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The fight against the far right in Berlin: From Solidarity to Direct Action

On 16 August, 600 people gather gathered in Berlin to display their solidarity with antiracists who were attacked by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia. The demonstration brought together a broad based coalition of far left, anti-racist, and progressive groups including but not limited to members of the Black Lives Matter Berlin, Die Linke, Soul Sisters, Solidarity Cities, The Coalition Berlin, Campus Antifascism Network, and many others. The attendees were multilingual and multiracial people who were anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and internationalist. Solidarity was a central feature of the demonstration mostly to show political support but also to provide material donations to those who incurred physical injury. Consequently, political solidarity meant that those who were ordinarily isolated could collectively show their frustration with the rise of the far right in North America and Europe. A Black American Veteran from Veterans Against the War spoke about the antiwar movement in the 1960s, a woman spoke about US imperialism in Guam, and Black Germans discussed Germany's colonial past. Altogether, most people who attended the demonstration were drawn to a politics of solidarity, however, there were debates about what that might look like. For some, it was a politics of "ally"-ship and for others it was a question of developing networks of comrades who could build trust and organization. As the pulse of these movements mutate and develop new life, these political questions will occur on the streets and in organizing meetings.

Several days after the solidarity demonstration, antifascists were in direct contact with the German far right. Neo-Nazis gathered on 19 August in Spandau, a neighborhood in Berlin, to celebrate the death of Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler's deputy. This demonstration was not merely held in Germany but also extended to Hungary and Czech Republic, where neo-Nazis have also gained popularity. In accordance with German law, the neo-Nazis were not permitted to publicly display swastikas or openly chant hateful speech, yet, their congregation showed that their forces are larger and more confident than in year's past. Nevertheless, the counter protest drew 1000 anti-racists against the 500 neo-Nazis and the antifa were able to prevent the neo-Nazis from marching resulting in them being confined to a 200 meter section. The distinction between the Charlottesville solidarity demonstration on 16 August and the anti-Nazi demonstration is that the tentacles of racism were directly on display. That direct confrontation raised a set of questions for organizers: Why weren't there more antiracists? How can we gather more forces? How do we shift consciousness? The toxic combination of a far right in North America and Europe has produced a surge of protestors who stand on the side of the oppressed. When 40,000 antiracists marched in Boston, Massachusetts on 19 August, they showed that protests matter and that they have the power to enervate the confidence of the far right. Not only was the far right humiliated, they cancelled 67 of their rallies in 36 states.

As the Financial Times has noted, the economic devastation of the German working class and the political abandonment of the centrist and leftist parties has resulted in voters shifting their allegiances to the far right political party, Alternative für Deutschland. What this means is that AfD might be able to secure parliamentary positions in the upcoming German elections on 24 September. Populist in their approach, AfD has been explicit about their xenophobia and used that to secure votes from zealots.

The fight against fascism will not just be a matter of confronting neo-Nazis on the streets but also challenging those who have direct links to political power. The historical origins and trajectory of fascism in Italy and Germany during the 1930s was part of a dark political past, yet the evolution of neo-Nazis in Berlin today warrants a long-term political strategy to tackle the far right and white supremacy, more broadly. Defeating the far right will require organizing mass protest to directly confront their presence. Yet, this might yield raising the level of politics and learning about the history of fascism to ensure that their side does not win.