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## BOOK REVIEW

**WERNER PATZELT, CDU, AFD UND DIE POLITISCHE TORHEIT [CDU, AFD — A POLITICAL FOLLY], DRESDEN, WELTBUCH PRESS, 2019, ISBN: 978-3-906212-43-2 (PBK.), 292 PAGES**

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In his book *CDU, AfD – a Political Folly*, Werner Patzelt, who has been a member of Angela Merkel's conservative CDU party since 1994 and a professor of political science at Technische Universität, Dresden, discusses Germany's right-wing extremist party, the Alternative for Germany or AfD. In particular, Patzelt focuses on the relationship between his own political party – the CDU – and the AfD. For several years, Patzelt's key thesis has been that the CDU has made a mistake – a political folly, as Patzelt calls it – by moving too far to the centre of German politics. This move opened up a space to the CDU's political right. It allowed Germany's newest political party, the right-wing extremist AfD to occupy the political ground to the right of the CDU. Patzelt calls this the representation gap.

Patzelt also argues that by not entering into a coalition with the AfD, the CDU is forced to engage with either the social-democratic SPD or the environmentalist Green party. He favours what is called a *hazelnut coalition* (Augstein 2018) consisting of the CDU (assigned the political colour black) and the AfD – featuring brown, the colour of Hitler's Nazi brown-shirts, the SA. By contrast, Patzelt sees the AfD simply a populist party. Calling a spade a spade, CDU hardliner Friedrich Merz (2018) calls the AfD *a Nazi Party with anti-Semitic undertones* (Klikauer 2018).

Because of the CDU's rejection of entertaining a CDU-AfD coalition – except at a few local levels – the AfD was allowed to grow into a political force. This is Patzelt's key argument. Since the AfD is about twice as strong in East-Germany (Ost-Deutschland) compared to the western parts of Germany, some have started to talk of *Ost-AfD vs. West-AfD* (Zeit 2019a). Beyond that, the Ost-AfD is more conservative compared to the West-AfD (ZDF 2019).

Patzelt maintains that the rise of the Ost-AfD was aided by East-German 'authoritarianism that continued to have an effect and by a cultural resentment against the west' (p. 12). Patzelt also comments on Merkel's refugee policy of 2015. He says, during the 'welcome refugees policy, our country made promises that it could not keep' (p. 16). This is a somewhat unbecoming statement given what has happened – or rather hasn't happened – over the last four years: 2015 to 2019. The often announced so-called *refugee chaos* simply

did not transpire. Apart from some minor administrative hurdles, there simply was no chaos in Germany because of arriving refugees. There was no tsunami sweeping away traditional German institutions and creating turmoil and mayhem.

In terms of politics, Patzelt believes that there are two camps. On the one side are the social-democratic SPD, the environmental Green Party, and the socialist Die Linke. On the other side are his CDU, the AfD and Pegida. Pegida is the AfD's street-fighting organisation. Founded in December 2014, it is popular in East-Germany with Dresden being its main stronghold. Patzelt emphasises that 'the CDU is wedged between both' (p. 20). For quite some time, AfD and Pegida have been placed under observation by Germany's powerful *Verfassungsschutz*, the secret service (Klikauer & Webb Tunney 2019). Patzelt thinks what the *Verfassungsschutz* (VS) did was 'not necessary' (p. 26). Placed under special VS observation is Björn Höcke (p. 28). On Björn Höcke, Patzelt believes that 'the journalistic enemies of the AfD focus on Höcke' (p. 28). Indeed, German and international journalists have reported widely on Björn Höcke. However, these journalists and news agencies are not his sworn enemies. It would be extremely hard to argue that CNN, for example, is the enemy of Björn Höcke when reporting on the AfD's most outspoken right-wing extremist leader.

Worse, Patzelt does not mention even one of the many Neo-Nazi statements made by Björn Höcke. Nor does he comment on Höcke's Neo-Nazi past. In fact, he says nothing about him writing for Neo-Nazi publications under the false name of Landolf Ladig. Nothing, not a single word by Patzelt on Höcke's calling the *Holocaust Memorial* in Berlin "shameful." No matter how deep we dig, there is not a word on the history teacher Björn Höcke's desire to revise Germany's past through what he calls *an 1800 turn-around*. This implies that the SS man pushing a Jewish child into a gas chamber is now good, while the child is evil (Frank 2018).

In an attempt towards what Canadian scholar Henry Giroux recently called the *mainstreaming of fascism* (2018), Patzelt strongly advocates we 'include the AfD when discussing politics' (p. 32). Patzelt wants us to see the AfD as just another normal party. He promotes the idea of whitewashing the AfD despite its many Neo-Nazi links. Recently, an Eisenach (East-Germany) court found that Björn Höcke can be called a *fascist* (Zeit 2019). Instead of acknowledging all this, Patzelt recommends that the AfD 'needs to appear cautious and farsighted' – *mit Augenmaß aufzutreten* (p. 35). This might mean that the AfD should just *appear* that way – *aufzutreten*. The AfD does not necessarily need to be farsighted – the image is enough.

Patzelt also offers excuses for the AfD defending itself against what he calls the 'evil-mindedly setup shooting debate' (p. 35). This debate was about the legitimacy of shooting refugees –including children– at German borders. It was not setup by anyone else but the AfD. The brouhaha started with the then AfD-boss Frauke Petry and Beatrix von Storch (a high level AfD apparatchik). Both women advocated the shooting of refugees at German borders. Wikipedia notes on von Storch that she is the granddaughter of Johann von Krosigk, Hitler's finance minister when der Führer was looting Europe during a war of annihilation. Storch's other grandfather, thus beefing up her *bona fides* as a Neo-Nazi, was SA-*Standartenführer* Nikolaus von Oldenburg. Need one really be reminded that the SA did really shoot children and much worse? Nothing like this enters Patzelt's book. Instead, we read that the debate that was – actually orchestrated by two leading AfD figures and beyond doubt an 'evil-minded setup' (p. 35) by enemy journalists.

Patzelt comments that the AfD is no NPD light, as though it were a fashionable diet drink; contradicting the former president of Germany's prime business association (BDI) and former vice-chair of the AfD, Hans-Olaf Henkel, who pronounced: 'the AfD is the NPD light' (Focus 2015). Patzelt also notes that there is no 'symbiosis between 1,400 years of Islam and a democratic order' (p. 38). Virtually, the same can be said about more than 2,000 years of Catholicism and democracy covering the centuries from the Dark Ages until the end of Franco's dictatorship in Spain and the country's slow evolution towards democracy during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Franco's rule consisted of a heady mixture of staunch Catholicism, militarism and fascism (Graham 2012).

In 2016, Patzelt gave an interview to the AfD's unofficial party newspaper, *Junge Freiheit*, claiming that the stalwart anti-Semite Wolfgang Gedeon (AfD) was just someone on the 'right-wing jester edge' – *rechter Narrensaum* (p. 40). Not a single word about Gedeon's book in which it is stated that the Jews are "our inner enemy" and not a hint of Gedeon's belief that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are the literal truth, even though everyone with an ounce of knowledge identifies it as a Russian fake dating back to the year 1903. Instead, Patzelt notes, 'experts will tell you that Gedeon's statements on Judaism and Zionism are anti-Semitic' (p. 41). Perhaps not only the experts, but also ordinary people with common sense know as much. In a country that gave the world Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Patzelt's belittling of anti-Semitism might seem a teensie-weensie bit problematic, to say the least.

On the AfD's *natural ally* (AfD-boss Gauland), Patzelt declares 'Lutz Bachmann knows that he has achieved something superb for Germany with Pegida' (p. 43). Not one word from Patzelt, however, about the fact that the AfD-boss Gauland called Pegida the *natural ally* of the AfD; not one word about Bachmann's Neo-Nazi activities and his petty crimes, his prison sentences, etc.; and not one word about the fact that Lutz Bachman likes to dress up as Adolf Hitler (Connolly 2015). Instead, Patzelt calls Bachmann and his Pegida *superb*.

Much in line with Pegida and AfD, Patzelt talks of a 'defence against refugees' – *Flüchtlingsabwehr* (p. 50). It implies that taking in refugees from war zones like Syria is something against which Germany needs to be defended. He does not see the taking in of frightened and desperate families as a moral obligation and a constitutional demand. Article 16a on the right of asylum in the German constitution clearly states: persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum. So much for the self-styled law-and-order party, the CDU. The law is the law.

Instead of supporting Germany's constitution, Patzelt sees the granting of asylum as a '*cul-de-sac*' – *Sackgasse* (p. 50) – with no way out for Germany. It gets worse: Patzelt protects those advocating racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism (Merz 2018). Patzelt writes that there have been 'violent acts against posters, office and AfD politicians' (p. 57). What remains unmentioned, though, are the high rates of murder, assault, hate speech, arson and other crimes against new immigrants, asylum seekers and *Gastarbeiteren*, crimes committed by Germany's right-wing extremists and Neo-Nazi would-be storm troopers (Tamma 2019). By mid-2019, right-wing violence had become so bad that the Germany state is planning to substantially increase police officers on a special assignment fighting organized street violence. Of course, Patzelt does not mention the combined Neo-Nazi-AfD rallies held in Chemnitz in August and September 2018. Those AfD-Neo-Nazi rallies had all the Neo-Nazi trimmings one imagines: hunting foreigners, Hitler salutes, mob violence and an attack on a Jewish restaurant (VS 2018:46).

Instead of focusing on the ideologies that gave the world the Shoah (Langbein 2004), Patzelt points to the Links party which has, according to him, ‘communists among their ranks’ (p. 61). Those are the workers and intellectuals once put in concentration camps by the very people who came to power in 1933 through a conservative (Papen) and Nazi (Hitler) coalition government. On the possibility of a similar coalition between Germany’s present-day conservatives (CDU) and its present-day Nazi party (Merz 2018) the AfD, Patzelt writes egregiously, ‘there will not be a real coalition right now [between CDU and AfD] but a working arrangement like the one between the social-democratic SPD, and PDS/Linke in the East-German state of Lower-Saxony might be possible’ (p. 66). Patzelt calls the 1994 SPD/PDS/Linke arrangement in Lower-Saxony a ‘taboo breaker’ (p. 66). A quite different right-wing extremist taboo-breaking occurred in 1933. It cost the lives of well above 50 million people. One can only hope that Germany’s conservatives will not enter into such a self-deluded and suicidal arrangement with Germany’s newest gang of Neo-Nazis (Merz 2018; Klikauer 2018).

One of those advocating an AfD *Machtergreifung* is the aforementioned Björn Höcke. Patzelt simply eliminates Höcke’s many Neo-Nazi-like statements by calling them ‘incidents surrounding Björn Höcke’ (p. 77). While protecting the most outspoken right-wing extremist inside the AfD, Plazelt, writes that there is an ‘anti-AfD propaganda coming from CDU, SPD, Greens and the Linke [that is] supported by the media and science’ (p. 80). Claiming this is one of the AfD’s favourite *circling-the-wagons* conspiratorial fantasies bordering on a *they’re all against us* paranoia. Perhaps, rejecting an AfD coalition government does not constitute a conspiracy but rather a hopeful sign that Germany’s democratic institutions – this time around – reject the AfD’s right-wing extremism.

What Patzelt advocates is an ‘opening of the CDU towards the AfD’ (p. 91). He believes that the AfD is the ‘only political party that speaks the truth’ about refugees (p. 100), while the very opposite is the case. The AfD runs frequent hate speech campaigns. This has already led to criminal convictions for a number of its members and apparatchiks. Meanwhile, in AfD echo chambers, crimes by foreigners are exaggerated or simply invented, as the criminal case against Lisa F. has shown (Nato 2016). Simultaneously, the numbers of refugees are wildly inflated and spiced up by the usual populist argument that ‘the AfD speaks the language of the little people’ (p. 104) which mythical group Patzelt positions against ‘the green-left cultural hegemony’ (p. 110) – something that simply does not exist.

On the other side, the AfD is about to establish a right-wing hegemony in East-Germany. Patzelt notes that ‘entire constituencies in the east of Saxony have fallen to the AfD’ (p. 115). Aided by relentless AfD propaganda via the Internet, many voters are made to believe that the correct way to go is to fight against ‘a multi-cultural immigration society that is in the making’ (p. 119). Patzelt emphasises that ‘around one fifth of all Germans hold a right-wing and racist view’ (p. 120). Yet 20% seems to be a rather emotionally-charged number, unchanged in nearly a century, given what the astute historical witness and insightful analysis of Sebastian Haffner (1941) found during the days of Hitler’s Germany: 20% strongly support Hitler while many of the rest simply go with the flow. Looked at more closely, regional statistics reveal a strong west-to-east ascendancy when it comes to racism, with Saxony being one of the key focal points. In the 2019 state election in Saxony, for instance, the AfD received 27.5%, an increase of 11.7% (Boell 2019:4) – a result previously unseen in Germany. Highlighting such points means ‘Saxony-bashing’ (p. 124) for Patzelt.

Against his party fellows and the German chancellor Angela Merkel, Patzelt argues that it is ‘not the system [that] is in crisis but [that] the chancellor’ is (p. 131). Such invented crises are frequently rehearsed by Germany’s radical right, perhaps in the hope that their lies will stick and then miraculously turn into the truth. Has the miracle happened? By the end of 2019, there still is no Merkel crisis in sight, only the Merkel miracle. Still, Patzelt solemnly writes ‘Merkel is weakened’ using the German word *angeschlagen* (p. 135), bashing or hitting. And bashing and hitting forms the same old empty noise, the same anti-democratic rhetoric used by AfD boss Gauland when he announced on the eve of the last federal election, that he wants to *hunt Merkel down*. This is the primitive language of violence, the raucous sound of death and perhaps even the ominous shouts of fascism (Stanley 2018). Such rhetoric sees the political opponent as ‘the enemy’ (p. 136) and an unwanted movement to be destroyed and swept away on the ‘large wave of populism which the AfD is surfing’ (p. 142). What Patzelt refuses to acknowledge is that he himself is pushing such a right-wing wave.

On several occasions in his book, Patzelt seems to dream about a ‘right-wing majority for CDU, AfD and parts of the FDP’ (p. 157). The smallish FDP is Germany’s only truly neoliberal political party. He also claims that ‘one will not get stability if one enters into a coalition against the AfD’ (p. 172). Sadly for Patzelt, Angela Merkel’s grand-coalition with the social-democratic SPD has shown to be surprisingly stable over many years. Perhaps her grandmotherly coalition is maintained, albeit to a minor degree only, to the exclusion of the AfD. As a minor side-effect of running a rather stable government, Merkel seems determined to keep the AfD and its even more right-wing extremist outsider Pegida as far away from governing as possible. Patzelt fatuously characterises Pegida’s sympathisers and supporters as ‘concerned well-meaning’ (p. 178) people. Meanwhile, Patzelt’s so-called well-meaning people of Pegida have attacked refugees, people of colour and the police (Schneider 2015; Baeck 2019).

Patzelt never shies away from advocating that ‘following a Höcke direction [that would] mean merging the social with the national [it] will be something for the future – *wird Zukunftsträchtig sein* (p. 199). Once upon a time Germany did have a political party that merged the *national* with the *social*. It became *national-socialism*, Hitler’s NSDAP. Of course, Patzelt wants us to ‘see [the AfD as having] a normal centre-right position [and not as] a right-wing radical or Nazi’ party (p. 203). Unlike Patzelt’s attempt to bamboozle his readers, virtually nobody in German politics sees the AfD as a centre-right party. The wording *centre-right* has never been assigned to the AfD, except by Patzelt. He also works hard to argue that the AfD isn’t a ‘collection of racists and Nazis [so that] it should not be ostracised’ (p. 238). He also rejects an ‘all-party alliance against the AfD [contending that this] has strengthened the AfD’ (p. 240). Arguments like these play into the hands of AfD conspiracy fantasies featuring the above-noted *all-against-us* hallucination, while trying to nudge the AfD into a position of victimhood.

Overall, Patzelt’s book represents a fringe position inside his own party, the CDU. The vast majority of CDU members and voters do not seem to favour Patzelt’s proposal for an AfD-CDU coalition (Handelsblatt 2019). In sum, many of the predictions made in his book have not become reality. Others are far removed from the political realities in Germany. For example, recent negotiations for a coalition government in the state of Saxony seemed to favour what Germans call a Kenya coalition. Kenya’s flag consists of black, green and red. This means a coalition consisting of the CDU (black), the social-democrat-

ic SPD (red) and the environmentalist Green party (green). This is the very opposite of what Patzelt's advocates.

It seems that even in one of Germany's most conservative states, Saxony, there is a willingness for democratic parties to work together while – as a side effect – excluding the AfD. In other words and despite Patzelt's frequent insistence, a CDU/AfD coalition government is nowhere in sight. In conclusion, Patzelt's book argues from a right-wing CDU/AfD position. Such a position is rather isolated in Germany's political discourse. Because of Patzelt's political convictions, most of the book's argument remains thankfully unsustainable.

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