

## **"Our dealings with the right in the countryside are a constant balancing act"**

The young AbL awards Ottmar Ilchmann the Anti-Fascist of the Year prize

It could have turned out very differently. When 3,000 people, most of them farmers, came together in East Frisia, Germany in June to demonstrate against a misguided wolf policy, AfD<sup>i</sup> officials and the right-extremist "Freie Bauern" could have been on stage. "We received calls and emails from them almost every day," says Ottmar Ilchmann, dairy farmer in the region: "politicians of the new-right AfD party did everything they could to claim issue for themselves." However, Ottmar and some colleagues who were part of the organising team had a clear condition. Right-wing extremists like these must not be given any space!

### **We must not simply ignore the AfD**

For Ottmar, the fight against the spread of right-wing ideas in the countryside is a daily task. Distancing oneself from the right, as set out in the statutes of the AbL, Germany's ECVC member organisation, is important, but not nearly enough. "The AfD is a reality that we cannot simply ignore. As farmers, we have a responsibility to seek contact with our professional colleagues and to engage in substantive debate. Time and again, we have to explain why the AfD is not just another party among many. In view of the party's poll ratings, we have to make it clear why the constant phrase 'It can't get any worse than the current government' is reckless." However, such discussions are only possible if contact with colleagues is established. That's why it was so important for the dairy farmer from East Frisia to join the leadership team of the anti-wolf demonstration. After all, he was able to influence the programme and the list of speakers from within, which would not have been possible from outside.

### **Drawing boundaries where boundaries are crossed**

At the AbL general meeting in December, Ottmar received the Anti-Fascist of the Year Award not only because of his political work in East Frisia. The decisive factor for the *young AbL (jAbL)*, which awarded the prize for the first time this year, was that Ottmar is also prepared to draw boundaries in extreme cases. This came into play a few months later in November, when the Lüneburg district association of the German Dairy Farmers' Association (BDM) invited the AfD politician Dannenberg to be the sole speaker at an event. Ottmar, who had been active in the association for over 15 years, decided to resign his membership and publicly criticise the association's behaviour. By taking a clear position, he and some other members were able to initiate a debate within the association about their own values and how to deal with the Right, which would probably not have happened otherwise.

### **A constant balancing act**

With its prize, the *young AbL* honours precisely this difficult balancing act between establishing contact and setting boundaries, which must be constantly reassessed. Where it makes sense establishing contact and clearly standing up for your values; but drawing boundaries, where boundaries are crossed: that is what makes Ottmar Ilchmann the Anti-Fascist of the Year.

Info box

In times of an increasingly strong Right, especially in rural areas, the *young AbL* has decided to award the prize for the anti-fascist of the year every year from now on. Nominations can be sent to [junge-abl@abl-ev.de](mailto:junge-abl@abl-ev.de).

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<sup>i</sup> Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, *Alternative for Germany*) is an extreme right-wing party founded in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In some states of Germany it is considered "proven right-extremist" by the federal governments' secret service. Current investigative publications revealed deportation plans developed by high AfD politicians (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/10/politicians-from-germany-afd-met-extremist-group-to-discuss-deportation-masterplan>)