German Left Party seeks coalition with SPD and Greens

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On Monday, the Left Party outlined its political aims as it launched the final leg of its election campaign. At a convention in Berlin's Church of the Resurrection, Left Party leaders enthusiastically endorsed a coalition with the Social Democratic Party and Greens.

Current opinion polls anticipate a virtual tie in the elections, giving the current governing parties—the Free Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Union—approximately the same percentage of votes as the three opposition parties—the SDP, Greens and Left Party. Should the CDU and FDP fail to win an overall majority, then three possible combinations are possible: a grand coalition of the SPD and CDU; a coalition of the CDU and Greens; or a SPD-Left Party-Green coalition.

The Left Party is currently banging the drum for the last option. The party's leading eight candidates presented a paper to the convention containing ten demands, which it proposes as the basis for coalition negotiations. The first eight points include some social reforms such as the introduction of a minimum wage, a minimum pension and an increase in the top rate of taxation. Many of these items have the same wording as demands contained in the election programs of the SPD and the Greens, with slightly different figures.

In point 9, the Left Party candidates call for a halt to all arms exports and an end to foreign deployments by the German army. The ten-point program, however, makes no mention of the current drive for war against Syria.

Point 10 concentrates on European policy. Here the Left Party explicitly defends the European Union, which has been the most important instrument for the savage attacks imposed on the working class in Greece and across the continent in recent years.

The Left Party does not propose an immediate stop to the EU's austerity policy but says it should be allowed to carry on such measures for another four years. This is fully compatible with the phraseology of the SPD and the Greens. All of these parties are aware that demands for a minimum wage and higher taxes on the rich will be promptly junked after the elections in favour of intensified attacks on the social and democratic rights of the workers.

The guarantees made by the government for the latest round of bank bailouts, which the Left Party explicitly supports in its latest document, will rip huge holes in the state budget and require the incoming government to undertake massive attacks.

Instead of ending foreign deployments and withdrawing from Afghanistan, the incoming government will have the task of increasing resources for the army and preparing for new wars. The German government is actively involved in the preparations for war against Syria, and last year Berlin served as an important hub for the western-funded Syrian opposition movement.

In this regard, the government can rely on the support of all opposition parties.

The last SPD-Green federal government, which ruled from 1998 to 2005, not only introduced the most dramatic cuts to the German welfare state since the Second World War, including its Hartz IV laws and Agenda 2010, but also gave the green light for the deployment of the German army in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. This is what the Left Party is now preparing to support.

As was the case with the former SPD-Green government, the trade unions plan to play a central role in enforcing attacks on workers. In an interview with the *Rheinische Post*, Left Party leader Bernd Riexinger makes it clear that the unions are essential for the three

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potential coalition partners. “The policy change promoted by the trade unions reads like the emergency program to be implemented by a SPD-Left Party-Green government”, Riexinger said.

The Left Party’s parliamentary leader Gregor Gysi stressed the political reliability of his party for the German ruling class. At a meeting of the German Employers’ Associations with the Bundestag’s leading candidates, Gysi told his well-heeled audience: “We’re well-suited for collaboration and discussions.” Gysi also informed the *taz* newspaper that his party’s social demands should not be taken too seriously, saying, “If they are really serious about participating in government then those regarded today as radical are much more likely to be willing to compromise.” In the Berlin *Tagesspiegel*, Gysi added, “If it comes down to it, we would be even more disciplined than the SPD”.

Gysi speaks from experience. The Left Party has repeatedly demonstrated it can be relied upon to support welfare cuts and militarism. In its period in the Berlin Senate—where it ruled in a coalition with the SPD from 2001 to 2011, it imposed wage cuts of ten percent, slashed 35,000 public sector jobs and imposed massive cuts in education and social spending. This was imposed in the face of mass popular opposition.

More recently, when the German intelligence services came under pressure because of their links to the neo-Nazi NSU murder gang and its role in monitoring of the entire population, it was the Left Party that leapt into the breach to defend the government.

The Left Party has also demonstrated its loyalty with regard to the Syria conflict. Based on its contacts in Syria, the party has played a key role in building up the pro-imperialist opposition to the Assad government and advancing German interests in the region.

The Left Party seeks to cover up its reactionary record with some left-sounding phrases. Together with the SPD and the Greens, the Left Party speaks for the interests of the corporate and financial elite and an upper middle-class layer of the population that supports imperialism and the attack on the living conditions of the working class.

This is why sections of the corporate and political establishment are leaning towards a coalition between the SPD, Greens and the Left Party.

So far, representatives of the SPD and the Greens have not embraced the offer of cooperation by the Left Party. But it is quite possible that such a “left” government could be brought to power should a future grand coalition run into problems in the course of implementing fresh social attacks. This possibility was not ruled out by the SPD’s chancellor candidate Peer Steinbrück, who said, “That’s up to the Left Party to decide”.

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