

Germany: The Greens as a big business party

Dietmar Henning
20 May 2009

At their recent congress in Berlin, Germany's Greens presented themselves as a party of big business. Their leading representatives stressed that in view of the worldwide economic crisis the one thing above all was necessary: massive state and private investment in pollution-control technology, climate protection and education.

The German grand coalition government of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) was not up to the global challenge of the crisis facing the climate and the economy, explained the party's lead candidate, Renate Künast. She told the delegates present in Berlin's Velodrom, "This country is being governed by sheer diletantism." The economy must be put on a new ecological basis, Künast said. Quick progress must be made with the complete conversion to ecologically friendly forms of energy, she added.

Chairperson Cem Özdemir opened the congress, called to discuss the party's election manifesto for the upcoming Bundestag (federal parliament) elections in September, with the words: "We want a new social contract—and that can and must only be green." He said an epochal crisis requires grand solutions. The Greens are the only party in Germany that understood this, he stressed.

What is meant by a "Green social contract" and by "grand solutions" remained vague and ambiguous, as is often the case with the Greens.

In a contribution for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party), who no longer participates in the usual skirmishes at party congresses, wrote: "The responses to the world economic crisis and the world climatic crisis must be linked together."

The experiences of the world economic crisis of 1929 and the New Deal policies of US president Franklin D. Roosevelt that followed, teach that rescue packages on the order of a magnitude of hundreds of billions of dollars, could only cushion the crash and achieve stabilization on

a low level, he wrote. "However, the actual upturn—and this is very bad news—was brought on by the Second World War and the Cold War that followed," Fischer said. The world today needs a different economic "mega-project" rather than war. This mega-project is the "fight against the climate crisis." "An effective fight against the climate crisis requires nothing less than a green revolution of the world economy," he stressed.

These pompous clichés about a "mega-project" and "green revolution" simply mask the fact that the green rescue plan for capitalism consists of creating new and profitable markets in pollution-control technology and climate protection. As an answer to the crisis, this plan is absurd. The cause of the crisis is not a lack of markets for environmentally friendly projects, but rather the systematic plundering of social resources by an insatiable financial oligarchy. The crisis is a result of the incompatibility of capitalist private property with a modern mass society.

Ten years ago, when the Greens entered government with the SPD, their politics were already limited to carrying out the interests of the employers' associations. It was during their time in government that the most important restrictions on the capital markets were lifted.

And now, in the midst of the crisis, the Greens are making quite clear that their highest priority is the preservation of the capitalist profit system. They agreed to and participated in the bank rescue programme without hesitation—a multibillion-dollar programme for the support of the speculators—which avoided any real democratic scrutiny by being rushed through parliament in accelerated proceedings.

However, that did not prevent the Greens' second leading candidate in the Bundestag elections, Jürgen Trittin, from fiercely polemicising against "unregulated banks and deregulated markets" in his speech to the congress. The previous policy of deregulation endangers jobs, climate protection creates jobs, he said. Again and again, he made clear that he and the Greens long for a return to a more regulated economy in which normal

profits can be made.

Trittin stressed that in addition to defending capitalist conditions, Green economic policy had a second emphasis: state intervention and state control. “Economic crisis, climate change, hunger—these three crises have a common cause,” he said. “The “unregulated” pursuit of profits, one can also say profit-greed”. Unregulated capitalism must be brought under control.

His aim is not to limit the profits of banks and corporations, but rather to put them on a sounder footing—for example via a climate agreement or with “energy efficiency funds.” These would make investments possible in energy conservation technology, making industry “a little more competitive.”

Trittin’s entire speech reeked with the stench of a petit bourgeois who has come into money, and who now sees his assets melting away due to the economic crisis: Fearful of impending social protests he calls for a strong state in order to protect his savings deposits and suppress the increasing resistance on the part of workers.

In his student days in the 1970s, Trittin was a member of the Maoist Communist Federation, which at that time claimed that the increasing crisis of capitalism was leading to a “fascistization” of state and society, i.e., any mass movement opposed to a social crisis could only head to the right. In 1980 Trittin switched to the Greens, becoming environment minister in the Schröder government in 1998. Today, he warns that capitalism must be curbed in order to save it.

Trittin speaks not only for himself. He represents those layers in the upper middle class who have seen their prosperity blossom in the last 10 to 15 years. The economic crisis, rising unemployment and the development of social protests now threaten the harmonious life of this refined middle class layer of academics and state officials living in the affluent suburbs and better-off residential districts of the large cities.

Social scientist Professor Franz Walter also draws a clear connection between the rightward development of the Greens and the ascent of the social layers from which they originate. He comments on the present development of the Greens with the words: “The Greens have returned, at least sociologically, to their origins. No party is more bourgeois than they. Their supporters make the most money in Germany; their voters have the highest levels of education; their sympathizers go on vacation more frequently and travel further than all others... In the course of the last years, the proportion of entrepreneurs among their voters has increased significantly. In the 2004

European elections, the Greens came second among self-employed voters, just behind the CDU/CSU. On the other hand, no party in the Bundestag fares as badly among workers and the unemployed as the post-materialists.”

The distant and often hostile attitude towards working people—the majority—continually finds its reflection in the policies of the Greens. This is particularly obvious today.

Like the SPD, the Greens also continue to uphold the antisocial policies embodied in the welfare cuts and labour “reforms” of Agenda 2010 and the Hartz laws. The widening gulf between rich and poor is not to be closed, but merely corrected slightly. They expressly defend the Hartz laws, introduced when the Greens were in government. A call for a cosmetic increase in the basic rate of welfare payments from €351 to €420 a month, like the call for a minimum wage of €7.50, was passed by congress delegates by only a narrow majority and after fierce dispute.

Such minimal social demands cannot disguise the fact that, under conditions of economic crisis, the Greens are clearly moving to the right.

When the party was formed at the end of the 1970s, many regarded it as a left-wing alternative to the SPD. Then, when it entered the federal government in 1998 as junior partner to the SPD, it guarded the right flank of the coalition particularly on matters of social and economic policy. While there was some resistance to Chancellor Schröder’s Agenda 2010 in the ranks of the SPD, the Greens supported it without reservation. One year ago in Hamburg, the Greens went on to form their first state-level coalition with the CDU.

Their recent party congress has made it abundantly clear that the party has finally arrived in the camp of right-wing bourgeois politics. It is in this context that one should understand the statement by the Greens that their congress had not reached any firm conclusions about future coalitions at a federal level. This can only mean that the party is keeping all its options open, including a possible federal coalition with the Christian Democrats.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact