

"Modern" German Social Democrats - Jost Stollmann--from multimillionaire to future economics minister

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In June of this year, Gerhard Schröder, Social Democratic Party (SPD) candidate for chancellor of Germany, conjured his future economics minister out of a hat. At the time, the name Jost Stollmann was known only to insiders. Since then, he is talked about everywhere and the SPD has problems in restraining the man. They would prefer that he keeps his neo-liberal, anti-working class ideas to himself--at least until the elections have taken place.

Who is Stollmann? This 43-year-old entrepreneur earned his millions with a computer firm, Compunet, he founded in the mid-1980s. His widely-praised perfect career did not come about overnight. A glance at his biography shows this. Stollmann's parents were rich; he is the son of a well-off businesswoman and his father is a senior ministry official.

Directly following his high school graduation he was sent to various elite colleges in France and the US. In America he made his first attempt to establish himself independently, failed miserably and returned to Germany. His father then helped him with half a million, and Stollmann junior was allowed to try again. With Compunet, he was fortunate to venture into the strong growth sector of the computer and service industries. Compunet has since been bought out by the American corporation General Electric and Stollmann was paid off handsomely.

In his youth, Stollmann was a member of the conservative Young Union, and joined the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1987. In interviews, he has frankly acknowledged his admiration for Chancellor Helmut Kohl, declaring: 'He is a statesman who has accomplished great things with German unification and the euro. That is a fantastic

performance.' As to why this smart employer was not immediately hired by the CDU-led government of Kohl, Stollmann himself said in another interview, 'I was not asked by him [Kohl]. It was conceivable, but I have made an arrangement with Gerhard Schröder.'

So far, so good. But what motivates a semi-retired multimillionaire to want to become economics minister of the SPD, when he himself admits, 'I am no politician and I do not want to be one either'?

'I want to change the world,' he declares on his personal Internet home page. That sounds good, but raises the question: what sort of world does he have in mind? According to Stollmann's view, 'an entrepreneur resides in every person.' Therefore it is a question of 'throwing overboard' the 'take-no-risks mentality' and 'social do-gooding.' His favourite mottoes include, 'overcoming barriers', 'entrepreneurial courage', 'new entrepreneurial culture', 'new well-being' (which he expressly means just for the better-off), etc.

His message is anything but new; most of it can be found almost word for word in the position papers of the SPD's economics forum. Moreover, Stollmann has hired a Düsseldorf advertising agency especially for the election campaign.

Two and a half years ago this same 'ideas factory' developed a campaign for Compunet, to defend Germany as a 'location' for industry and production. The boastful advertising copy stated: 'Finding the competitive pressure murderous? You should be part of the best. Whoever uses Germany as a place to locate and not stagnate, as somewhere with room for manoeuvre, can achieve the economic success thought only possible in the Pacific region.... In just 10 years, turnover here grew from zero to over a billion a year.

That was not achieved by treading the same old paths but by embarking on new, radical and revolutionary ones. This country is ripe for success. Let's make it.'

Should Stollmann really become economics minister, and Schröder chancellor, they are ready to sweep aside every obstacle that stands in the way of big business and its profits.

According to Stollmann: 'A dramatic restructuring of all levels of society is overdue: In the civil service, welfare and health systems and in education.' In other words, everything that the CDU-led government has so far destroyed, with the help of the SPD, is not enough for him. Stollmann's neo-liberal conceptions are virtually identical to those of the liberal democratic FDP, like present Economics Minister Günter Rexrodt or FDP leader Guido Westerwelle. Hardly a day goes by without Stollmann presenting a new proposal on how, or where, even more drastic social cuts can be implemented.

The occasional protests against Stollmann from the junior ranks of the trade unions and the SPD are motivated less by opposition to his policies than by the justified fear that workers might turn away from the SPD in even greater numbers.

Such views from a businessman like Stollmann would not usually be worthy of comment. However, the fact that the party leadership unanimously voted him into Gerhard Schröder's team as shadow economics minister casts a glaring light on the character of a future SPD-led government. The continued rapid rightward turn of the SPD under Schröder and Lafontaine has reached a high point with the naming of Stollmann as SPD shadow economics minister. The development of the SPD into a party responding solely to the needs of big business is irreversible.

But something else is emerging before the electorate. The continual declarations from the Greens, the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, the former Stalinist party of state in East Germany) and their followers that it would be possible to put pressure on a future Red-Green coalition government to carry out social forms, have been stripped of any foundation.

The whole media spectacle conducted by all the mainstream parties, with their virtually identical political formulas, is designed to divert attention from one central fact: the complete failure of their political conceptions. They answer the social disaster, which

they have created, by saying: more of the same! Those who already have much, should get even more.

See Also:

See the election web site of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party--PSG)

[In German]

See Also:

Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) Election Programme 1998:

For an independent political movement of the working class

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