

Opposition Greens and Left Party evade issues in German TV debate

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On Monday evening, Germany's ARD television channel broadcast the so-called three-way battle among the top candidates of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens and the Left Party. Although viewers witnessed some heated confrontations in contrast to the chancellorship duel (Angela Merkel versus Peer Steinbrück) the day before, all the parties agreed to exclude from the debate the main social and political issues.

All three candidates are responsible for savage social attacks that have already taken place. FDP parliamentary faction leader Rainer Brüderle spoke as a representative of the current federal government. The Greens' Jürgen Trittin was environment minister in Gerhard Schröder's Social Democratic-Green Party government, whose Agenda 2010 austerity programme and Hartz IV welfare reform has inflicted the most brutal social devastation since the end of the Second World War.

The Left Party's Gregor Gysi was economics senator and architect of the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party administration in the city-state of Berlin. One of his first official acts was to support a bailout of almost €22 billion for the bankrupt Berlin Banking Society, which was subsequently financed through unprecedented cuts in social and staffing budgets.

Against such a background it is hardly surprising that none of the speakers wanted to discuss the areas in which biting social attacks are being planned for the period after the elections. However, all three party representatives agreed that the billions required for the euro bailout's guarantee—which the federal government had pledged in line with the European Stability Mechanism (ESM)—was needed for what Trittin referred to as “European solidarity”.

After Left Party parliamentary faction leader Gysi had briefly warned that this guarantee might have to be honoured, he hastened to reassure the audience that he also supported backing the bailout.

In fact, the hundreds of billions of euros from the ESM and the purchase of government bonds by the European Central Bank (ECB) has not gone to the crisis-ravaged EU countries and certainly not to the people of those countries, but exclusively to the banks and speculators, whose investments had become worthless overnight.

Over the last three years, public creditors have massively bought up Greece's rotten government bonds to save the private banks. About two-thirds of Greek sovereign debt is now in public hands. A debt cut for Greece, deemed necessary by all the experts, will directly burden the German treasury with tens of billions of euros. The next federal government will take this as the pretext to enforce further comprehensive social cuts throughout Europe, including Germany.

None of those present spoke about this background to the coming election. Nevertheless, it was generally agreed that federal budget spending must be reduced. While Brüderle held back from recommending new austerity measures, Trittin argued for reducing subsidies and abolishing child care benefits without any compensation. “You've been building up further debt in a situation where you should have been consolidating budgets”, he told the FDP.

Gysi also called for fiscal consolidation. “When the tax sources start gushing, it's time to make savings”, he said. He proposed among other things saving money by dismantling bureaucracy—i.e., the same method employed by the SPD-Left Party Berlin Senate, which slashed 35,000 jobs in the public sector.

Other international issues were not mentioned at all in

the three-sided battle, because all the parties present have adopted the same stance, starkly at odds with the majority opinion of the population.

Thus, neither the candidates nor the moderators uttered a single word about the preparations for war against Syria. The federal government has long supported the US-backed rebels and has already signaled to the US its support for a military campaign. The Greens welcome this development. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, co-president of the European Greens, even called for German participation in a military intervention.

The Left Party has been active in the region for years, systematically supporting the rebels who are now calling for imperialist intervention. Last December, Left Party chairperson Katja Kipping and deputy chairman Jan van Aken were in favour of intervention in Syria. Today, the Left Party is cynically trying to cover its tracks. It officially rejects a military strike in order to neutralize the population's opposition to the war.

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The systematic monitoring of the entire population, as revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden, was concealed for years by the party representatives in the Parliamentary Control Committee (PCC) and the G10 Commission. This massive spying operation, revealed en masse in recent weeks, was also not worth mentioning as far as the candidates were concerned.

The committee investigating the series of murders committed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU) consisted of deputies from all the parliamentary factions, who cooperated to hide the German intelligence agency's support for the extreme right-wing terrorists.

To divert attention from these issues, the party representatives indulged in heated debates over the details of a tax increase, the introduction of a minimum wage, and the framework for pension awards. Emulating the orchestra on the sinking Titanic, they spouted symphonic waves of words designed to distract people from the real issues and their own brutal plans for the future.

At the end, Gysi made an effort to place a few social demands—such as abolition of the Hartz IV benefits scheme, increases for pensioners, and rejection of bank

bailouts. Given the past policies of the Left Party, the impression he made was far from credible. Whenever it came to their votes, the Left Party always agreed to bank bailouts and merciless attacks on social provision.

More credible was his clear message regarding a future coalition. "Negotiations [between political parties] don't break down because of us", Gysi said, "but because of the SPD and the Greens". An SPD-Left Party-Green Party coalition would put the Schröder government's war policy, social attacks and dismantling of democratic rights in the shade. The evening's debate showed the Left Party was determined to provide left cover for such an alliance.



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