

# Federal Republic of Germany: Trade Unions and Antiracism

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With the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a fascist party has established itself that has reached the political center. It agitates against a "stateless big capital" that creates profits "at the expense of the German worker" abroad. The government promotes "mass immigration" to lower wages and "exchange the population." This social populism also has an impact on trade union members.

In the political education program of the unions, right-wing agitation was increasingly countered with a realistic picture of asylum and migration policy especially after the "Summer of Migration" in 2015, for example with the seminar series "Facts instead of Populism".



The trade unions' restraint grew as the openly fascist wing of the AfD grew stronger. After a young man of color, died in a fight with an Iraqi refugee in Chemnitz in August 2018, right-wing thugs organized hunts and attacks on migrants. Large parts of the AfD leadership demonstrated with violence-prone Neonazis. They showed they have the same goal: To use violence to create an ethnically and culturally cleansed Germany. German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer legitimized the violence by saying migration was the "mother of all problems." Many media outlets joined in the agitation. The police did nothing against the racist attacks.



With the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a fascist party has established itself that radiates far into the political center. It has a strong national-social wing and also has an impact on wage earners and the unemployed, including quite a few trade union members. The AfD defends fossil-fuel industrial capitalism and agitates against a "stateless big capital" that transfers profits abroad "at the expense of the German worker."

Another obstacle to an offensive counter-mobilization in the trade unions was the AfD's self-dramatization as the "party of the little people," due to the above-average approval by workers, the unemployed, and trade union members for the party in the 2016 and 2017 state and federal elections. After the so-called summer of migration in 2015 (when the Federal Republic of Germany took in almost one million people seeking protection from the war-torn and crisis-ridden countries of the Middle East), the political education program of the trade unions intensified its efforts to counter the agitation from the right with a realistic view of the causes of flight and migration. With the

seminar series "Facts not Populism" on asylum and migration policy, for example, ver.di is primarily targeting trainees and young employees.



The #Unteilbar alliance was formed. On October 13, 2018, more than 240,000 people demonstrated in Berlin for an open and solidary society in which the social question, the struggle for good education and work, and the right to flee are not played off against each other. Social cuts and racism are separate problems but also linked.

This awareness was missing in the trade unions before. From now on, the independent racist character of the AfD party was more frequently emphasized as a threat and downgrading of the migrant members of the unions. As a helpful maxim for action, the trade unions have the slogan "Clear edge and open door": Clear edge against the right and fighting together against reactionary. It also means working together for solidarity-based solutions to social problems. This can have an effect at the trade union and workplace level in four core areas.



**The importance of equal rights for common struggles:** The often racist division of workers into core and border groups offers starting points for addressing the principle of equal rights, such as the right to vote for all regardless of citizenship, as a strengthening of the whole working class.

**Anti-racist Education:** Unions should do more to push back the division between "us" and "them." A historical understanding of racism is needed. Lack of language courses and residence rights show that the ruling class has long been uninterested in integration policies.

**Shifting the debate:** The right opposes the deterioration of working conditions and social insecurity with an "us versus them" approach. Against this, trade unions must be strengthened as the protective power of all wage earners - employees, the unemployed, precarious workers, migrants, etc.

**Living and anchoring diversity:** The labor struggles of recent years show that the fixation on a white German skilled workforce has little to do with reality. Almost 22% of all IG Metall members, 500,000 people, have a migration background. This must also become more visible in committees and leadership positions.