

Germany's Left Party supports austerity in Bulgaria

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Hans Modrow, chair of the Left Party's council of elders, has pledged his unreserved support for the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the government it hopes to lead.

In a letter dated May 21 to BSP chair Sergei Stanishev, cited in the *Junge Welt* newspaper, Modrow writes, "The endeavour to form a government, in which various political forces participate, as sought by the BSP, finds the full support of left forces in Germany."

Modrow, who from November 1989 to April 1990 headed the last Stalinist-led regime in East Germany, sees a direct parallel between current events in Bulgaria and the government he led.

"Certainly, time has not stood still", he writes. "However, at the end of 1989/beginning of 1990 in the GDR [German Democratic Republic], when the social and political conflicts intensified enormously, the formation of a 'government of national responsibility', to which 13 parties and civil movements belonged at that time, was the only chance to ensure a certain stability and further development, and to avoid chaos."

Modrow's letter is doubly revealing. It underscores the support of the Left Party for the European Union's brutal austerity measures, which have transformed Bulgaria into a poor house, and to which policy the BSP is unconditionally committed. It also throws a sharp light on the role of the Modrow government and of the ruling Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (SED/PDS) at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Sergei Stanishev, to whom Modrow's letter is directed, is not an unknown quantity. The son of a secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, in 2001, he took over as chair of the BSP, its political successor. From 2005 to 2009, he then led a government which took the country into the

EU and introduced massive social cuts to attract foreign investors.

With an average monthly wage of €350, Bulgaria stands towards the bottom of the European income scale. At the end of his period in office, Stanishev was so unpopular that he received the support of just 15 percent of the electorate, giving the BSP just 40 of the 240 seats in parliament.

Since 2011, Stanishev has also been the chair of the Party of European Socialists (PES), which includes Germany's Social Democratic Party, France's Socialist Party, Greece's PASOK, Spain's PSOE and the Portuguese Socialist Party—parties that have all played a leading role in implementing devastating austerity measures.

In spring this year, when mass demonstrations against price rises in Bulgaria brought down the conservative government of Boyko Borissov, a possibility arose for the discredited BSP to return to power. In the May 12 general election, the BSP emerged as the second strongest party, behind Borissov's GERB (Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria).

Since GERB could not find a coalition partner, Stanishev proposed the formation of a "broad government to save the country", which would include along with the BSP the Party of the Turkish Minority (DPS), as well as various civil movements that had been able to enter parliament.

Modrow supports this proposal in his letter of May 21. As he correctly remarks, the task of such a government is "to prevent chaos". In other words, to suppress the social opposition that brought down Borissov's government, and at the same time to maintain the austerity measures dictated by the EU.

Meanwhile, such a government has taken on a concrete form. Today, parliament will vote on a new

cabinet largely comprising various technocrats and figures trusted by the EU and the banks. The proposal is supported by the BSP and DPS, who, since they only command 120 of the 240 seats in parliament, must rely on the support of the far-right Ataka (Attack). This can either vote for the new government or leave the sitting, so that the quorum for a necessary majority would then be reduced. This is what they did last week in order to ensure the election of the BSP member Mihail Mikov as parliamentary speaker.

The Prime Minister is the independent finance expert Plamen Oresharski, who began his political career in 1997 in a conservative government, and then was finance minister in Stanishev's government between 2005 and 2009. Oresharski has announced necessary "albeit not entirely popular" reforms.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice is Zinaida Zlatanova, who enjoys the confidence of the EU, having led Bulgaria's EU representation for five years. Interior Minister is Svetlin Jovtchev, previously heading the cabinet office of conservative President Rosen Plevneliev. The Finance Ministry is led by Petar Chobanov, who previously worked at the Bulgarian National Bank. The foreign and economics ministries are the only ones headed by members of the BSP.

It is no accident that Modrow compares this right-wing cabinet of technocrats with his own government. He became the last prime minister of the GDR on November 13 1989, when the longstanding Stalinist party leader Erich Honecker was forced to resign under the pressure of mass protests, and his immediate successor Egon Krenz was only able to cling onto office for four weeks. The situation in the GDR at that time was marked by mass demonstrations and strikes against the SED and the organs of state.

Modrow regarded his task as "preventing chaos" and the "undermining of political stability", as well as preserving the "governability of the country", as he wrote in his 1991 memoirs. Modrow regarded the road to German unification to be "necessary and inevitable", and which in his opinion had to be "followed with determination".

In order to divert the mass protests in the direction of German unification and the introduction of capitalism, Modrow joined forces with the recently established petty bourgeois democratic groups at the so-called "Round Table", and then brought them into his

government. Contrary to the subsequent myth that the SED and its successor the PDS had opposed the introduction of capitalism and its terrible consequences, they regarded this as "necessary and inevitable", and pursued it with "determination".

Modrow was rewarded by being made honorary chair of the PDS, a post he held for 17 years. Today, when the social crisis gripping all of Europe threatens capitalist rule, Modrow and the Left Party are its staunchest defenders. They advocate right-wing, bourgeois politics that are diametrically opposed to the interests of working people.



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