influence German politics through sheer terror.

Bourgeois politicians and the CDU controlled regional government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which is responsible for Rostock and its policing, at first refused to take the violence seriously. This was shown by the fact that on August 25 there were only six police to confront over 200 armed Nazis; units of border guards stood idly by, since they were not given the order to intervene. Some 60% of those arrested were anti-fascists who had tried to come to the aid of the refugees.

## Lack of will

The press and politicians talked of the "helplessness" of the police. In reality, it was simply a matter of a lack of will.

As if by magic, the same police chiefs and politicians were able to overcome their helplessness on August 29 when 3,000 elite police were on hand to control the anti-fascist counter-demonstration,

making over 90 arrests.

The racist outlook of bourgeois politicians and police chiefs aside, the initial inactivity also had a precise political motive in the form of the campaign for a change to the constitution's provisions on asylum. Furthermore, the racist tide is useful to the government as a way of distracting attention from its own lack of ideas.

It was thus no surprise to find establishment media and politicians deploring the "violence of left and right" (meaning that they do not want to see the emergence either of an independent, action-oriented fascist movement or still less of an energetic anti-fascist movement) alongside a swell of "understanding" for the Nazis and those that applauded them.

The establishment united front has talked mainly about "the problem of stopping the flood of asylum seekers". Meanwhile CDU and SPD security experts have taken the opportunity to call for the creation of a 1,000 to 2,000 strong special police unit. It is not difficult to guess who will be this unit's real target. The Nazi terror has thus led directly to a stronger state — aimed at the left.

All the measures which the state claims are aimed at dealing with the Nazi threat represent concessions to the far right programme and will in fact work to the Nazis' advantage; the refugee hostel in Rostock will be vacated, the article on asylum in the constitution changed and the state strengthened. The Nazis can and have greeted this victory: five to ten attacks on refugee hostels have been taking place daily in Germany.

The caving in of the SPD leadership is a disaster. This it has done not only on asylum, but also over the involvement of German troops in United Nations intervention units. Briefly summarized: the SPD will do its bit to increase the production of refugees while at the same time preventing them from coming to Germany. Some SPD chiefs are toying with the thought of a grand coalition. But the basic cause of the collapse is the integration of the SPD bureaucracy into the bourgeois state apparatus and their lack of ideas.

The SPD no longer has any alternative to the conservative fog as it did at the start of the Brandt era in the 1960s. The collapse of Stalinism in a rightward direction has not had such a big impact on the SPD as on the Stalinist and Stalinist-influenced left. Nonetheless, the Social Democrats has retreated step by step before the rightwing offensive.

There have been some resignations and signs of opposition, especially among the Jusos (Young Socialists), but the latter are scattered and it does not seem that enough support can be found to force an emergency congress. Those that resign from the SPD will probably either drop out of activity or turn towards the Greens. Socialists will try to draw such people into active campaigns against racism and militarism.

## Counter-demonstration

The counter-demonstration in Rostock had very broad support, ranging from the local branch of the DGB trade union confederation to the anarchistic autonomists. The turnout of 20,000 showed that the radical left remains able to mobilize more people than the far right.

However the demonstration also revealed a dangerous split. Some of those in the reformist spectrum see the masses as inherently racist and are therefore ready to consider proposals for tougher controls on immigration.

The other problem comes from the radical side where many who are (correctly) ready to directly confront racist ideology and organize militant opposition are unwilling to address social questions. This is not to suggest that committed racists are going to change their views because of social demands.

The point is, however, to present a clear left alternative built around a consistent anti-racist struggle for full legal and social equality for all and a movement of immigrants and refugees which takes up demands relevant to all workers. If such an alternative is not built, "foreigners out" will become the political programme for an increasing number of people in Germany. ★