

German federal election on September 27:

What does the Pirate Party stand for?

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The recently founded Pirate Party is standing for the first time in Germany's September 27 federal election. The party was set up just three years ago based on a single issue: freedom of information on the Internet.

The roots of the Pirate Party lie in Sweden where the party was founded on January 1, 2006. It emerged from the web site Pirate Bay, which organised the (mainly illegal) exchange of music, films, software and other Internet files. Following a court judgement in April 2009 in Stockholm, which sentenced the organisers of Pirate Bay to one year's detentions and fines of 2.75 million euros for copyright violations, the Swedish Pirate Party won 7 percent of the vote in the 2009 European election.

Since then Pirate Parties have been founded in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France and Peru. Other parties are in the process of being established.

The German Pirate Party was registered on a federal basis in September 2006. In the Hessian state election at the start of this year it received 0.5 percent of the vote, and in the European election 0.9 percent. In June the Social Democratic Party deputy Jörg Tauss quit the SPD to join the Pirate Party, giving the party its first representation in the German parliament (the Bundestag). Tauss came into conflict with the SPD because it had voted for a law that allows the police to block certain Internet sites. The pretext given for the new law was the need to combat child pornography.

According to its own figures, the German Pirate Party now has 7,200 members. In the forthcoming federal election it is expected to receive one of the best results for a newly founded smaller party. It is unlikely, however, to receive the five percent, which according to German electoral law, is necessary for representation in the Bundestag.

The program of the Pirate Party is extremely limited. With one exception, namely education, the party restricts itself to issues directly bound up with the Internet: i.e. self-determination of information, free exchange of knowledge, reform of copyright and patent laws, transparency and data protection.

The Pirate Party rejects, for example, the online and video monitoring as well as retention of data by the state, which were introduced under the pretext of "anti-terror laws" by the former

SPD-Green government led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and extended by the grand coalition (SPD, CDU, CSU) under Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union). The party is also opposed to patents on software — a position held by those who use and advocate Open Source software.

The Pirate Party also advocates changes to copyright codes. "Private individuals without commercial interests" are to have the right (as was formerly the case) to "freely use and copy works". The Pirate Party rejects the digital copy protection measures employed by the major music, film and software industry concerns. The introduction of a universal deduction for copyright remuneration (a so-called cultural flat rate) by Internet users is discussed in the party, but does not appear in its election program.

The Pirate Party also appeals for more "transparency on the part of the state" and a "transparent government". The freedom of information law has not been "brought to a satisfactory level". Improved transparency of state "decision-making processes" should make these more "perceptible and comprehensible for the citizen". According to its election program "transparency" is to end, however, precisely at that point when issues of "national security" are involved.

In the sphere of education the Pirate Party categorically rejects any kind of fees. This is necessary in order to ensure that "every person, independent of their social origin, is able to take part in society to the greatest possible extent", the party declares on its web site. "Education is one of the most important resources of the economy, because in the long term, progress and social prosperity can only be secured through the maintenance, passing on and increase of knowledge."

The main source of support for the Pirate Party comes from the Internet sector. Its Bundestag candidates are almost exclusively software developers, computer scientists and engineers.

The Pirate Party explicitly refuses to raise social demands or other political issues. "We only want to advocate political policies about which we have some understanding and not assume authority on issues where we lack any competence," the party states on its web site. In an Internet forum, the Pirate Party answers a question as to whether it regards itself as left wing or right wing as follows: "No, we pirates see ourselves

outside of the rigid lines separating the extremes ‘right’ and ‘left.’” The party does not stand somewhere in the centre, “but rather outside of the—in our opinion too simple—linear view of political positions.”

One can detect an element of political naivety in this position, but in fact it represents a wilful deception of the electorate. In a society torn apart by social conflicts, no party can stand above social class—including the Pirate Party. In fact it expressly professes its adherence to the free-market economy, to the bourgeois constitution and the capitalist state—even if it criticises some its excesses.

The party’s praise for the German constitution is boundless. “We stand behind the Basic Law in the fundamental form, worked out by our founding fathers in 1949”, the party declares in the first chapter of its election program. And in the Internet forum already cited, the Pirate Party explains: “The question for the 21st century is not ‘right’ or ‘left’, ‘conservative’ or ‘social-democratic’. It is—freedom or authoritarianism. We stand absolutely clearly on the side of the freedom. The highest authority for us is the liberal and democratic constitutional structure laid down in our Basic Law.”

Such a sentence could just as well appear in a policy document of the rabidly free market Free Democratic Party (FDP).

The proposals of the Pirate Party regarding copyright aim at establishing new “business models” for “artists, writers, journalists, computer programmers and other cultural workers” which make it “possible for the authors of the digital cultural community to receive proceeds for the utilisation of their works or their surrounding field on a free market basis.”

For the pop music industry, the party promises better “earnings possibilities through the elimination of middlemen”—i.e., the big international music companies. This will enable artists to retain “a larger part” of the proceeds from their work.

The party also rejects any “competition-distorting influence” in the sphere of public infrastructure (road, rail, electricity supplies, water routes) by “private-economic interests”. The state must remain the sole operators of such nets “as the only publicly controllable authority.”

This is the language of the petty bourgeois, who feels he has suffered at the hands of big business and calls upon the state to arbitrate. While repeatedly appealing to the state, the party makes no mention of any of those issues that are most relevant to the working population, such as wages, employee rights, jobs, or anti-welfare laws.

The Pirate Party is a right-wing bourgeois party, which, programmatically speaking, is close to the FDP and Greens. In Thuringia, it has already agreed to set up an alliance with the Greens following the recent state election. The Swedish deputy of the Pirate Party in the European parliament has also joined the Green parliamentary group.

In addition, the party is also open to possible co-operation

with those parties, which in the past have been responsible for the development of police state surveillance measures and laws that restrict freedom of information and undermine data protection. A spokesman for the Pirate Party, Aaron Koenig, declares in a video on Youtube that he would also form a coalition with the CDU and the SPD in government if these two parties were prepared to take up some of the issues of importance to the Pirate Party.

Koenig is the founder and managing director of the Bitfilm Network GmbH, which deals with “moving picture content on the net”. He is responsible for publicity and communication for the Pirate Party and only joined the party in July.

The main source of support for the Pirate Party is amongst young people involved in irregular precarious work, whose lives are influenced by modern technology and are estranged from the established parties—in particular students and university graduates involved in the sphere of electronic media.

The Pirate Party will, however, rapidly disappoint its supporters. It is not possible to defend democratic rights in a class divided society without taking up a clear position on vital social and political questions. Self-determination, social participation, transparency and many of the other laudable issues advocated by the Pirate Party cannot be realised as long as a small financial oligarchy controls social wealth and dictates the course of all economic and political decisions.

The issues taken up in the program of the Pirate Party, such as the spread of surveillance, the restrictions on data protection and the limits on freedom of information, are all part of the reaction of the ruling class to increasing social tensions. They are directed against the working population and the danger of a social rebellion.

The defence of democratic rights therefore requires a socialist program. The new media and the Internet needs an open and free society, which gives priority to the social and intellectual needs of the working population—not the profit interests of big corporations. Democracy can be achieved only by challenging the foundations of capitalist rule—the profit system, private property, and the free-market economy.



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