

German radicals provide political cover for Left Party

A culture of opportunism

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26 September 2008

On September 11, the SAV (Socialist Alternative) group announced the entry of Lucy Redler and her supporters into the Left Party. The SAV is affiliated to the Committee for a Workers International, which originated in a British group led by Ted Grant that broke with Trotskyism half a century ago.

Two years ago, Redler, a leading member of the SAV, stood as the leading candidate for the WASG organisation (Election Alternative Labour and Social Justice) in senate elections in Berlin in opposition to the Left Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which governed—and continues to govern—the German capital in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Since then, the Left Party/PDS has moved clearly to the right. In the Berlin elections of 2006, the party suffered heavy losses due to its antisocial policies. The Left Party lost 9.2 percent of its support across the city and 20 percent of its electoral support in East Berlin—the traditional power base of the PDS. Despite this warning from the electorate, the Left Party, led by Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine, has continued its attacks on the population of Berlin. Just this spring, the SPD-Left Party senate forced a new contract deal on Berlin state employees that involves a real cut in wages.

The Left Party also flagrantly offers its services to the SPD in other German states. In Hesse, it has begun discussions on a pact to support the state SPD, making clear it was not demanding any preconditions. In return, the SPD is calling upon the Left Party to unequivocally recognise the principles of the free-market economy and the capitalist profit system.

It is against this background that Redler and her supporters have chosen to join the Left Party. The reason for this turnover is simple: the Left Party needs a left fig leaf.

It is no coincidence that the SAV announced its decision just a few days after the right-wing putsch in the leadership of the SPD. The return of Franz Müntefering as SPD chairman and the appointment of Frank Steinmeier as the SPD's candidate as chancellor means that the advocates of the antisocial Agenda 2010 policy are once again firmly in charge of the party. Former SPD chancellor Gerhard Schröder has also returned to active politics. He gushingly welcomed the change in the party's leadership and announced he would actively support the party in the next election campaign.

The change in leadership is the response by the SPD to growing mass opposition to major social cuts, a wave of mass redundancies, wage cuts and the introduction of a huge low-pay sector in Germany. The SPD is offering its service to Germany's business federations as the political force that can most effectively intensify the Agenda

policies.

Broad layers of the ruling elite have expressed their disappointment with the current ruling grand coalition of the SPD and conservative parties (Christian Democratic Union, CDU/Christian Social Union, CSU), accusing the coalition of being lax in its furtherance of business interests. The Bavarian CSU has even gone so far as to propose the reversal of one of the social cuts carried out in the past as part of its current state election campaign. Under these conditions, there is increasing discussion in business circles and party headquarters over the possibility of a government formation involving the Left Party, bearing in mind that the coalition that has most effectively introduced social cuts in Germany is the SPD-Left Party senate in Berlin.

For its part, the Left Party has indicated it is ready to play ball and assume government responsibility, not only in states like Hesse and the Saar, but also at a federal level. The character of such a government can already be predicted. Its task would be to intensify social and welfare cuts while suppressing any popular opposition. Such a government would also be able to rely on the support of the trade unions in this respect.

However, the Left Party has a problem. Its practice makes it increasingly more difficult for the party to resolve the contradiction between its radical electoral promises and its activities in government.

This is where Lucy Redler comes in. The task of the SAV is to mask the true character of the Left Party and present its pro-market orientation in the best possible light. In so doing, it plays an important function in the preparation of a government that spouts radical phrases while unequivocally representing the interests of big business.

A political diversion

Redler's press statement is nothing less than a hymn of praise for the Left Party. She has justified her entry into the party with these words: "The Left at a federal level awakens the hopes of millions in a policy that provides an alternative to the social catastrophe introduced by the SPD and CDU." Instead of explaining that such hopes are completely unfounded, Redler merely encourages such illusions.

She states that the Left Party is "the only party which rejects the Hartz IV reforms and the proposed retirement age of 67 and seeks to withdraw troops from Afghanistan." Redler neglects to mention that in power the Left Party follows entirely different policies. In

particular, Redler treats the Berlin Senate as a special case, which has no relevance to politics at a federal level.

Just two years ago, Lucy Redler justified standing as a candidate of the Berlin WASG against the Left Party with the argument that “the Left Party-PDS in a coalition with the SPD had privatised 100,000 dwellings, forced more than 30,000 Hartz IV recipients into one-euro jobs and withdrawn from the local employers’ association in order to cut the wages of public service employees by 8 to 12 percent. The Berlin question is a key question for the future new left. If the WASG were to stand candidates under the wing of the Left Party-PDS, this would represent a break with the basic principles of opposition to welfare cuts, privatisation and job dismantling; it would have to support a government in the election campaign that implements thoroughly antisocial policies.”

Now, Redler is joining the party that implements thoroughly antisocial policies and is seeking to present such policies in the best favourable light.

The statement that the Left Party is the only party that wants to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and pursues a consistently antimilitarist course is a lie. The Left Party votes against military interventions in parliament because its leadership is aware such opposition remains without consequences. Or it uses its stance as a bargaining chip in negotiations over possible coalitions.

The Left Party is vehemently opposed to any broad mobilisation that links opposition to imperialist war with the fight against welfare cuts and poverty—i.e., a struggle against the capitalist system. This was apparent in the anti-war demonstrations of last weekend. At the main rallies in Berlin and Stuttgart, the Left Party failed to undertake any real mobilisation of its membership.

The purely verbal opposition of the Left Party to the intervention by the German army in Afghanistan is compatible with a growing mood in the German foreign ministry, which favours increasing independence from the US. The stance taken by the US government in the Georgia crisis, the stationing of an anti-missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, and the US military offensive in south Afghanistan and Pakistan have already been subjected to criticism in the foreign ministry.

The antimilitarism of the Left Party is directed in particular against the US. As soon as German imperialist interests are at stake, the Left Party will take the same road as the Greens and support interventions by the German army on the pretext they are “humanitarian” actions aimed at preserving peace. A number of Left Party deputies, for example, recently voted with the government to support sending troops to Congo.

A federal government including the Left Party is not only important for the ruling elite in order to channel and counter popular resistance, it is also a vehicle for an important swing in foreign policy. The majority of the Left Party membership and most of its functionaries stem from the PDS—the Party of Democratic Socialism, the successor party to the East German Stalinist SED—and therefore have a long tradition of supporting Eastern European interests in the Cold War.

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Redler has stressed she wants to develop a “Marxist opposition” within the Left Party and strengthen those forces “which support a

militant course and a socialist programme.”

One must ask: How simple and naive does she consider her readers to be? Two years ago, she attacked the antisocial policies of the Left Party, organised an election campaign against it, wrote protest letters, collected signatures and called on trade unionists to resist. After all of her attempts to influence the Left Party have failed miserably, Redler now declares her support for those inside it who she presumes “support a militant course and a socialist programme.”

Redler and the SAV are unable to look to reality in the face: The Left Party is a bureaucratic apparatus consisting of the remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy, sections of the trade union bureaucracy and the SPD, which is intent on preventing a radicalisation of the working class and a political development towards socialism.

One can find criticism of the Left Party and references to its attacks on working conditions on the pages of SAV publications. But instead of issuing a warning and speaking out the truth, Redler and the SAV strive to encourage fresh illusions in these right-wing forces, maintaining, for example, that the Left Party is the “only left force on a party-political level” and that “activists from movements and struggles” would inevitably turn towards the party.

The theoretical justification for such opportunism goes as follows: Today Marxists have the twin tasks of developing a Marxist organisation...as well as “contributing to the reconstruction of the workers’ movement in the broader sense” (SAV strategy paper).

By the “workers’ movement in the broader sense,” the SAV means the trade unions—i.e., reactionary, corrupt, bureaucratic apparatuses pledged to class collaboration. The SAV rejects any conception of building an independent Marxist party as the only way of taking the workers’ movement forward. It was on this basis that the SPD was established originally as a Marxist party more than a century ago.

The most important precondition for the reconstruction of a revolutionary workers’ movement is a conscious break with the old reformist organisations and the theoretical conceptions of social reformism. For its part, the SAV is organically hostile to such a break and is desperately seeking to subordinate the working class to the increasingly discredited labour bureaucracies.



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