

An exchange on the German Greens

Peter Schwarz
27 September 2005

The following is a letter from a reader on “German Green leader clears way for collaboration with the right”, posted September 24, followed by a reply by the article’s author, Peter Schwarz.

But I’ve just been reading on several web sites that the German Greens have rejected the CDU because of policy differences, e.g.:

“Merkel, head of the Christian Democratic Union, held talks yesterday with leaders of the Greens to sound out whether they could ally with her and the pro-business Free Democrats.

“But the Greens—junior partners in Schröder’s outgoing government coalition—killed speculation they could lurch to the right, shunning Merkel’s invitation to in-depth talks because of disagreements on policy issues.

“‘The differences are very big,’ Merkel said after the talks near the Reichstag parliament building. ‘I would have liked to have spoken more in detail about where we overlap, but the Greens have a different wish.’”

This particular story was on:
http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2005/09/24/german_conservatives_fail_to_win_over_greens_for_new_government/

But as I say, there are a lot of web sites reporting it. I read your site and you are nothing if not consistent. Surely here is a clear case where your own ideological bias has led you to report something which is wrong.

(I do not even believe in electoral politics and don’t have an axe to grind. But you are ideological are you not?)

MK

24 September 2005

Dear MK,

Our estimate that the Greens are preparing for cooperation with the conservative German Union parties, is not a product of ideological bias. The analyses of the WSWs are based on the inherent logic of politics—and in this way we arrive at far more reliable results than would be the case if we merely accepted on face value the

statements of individual politicians, which change on a daily basis.

We have had a great deal of experience in particular with respect to the Greens. The German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International has very closely followed the evolution of this party since its establishment 25 years ago and we have always warned against regarding it as some sort of left alternative to other bourgeois parties.

To give just one example: in 1993 we published a perspective resolution which had a large section on the Greens. The perspective states: “The Greens do not attack the policy of the prevailing parties from the class standpoint of the proletariat, but rather from that of the petty bourgeois.” The resolution points to “the basically conservative nature of the Greens” and stresses that “the reactionary nature of the Greens” becomes “most clear with respect to their economic program.” Finally it warns that “any difference with respect to other bourgeois parties finally disappears at that moment they take up government responsibility.”

That was written five years before the Greens entered the federal government and, at that time, appeared to many also to be a result of “ideological bias.” In fact, our warning was confirmed in its entirety. We thereby gave early warning to the working class against illusions in an SPD-Green coalition and prepared them for the bitter disappointments which they have experienced over the past seven years.

If one regards Fischer’s political maneuver—his renouncement of leadership posts in the Green Party—in connection to the historical development of his party then there can be no doubt that a further, sharp lurch to the right is being prepared. After the collapse of all Social Democrat (SPD)-Green coalitions at a state and national level, the Greens are now preparing for joint governments with the Union parties—CDU (Christian Democratic Union), CSU (Christian Social Union)—and/or free market FDP (Free Democratic Party). (Such coalitions already exist at a local level—a fact which is little known outside

of Germany.) Prominent representatives of the Greens have made unmistakably and publicly clear that the development of such coalitions is their aim.

Following the discussion between the Greens and the Union leadership the chairman of the Green Bundestag faction, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, declared in a newspaper interview that the “Babylonian captivity” of the Greens with the SPD was now past. She recommended that the first step should be a Green-Union coalition at a state level: “Whoever wants to develop an option for black-green, should begin on a state level.” An opportunity in this respect could be the election of the state parliament in Baden-Württemberg due next spring. For some time both the Green Party regional organization and CDU Prime Minister Günther Oettinger have agreed that such a coalition is entirely possible.

In a similar vein, after the one-and-a-half hour meeting with Union party leaders Angela Merkel and Edmund Stoiber, Green Party Chairman Claudia Roth spoke of an “important, perhaps historic meeting.” Never before had she spent so much time with the Bavarian prime minister, she rejoiced. She expected that this will help to “remove taboos and attempts to demonize” her party.

Renate Künast, the agrarian and consumer protection minister in the government of Gerhard Schröder who is seeking to take over the post of leader of the party’s Bundestag faction, was even more explicit. After the discussions with the union she said she reckoned in the future in regard to alliances between the Greens, CDU, FDP or the Left Party: “No constellation is ruled out from the beginning,” she told *Der Spiegel*. “The old attempts to demonize us will no longer apply at the next Bundestag election.”

As we wrote in the original article, it is difficult to predict at present whether a government of the Union parties, FDP and the Greens will come into being. At present the official debate tends towards a grand coalition (Union parties and SPD). However, one cannot completely exclude the possibility of a conservative government with the participation of the Greens.

On the one hand, the building of a grand coalition still confronts substantial obstacles. While there is considerable agreement between the SPD and Union in terms of political content, there are still large differences, in particular, over the issue of the chancellorship. Up to now Schröder has refused to give up his claim to the post, while the Union insists that Merkel becomes chancellor.

On the other hand, in light of the political dilemma which emerged from the election result, there are good

reasons for the ruling elite to include the Greens in a conservative government. The Union parties were unable to exploit widespread discontent with the Schröder government because their own neo-liberal economic program is so unpopular. Many are afraid that under these circumstances a grand coalition could strengthen the position of extreme-left and right parties. The inclusion of the Greens would serve to consign the SPD to the opposition and reconcile a layer of the middle-class Green Party membership with a Merkel government.

In this situation the Greens are more than ready to undertake “political responsibility for the state,” as the chairman of the party, Claudia Roth, stresses again and again. This is also clear from the statements by Künast and Göring Eckardt, quoted above.

With respect to Joschka Fischer himself, for tactical reasons he prefers to leave it to others to sound out the terrain. But in light of his political biography there can be no doubt of his preparedness to assume a ministerial office in a Union-led government. His announcement of his withdrawal from party posts at such an early point amounted to repudiating a fresh government mandate with the SPD, and clearly strengthened the hand of Merkel in her negotiations with the Social Democrats. Fischer’s action closed the door to a repeat of the SPD-Green coalition and at the same time offered Merkel an alternative to a grand coalition.

It is also well-known that Fischer has been aiming for some time to take up some sort of non-partial post in an international organization such as the European Union or the UN. This step would also facilitate moves by the Greens towards an alliance with conservative parties.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Schwarz



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