

The crisis of German democracy and calls for a ‘left’ government

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Two issues are currently at the centre of political discussion in Germany. First, criticism from the business media of the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) continues to grow, and is linked to expressions of support for so-called “red-green” coalitions, combining the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Green Party.

Second, a debate has begun about the “crisis of democracy” and the “need for Bonapartist solutions.”

Both issues are directly related. Influential sections of the ruling class are of the view that the SPD, in alliance with the Greens and if necessary supported by the Left Party, would be in a better position to implement sweeping social cuts and suppress anticipated popular resistance than the current Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CSU)-Free Democratic Party (FDP) federal government.

They complain that the Merkel government is too preoccupied with itself and with its internal conflicts; is hesitating to push through deep cuts in the social safety net, and is not tackling with enough determination the “economic reforms that are indispensable” for big business.

The election of the SPD regional chair, Hannelore Kraft, as the new state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia last Wednesday, consummating the formation of a “red-green” minority government in Germany’s most populous state, is to serve as a test of collaboration between the SPD, the Green Party and the Left Party, with a view toward a possible “red-red-green” option at the federal level.

The ruling class will use the “red-red-green” option in two ways: to exert pressure on the CDU-CSU-FDP federal coalition and, if necessary, install the “left” coalition in place of the existing federal government.

There is a proliferation of media commentaries

praising the Schröder-Fischer government (1998-2005) as “red-green I” and depicting the social cuts implemented by means of its Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV welfare and labour “reforms” as crucial steps in increasing the competitiveness of German industry in Europe and worldwide.

But “red-green II” would not be a repeat of the first SPD-Green Party federal government. Given the global economic crisis, the ruling class is calling for social attacks that go far beyond Agenda 2010. What remains of the welfare state is to be slashed even more drastically.

The demands of big business are wide-ranging: removing legal protections against dismissal, cutting paid sick leave, scrapping the statutory holiday minimum, slashing state pensions, and much more. Moreover, value added tax is to be raised significantly, as are health and pensions contributions.

Such a frontal assault on social conditions will encounter fierce resistance from the population and ultimately cannot be enforced by democratic means. In Europe and around the world, preparations are underway to change existing governments and establish the necessary authoritarian structures to shift the burden of the economic crisis onto the working population.

Nowhere can any serious resistance be found in the ruling elite to the dismantling of democratic structures and the introduction of police state-type measures.

The eulogies to “red-red-green” are an expression of the fact that sections of the ruling class regard such a coalition as an appropriate instrument for the transition to authoritarian forms of rule.

SPD Chancellor Schröder’s “enough is enough” policy, by which he suppressed all opposition in his own party and in the population, still garners admiration in business circles. During the years of the

“red-green” government, the SPD lost 17 state elections, but Schröder was not prepared to give way to pressure from below. After the party’s substantial loss of votes in the North Rhine-Westphalia state election in 2005, he presented the population with an ultimatum by bringing about early federal elections: either he would obtain a new mandate, or he would hand over power to the CDU/CSU.

In the event, he did the latter.

To force an early election, Schröder, supported by the Greens, bypassed normal democratic procedures. Since then, both parties have moved even further to the right.

In the past decade and a half, the SPD has lost more than a third of its members. Anyone who had even the slightest hope that the SPD would pursue social and humanitarian goals has been disillusioned and turned his back on the party. Today, the SPD is little more than a state-funded bureaucratic apparatus to implement the interests of the ruling elite.

The transformation of the Greens is particularly striking. It has become the mouthpiece of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class. Its membership includes the highest proportion of state employed officials of any party.

During the years of the “red-green” government, these former pacifists transformed themselves into supporters of foreign military missions by the German army. Now they fervently advocate the transformation of the Bundeswehr into a professional army, knowing that this goal is being pursued by those who want to overturn the constitutional ban on the deployment of the Bundeswehr inside Germany so that the army can be used in domestic crises and against strikes and mass protests.

Recently, historian Herfried Münkler, who describes democracy as a “tyranny of the majority” and writes about the “need for Bonapartist solutions,” pointedly directed his arguments toward the Greens. Citing the “impending” environmental “disaster,” he asked, “What happens when the people do not want to listen?”

“Then the idea of an eco-dictatorship arises,” he replied.

The demand for an authoritarian form of government is combined with a call for a Council of Experts comprised of educated professionals, which, in addition to competence, must also have the authority of the state to enforce its decisions against the will of the majority.

The trade unions form a part of these preparations towards authoritarian forms of rule. Since the crisis began in the autumn of 2008, they have intensified their collaboration with the government and act ever more openly as a part of the state apparatus. Their goal is to suppress the class struggle and to ensure that peace and order prevails. Their network of works councils and union representatives is used primarily to prevent any independent movement on the part of workers.

The Left Party plays an important role in this “red-green” alliance with the unions. Because memories of the anti-social policies of the last “red-green” federal government are still widespread, and the representatives of the SPD, the Greens and the German Federation of Unions who show up at rallies often evoke shouts of “You were responsible for Hartz IV!”, the Left Party has taken on the defence of the “red-green” alliance, a task for which it is well prepared.

In the East of Germany, the Left Party (formerly the Party of Democratic Socialism—PDS) has its roots in the repressive Stalinist regime of East Germany. During the period of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the PDS regarded its main task as maintaining “law and order on German streets.”

The claim that “red-red-green” is the lesser evil stands things on their head. What is referred to in the media as a “left-wing” government is, in fact, part of the preparations by the ruling class for intensified social attacks and growing working class resistance.

Under conditions where the class character of bourgeois democracy is becoming increasingly clear, the working class must make its own preparations to establish genuine democracy. This requires an international socialist programme and the establishment of workers’ governments to expropriate the financial aristocracy and the banks and corporations and put them under the democratic control of working people.

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