

German Green Party ditch any attachment to social reform

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The German Green Party has responded to its dismal showing in the recent federal election with a further shift to the right. This was confirmed at a regional meeting of the party in Berlin last Saturday.

The debate at the conference was dominated by fierce attacks on anything that could even remotely be interpreted as contrary to the interests of the business elite or the wealthy. Delegates outdid each other in proclaiming their fidelity to big business and their rejection of any type of social reform.

The campaign was led by Winfried Kretschmann, the first Green to be appointed head of a German state in 2011. The Baden-Württemberg premier publicly criticised the Greens' leading election candidate Jürgen Trittin for his alleged concentration on "fair forms of distribution" in the election campaign.

"We are not the party of redistribution, we cannot expect to be elected on that basis," Kretschmann said.

Kretschmann, a former Maoist, declared that sustainability and ecology were central issues for the Greens, which need big business as its partner. He cited as an example the auto industry, which the Greens had to support in the global market. The theme of ecology had been taken up by social broad layers in the middle of society, so a different orientation was necessary.

To this end there, should be none of the attacks on business interests and top earners as was the case 30 years ago. Instead the party should "seek out stable majorities. The middle of society is where the players are. This is where we have to situate ourselves," he said, making quite clear that by players he meant the big corporations.

Kretschmann blamed Trittin personally for the party's call in its election manifesto for an increase in the top rate of taxation from 45 to 49 percent. The manifesto had argued that such an increase was needed to finance education. The former SPD-Green government led by Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party, SPD) had

reduced the same top rate from 53 to 42 percent. "You have to be ready to learn and not just lecture," Kretschmann said, turning to Trittin. "You have to know when you are demanding too much."

Kretschmann also rejected the party's call for a minimum wage. Although he was personally a supporter of the minimum wage, he said, it was inappropriate for the party to raise the issue in an election campaign.

The same line was put forward by the current party chairs Cem Özdemir and Kerstin Andreae. Like Kretschmann, they both come from the state of Baden-Württemberg. Özdemir appealed to the German middle class, which has traditionally provided the basis for the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). "We need the middle class as a partner in the energy revolution," he said.

For her part, Andrea called on the party "to build bridges to the corporations," winning over the 200 party delegates with her clear commitment to business interests.

Other participants at the congress made clear that the Greens sought to claim the heritage of the FDP, which failed to win enough votes to enter the Bundestag. "The FDP has long since vacated its place as a civil rights party," declared Simone Peter, the Green environment minister in Saarland, where the Greens have already formed a pact with the CDU and FDP. "We are the true party for civil rights and freedom."

The party's two leading electoral candidates, Trittin and Katrin Göring-Eckhardt, also laid claims to the "civil rights legacy" of the FDP. "This is a burning issue for me as an East German," Göring Eckhardt declared.

The social base of the FDP and Greens merged some time ago. Both parties represent wealthy middle class layers. Their members and voters earn on average more than the members of any other party in Germany. Now, the Greens are jettisoning any lip service to social reforms

and now pose openly, like the FDP previously, as a party of big business.

In so doing, the Greens are preparing to support a federal government that will act against the European and German working class far more aggressively than previous administrations led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD) or Angela Merkel. Whether they do so as a coalition partner of the CDU-CSU or as a loyal opposition to a grand coalition of the CDU- CSU and SPD, remains to be seen.

For their part, the delegates at the state council countries made very clear that they are ready to form a coalition with the conservatives. They spoke out almost unanimously in favor of exploratory talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Kretschmann urged the party to take the exploratory talks “seriously.” “We need to make clear we are prepared to take over responsibility, even if something fails.” He was fearful of a grand coalition, he said, because such a coalition was likely to promote coal as an energy source.

With just one vote against and one abstention, the delegates nominated Göring-Eckardt and Trittin, and current party leaders Özdemir and Roth to attend the exploratory talks.

The CDU responded positively. Chancellor Angela Merkel has invited the Greens to initial discussions this coming week and after a CDU executive meeting CDU General Secretary Hermann Gröhe specifically praised the Greens. After their bad result in the election, the party was undertaking “a self-critical examination of its existing leftist course.”

Until now the Greens had made at least verbal concessions to pressing social problems. This phase is now passé. They are offering their services to the CDU-CSU to impose social attacks on the working class and undertake a militaristic foreign policy in the interests of the German business elite.



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