

# German Left Party promotes SPD candidate Steinbrück

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Leading figures in the German Left Party have recently stated their readiness to support the Social Democratic Party's (SPD's) right-wing candidate Pier Steinbrück as future chancellor, and to assist in the creation of an SPD/Green/Left Party government.

On Tuesday, Gregor Gysi, the leading candidate for the Left Party in this year's federal elections, commented in the *Rheinische Post*: "I see it very pragmatically. If we can reach a compromise with the SPD on key issues such as social, finance and foreign policies, we will not stand in the way of the election of an SPD Chancellor."

Two days previously, party co-leader Bernd Riexinger stated in an interview with the *Bild am Sonntag* that he would be willing to support Steinbrück. He did not think it wise to "exclude all possibilities" prior to the election. A so-called red-red-green coalition with Steinbrück as chancellor would be possible, depending only on the political content of any agreement. Any other view would be "childish", he added.

Stefan Liebich and Christian Görke, regional heads of the Left Party in Berlin and Brandenburg, followed suit. They would "elect Steinbrück as chancellor," if the SPD made "fair and manageable demands" for them to accept.

When Steinbrück was named the SPD's chancellor candidate last October, Left Party co-leader Katja Kipping declared that the Left Party, Greens and SPD should resolve their "childish ritual of differentiation" and clear the path for open collaboration.

Lothar Bisky, long-term chair of the Left Party and its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), and currently a member of the European parliament, was even more explicit. Asked whether a coalition with the Greens and SPD would be an option for the Left

Party, Bisky told *Die Zeit*: "Of course. It would be a chance for the Left Party to break out of its narrowness. The idea that one is not allowed to make contact with a particular party is unbelievably childish."

Answering the question of whether the Left Party would vote for Steinbrück, Bisky replied: "Yes, if it makes sense. I can in any case envisage it. Why not?"

The support for Steinbrück makes clear that the Left Party is in broad agreement with the SPD programme and the policies of the ruling German government.

When it selected Steinbrück as its leading candidate for the federal election this autumn, the SPD was sending a clear signal. Now, the Left Party is showing its commitment to right-wing policies with its open display of support for a man who stands for massive social cuts and the handing over of billions to the banks and big business.

As finance minister in the previous grand coalition government (i.e., of the SPD and the conservative parties), Steinbrück awarded billions of euros to the banks during the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures enforced against the population.

With its support for Steinbrück, the Left Party is preparing to help remove a government that ruling circles increasingly see as an obstacle. In the fifth year of the economic crisis, the ruling elite in Germany is demanding fresh social cuts in the heart of Europe.

In a speech at the Bundestag (parliament) shortly after he was named the SPD's chancellor candidate, Steinbrück criticised Merkel for her "double-game in Europe." While the chancellor stood for strict budgetary policy in Europe, she did not herself implement the "recommendations" the European Union (EU) gives to countries in crisis. Steinbrück concluded, "This government is not taking a leading role in Europe

in debt reduction.”

In 1998, it was also an SPD government led by Gerhard Schröder that received the task of overcoming the “reform blockade”—the residue of 16 years of rule by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under Helmut Kohl. Schröder instigated a social and political catastrophe, including the Hartz IV welfare reforms, the creation of a low-wage sector, tax reductions for the rich, and the return of the German army to the world stage.

Steinbrück as chancellor would not remain in the shadows of Schröder, but would intensify Merkel’s austerity policies in Germany and across Europe. Steinbrück believes that it is not permissible to threaten sanctions, “if one is not prepared to implement them.” In other words, anyone who does not follow the EU’s dictates of austerity—which primarily come from Germany—must face the consequences.

To enforce the cuts against opposition from the working class, Steinbrück calls for a “strong state.” At a special party conference in December, he warned that cuts in social welfare were undermining social stability. This was a danger above all to those “living in penthouse apartments.” Therefore, the state would have to be strengthened.

Steinbrück’s reactionary politics have not changed. On the same day Bisky announced his support, the online edition of *Handelsblatt* reported on a February 21, 2012, secret meeting between Steinbrück and the heads of several large corporations, including EADS, Vattenfall, RWE, Vodafone and Microsoft. He said that an SPD government would not “turn to the left” in tax policy and that he wanted to take a “business-friendly approach.”

By supporting Steinbrück, the Left Party is making explicit the social interests it represents—i.e., a small section of the ever-wealthier business and financial elite.

As the class struggle intensifies, the Left Party is moving further to the right, into the camp of the SPD and Greens. In foreign policy, the Left Party supports the interests of German imperialism and the imperialist intervention in Syria aimed at overthrowing the Assad government and installing a pro-Western puppet regime.

Domestically, the party is prepared to implement austerity measures at a federal level—just as it has done

at a regional level in collaboration with the SPD.

During its 10-year participation in the former Berlin Senate, the Left Party helped implement pay and job cuts in the public service, privatise housing and water supplies, close swimming pools and cultural institutions, and enforce the Hartz IV welfare reforms—with a consequent marked increase in child poverty.

No other region in Germany spends proportionally less on education than Brandenburg, where the Left party is in government with the SPD.

The Left Party is aware that class tensions are intensifying. The prolonged recession in Europe will increasingly lead to mass layoffs and social cuts in Germany, and widespread class conflict. The Left Party is convinced it will be required in these conflicts, not simply to impose austerity measures but to maintain control over opposition to them. By supporting Steinbrück, the Left Party is signalling to ruling circles in Germany that it is willing to take on this task.



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