

Germany's Left Party supports unconditional cooperation with the SPD and Greens

Peter Schwarz
17 January 2013

The Left Party has set its sights on an alliance with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens in the election in the state of Lower Saxony which takes place on Sunday. It sees the election in the northern German state as a test run for the general election due in September. Left Party chairman Bernd Riexinger and deputy party and parliamentary leader Sahra Wagenknecht made this clear at a press conference held in Hanover January 9.

Riexinger described the election in Lower Saxony as decisive for the future of Germany and of key importance for the Left Party, while Wagenknecht underlined the party's readiness to participate in negotiations on forming a government.

"The offer stands: we are willing to talk", she said, addressing the SPD and the Greens. She then added that a future SPD, Green and Left Party coalition administration in Lower Saxony could help overcome political obstacles to such a coalition at the federal level.

Meanwhile, several newspapers have reported on an internal paper issued by the two co-chairs of the Left Party, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, putting forward a "power perspective for a leftist coalition on the national level". The document calls for "substantial cooperation" with the SPD and Greens and no longer sets "any conditions for a coalition at the federal level", the newspaper *Osnabrück Zeitung* writes.

Up until now, the two leaders of the Left party had made collaboration with the SPD and Greens conditional on four prerequisites: No military operations abroad, a ban on the export of armaments, a minimum monthly income of €1,000 for all and increased taxes on the wealthy.

Now, the Left Party leadership has dropped these conditions and claims that the SPD and Greens have adopted their own positions since the latter have spent time in opposition at a federal level. The internal document states: "Their [the SPD's and Greens'] hints on basic social security, minimum wage, pensions and protection against poverty in old age, or for banking regulation indicate a shift towards the positions of the Left Party".

In fact, the opposite is the case. On all major policy issues, the SPD and the Greens have moved to the right. In parliament, they have consistently supported the Angela Merkel government regarding both European policy and German army

interventions in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa. They are thereby directly responsible for the brutal austerity measures that have plunged large sections of the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish population into poverty and misery, and for the death of tens of thousands of innocent victims in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria.

In particular, the Greens complain that the current activities of the Germany army are insufficient. Green Party leader Jürgen Trittin is currently demanding more German involvement in the latest imperialist intervention in Mali and a more vigorous military intervention in Syria.

The Left Party will support such a policy. Therein lies the significance of the "substantial cooperation without conditions" called for by the party leadership. As for the "hints" on basic social security and other social issues, which they interpret as a shift by the SPD and the Greens towards the Left Party, these are merely campaign gimmicks to be dropped the day after the election with the argument that the public purse is empty.

The SPD and Greens have not toned down their anti-social policies since entering opposition in 2008. What has changed, however, is the attitude of the Left Party. It is now ready to support their right-wing policies without preconditions.

This is its reaction to the deterioration of the social crisis placing intense class struggles on the agenda, which the discredited mainstream parties are increasingly unable to control. All economic data suggest that this crisis will worsen considerably in the period up to the elections.

There is also growing political instability. The established parties are increasingly losing credibility. Opinion polls predict an unstable result in Lower Saxony as well as at the federal level. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) led by Chancellor Merkel currently has a clear advantage, but is in danger of losing its coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party (FDP). Due to the lack of support for the Social Democrats, the SPD and the Greens also lack a clear majority to take power.

Under these conditions, the Left Party is offering its services to provide the SPD and the Greens with the majority it needs to carry out their anti-worker policies. In so doing, the Left Party is playing its part in stabilising capitalist rule and suppressing social struggles. It is significant that the Left Party called on Alexis Tsipras, the chairman of its Greek sister party SYRIZA,

to assist its election campaign in Lower Saxony. In Greece, Tsipras and SYRIZA are playing a similar role in stabilising capitalist rule.

This turn towards the SPD and Greens is being led by Sahra Wagenknecht, often described as a figurehead of the supposed left wing of the party. She has played a leading role in the last 10 days of the election campaign in Lower Saxony. Her portrait is heavily featured on the billboards of the Left Party, although she is not running for the state legislature. She has also made clear that she will personally lead negotiations on a new administration if called upon after the election.

For many years, the wing of the party led by Wagenknecht and her mentor and partner, Oskar Lafontaine, was seen as opposing close cooperation with the SPD and Greens. For this reason, the Lafontaine wing was fiercely criticised by party organisations in east Germany that were heavily involved in administrations at a municipal and state level.

The real issue for Lafontaine was not to squander prematurely the leftist image of the party in order to better control social conflict. There has never been the slightest doubt regarding his loyalty to the bourgeois state and hostility to the class struggle. As SPD premier of the state of Saarland, he smoothly and effectively closed down the region's key steel and mining industry in close cooperation with the trade unions.

Wagenknecht now advocates political and theoretical opinions that are also supported by far-right circles. As a leader of the Stalinist "Communist Platform in the PDS [Party of Democratic Socialism, former name of the Left Party]" in the 1990s, Wagenknecht spouted Marxist phrases. Now, she has renounced her verbal adherence to Marxism and communism and made the Christian Democrat politician Ludwig Erhard her new role model.

As economics minister (1949-1963) and chancellor (1963-1966), Erhard helped restore German capitalism, which had been thoroughly discredited by the Nazi dictatorship. Together with Konrad Adenauer, he ensured that tens of thousands of former Nazis in government, law, business and education remained at their posts, enabled war criminals such as Flick, Krupp and Thyssen to retain their fortunes and ensured that representatives of the banks such as Robert Pferdemenges and Hermann Josef Abs continued to pull the strings in business and politics.

The banning of the Communist Party and the persecution of countless Communists who had opposed the Nazi regime also falls into the remit of Adenauer and Erhard.

Wagenknecht now presents this reactionary period as a kind of preamble to a socialist society. She portrays the social concessions made by the ruling class at the time under the pressure of massive strikes as a beneficence from enlightened economists and politicians. The Left Party leader takes Erhard's demagogic promise "Prosperity for All" at face value, claiming that the present social crisis is a consequence of "breaking the promise of Ludwig Erhard".

In May 2011, she ~~published~~ her book *Capitalism* and expressly endorsed Erhard's ordoliberal views [ordoliberalism is a specifically German variant of neoliberalism, named for the academic journal *Ordo Yearbook*, created in 1948] that defend capitalist private property and the free market within a national regulatory framework (see: "'Left' figurehead of German Left Party praises meritocracy and the market").

Socialism in her view is not based on nationalising of the means of production and democratic planning of production in the interest of all of society. Instead, one arrives at socialism by "thinking the original free market ideas to the end". It is a socialism, according to Wagenknecht, that "does not uphold centralism, but rather performance and competition" and "is dominated by small and medium enterprises".

The invocation of Erhard and the glorification of performance and competition are an appeal to right-wing layers of the middle class who are under the pressure of the big banks and monopolies and feel increasingly uneasy with the CDU and the FDP. Wagenknecht offers her services as someone who can combine defence of the market economy and capitalist ownership with verbal attacks on "casino banks" and millionaires. The policies she has developed have a nationalistic undertone that also appeals to the right wing of the political spectrum.

Wagenknecht has enjoyed huge media support since the publication of *Freedom, Not Capitalism*. She is a frequent guest on leading television talk shows, and almost every major newspaper has published a long and sympathetic interview with her.

Against this background, it is only logical that the Left Party develops a "power perspective" on the national level and strives for ministerial posts. Once in power, the party will proceed against the unemployed and socially deprived with the same ruthlessness as the SPD, the Greens and the Merkel government have done in recent years.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact