German Greens shift further to the right after federal election

Dietmar Henning
2 October 2013

The Greens are responding to their poor performance in the general election by shifting their political axis further to the right.

The party dropped from 10.4 percent of the vote in 2009 to 8.4 percent in the election held on September 22. Less than six months ago, they were polling around 15 percent. Now they have lost half a million voters to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and 420,000 to the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). They took 170,000 votes from the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which this time failed to win enough votes to enter the Bundestag (parliament).

The conclusion drawn by the Greens is that in the future, they must orient more openly to the wealthy middle classes they represent. Until now, in their election campaigns they have tried to hide their right-wing politics behind vague phrases about social improvements. But no more.

Top Green officials regard the party's demand for a moderate tax increase for the rich to be the biggest mistake in the election campaign. In a commentary in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* , Joschka Fischer, former Green foreign minister under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD), complained last week about a "shift to the left" in the campaign, and warned that elections were always won "in the mainstream".

This position is shared by most of the leading Greens. The Green mayor of Tübingen in Baden-Württemberg, Boris Palmer, says the party's electoral defeat was due to the error of presenting the Greens as a "left-wing party". On the eve of the election, Green Party lead candidate Katrin Göhring-Eckardt had already called for a "very clear analysis" about how to "win the mainstream of our society".

By the "mainstream of society", the Greens do not mean the average blue or white collar worker, who has lost money from social attacks and wage cuts. They speak for their social base among the top 10 percent of society, for whom campaign rhetoric about a higher top tax rate is totally unacceptable.

In reality, the Greens' election campaign had nothing whatsoever to do with left-wing politics. They made no proposals to impose high taxes, let alone expropriate the obscene wealth and profits of the banks and super-rich.

Their demand for a slightly higher top tax rate was never more than empty campaign rhetoric, and was understood as such by broad sections of the population. It was the Greens who together with the SPD under Schröder had massively reduced the top tax rate, and imposed the fiercest social attacks in Germany after the Second World War. As an opposition party, they have continued their anti-social policies and supported all the bank bailouts.

On foreign policy issues too, the Greens left no doubt as to their right-wing political orientation in the election campaign. Ever since their vote for the Kosovo war, the former pacifists have been the most aggressive advocates of "humanitarian" wars. While politicians from all other parties tried to conceal their support for the imperialist offensive against Syria, former leader of the 1968 student movement and Green Member of the European Parliament Daniel Cohn-Bendit demanded the German government participate in the "preparation of military action" against Syria.

The election result has triggered a crisis in the ranks of the Greens. In the coming weeks, the party leaders are to be replaced. At the same time, elements inside the party want to use its dismal election result to offer their services to Chancellor Angela Merkel to form a government.

The imminent replacement of the party leadership

© World Socialist Web Site

suggests that the Greens are prepared to push through their anti-social and militaristic policy in the future with the CDU and CSU, at least in the medium term.

The leaders of the party's parliamentary faction, Jürgen Trittin and Renate Künast, who mainly support an orientation to the SPD, have announced they intend to vacate their posts. Künast, together with former party chair Claudia Roth, plans to stand for the office of Bundestag Vice President.

Cem Özdemir, second party leader alongside Roth, wants to run again for the party presidency. Göring-Eckhardt, who like Özdemir is known for favouring collaboration with the Christian Democrats, wants to stand again as parliamentary group chair, a post she already held from 2002 to 2005.

Like Özdemir and Göring-Eckhard, most of the applicants for the top jobs in the Green Party come from the so called "realist" wing of the party. In addition to Göring-Eckhardt, Kerstin Andreae and Anton Hofreiter are running for the parliamentary group chair post while Steffi Lemke and Simone Peter are contesting the party chair post with Özdemir.

Hofreiter and Peter are said to come from the "left wing" of the party, i.e. that section of the Greens who advocate disguising their right-wing politics with some leftist phraseology. A closer look at the political biographies of Hofreiter and Peter makes clear that they too enjoy especially good connections to the Christian Democrats.

Hofreiter, a 43-year-old native of Bavaria, has sat in the Bundestag for eight years and since 2011 has chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Transport, Building and Urban Development. He is also a founding member of the parliamentary group "Free-flowing rivers", which is concerned about the preservation of Germany's rivers. The group was founded in July 2007 by Bundestag deputies Brunhilde Irber (SPD), Horst Meier Hofer (FDP), Eva Bulling-Schröter (Left Party) and Hofreiter, who also chairs the group's executive. A year later, Joseph Göppel of the CSU joined the executive.

From November 2009 to January 2012, Peter was state minister for the environment, energy and transport in Saarland, in the first CDU-FDP-Green coalition.

Since the end of February 2012, Kerstin Andreae has been deputy chair of the Green parliamentary group and like Özdemir comes from Baden-Württemberg, where for the first time ever the party has headed a state executive, with Winfried Kretschmann as state premier since 2011. Although Kretschmann rules together with the SPD, he is regarded as the central figure in the Greens' overtures to the Union (CDU/CSU) parties. For years, he has favoured alliances with the Union and, like other members of his conservative state association, now advocates holding exploratory talks with the CDU/CSU.

Kretschmann is the personification of the rightward turn by a whole layer of former petty-bourgeois radicals, who today, apart from their CVs, are indistinguishable from the right-wing leaders of the CDU/CSU. His career path led him from the Maoist Communist League of West Germany (KBW), via the post of deputy ministerial head in Hesse under the then environment minister Joschka Fischer, to become the Greens first state premier. A devout Catholic, he maintains close relationships with leading companies, especially to the car manufacturers in his state, Daimler and Porsche, as well as the employers' associations.

Many leading Greens regard a coalition with the Union as premature, at this point. Joschka Fischer, who is not opposed to black-green alliances, described such an undertaking as a "Kamikaze mission" given the current crisis within the party.

While the coalition question is likely to trigger fierce debate within the ranks of the Green Party, one thing is already clear: in the next legislative period, the Greens will act as cheerleaders for war and welfare cuts—either continuing in the opposition, or as junior partners in the first Union-Green coalition at federal level.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site