

Germany's SPD leadership backs Left Party premier in Thuringia

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It now appears likely that Bodo Ramelow will become the Left Party's first state premier. On Monday, the executive committee of the Thuringian Social Democratic Party (SPD) unanimously agreed to end its alliance with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and form a coalition government with the Left Party and the Greens. Some 4,000 SPD members in Thuringia have now been called upon to accept the recommendation of the executive for a so-called "red-red-green" state government. It is expected that the Green Party executive will also favour an administration under Ramelow's leadership.

The installation of Ramelow as Germany's first "left" state premier heralds a new stage in the rightward shift of the Left Party. Twenty-five years after its predecessor organizations—the SED and PDS—restored capitalism in East Germany, it is being integrated into the state at the highest levels. As a junior partner in coalitions with the SPD, the Left Party has implemented massive social cuts in several eastern German states. Now it is preparing to take the lead in imposing new attacks on the working class.

In an interview for the *heute journal* news broadcast the evening following the SPD decision, Ramelow attacked the CDU-led state government in Thuringia from the right. He could "enumerate hundreds of problems that have simply been left lying or ignored by the CDU," he barked. "Previously, the CDU has always organized things by getting a lot of money from the federal government and distributing it. Now that no more money is coming, we need to develop a new form of politics." Together with citizens, he wanted "to make the state fit for the future".

Ramelow left no doubt about what he means: a brutal form of austerity at the state level. "First of all, the state of Thuringia, as is the case with the other eastern states,

will lose grants [from central government] year after year," he explained. "The solidarity contract will expire. The financial equalization scheme is under threat from Bavaria. The point is now that we need to develop a clever state policy. Sometimes it is important to jointly do our homework and the CDU has simply refused to do this."

At the end of September, in an extensive interview with the conservative newspaper *Die Welt*, Ramelow announced that his government would be "a tight-fisted administration".

"Everything that we are now discussing in the exploratory talks is subject to affordability," he said. "We will use the leeway permissible according to the state budget code. But we will prepare ourselves for the debt ceiling, by making savings."

When Ramelow defines the central task of a possible red-red-green state administration as "preparation for the debt ceiling", then he makes clear the right-wing character of such a government. The debt ceiling is one of the most important means by which federal, state and local governments are committed to social cuts, layoffs and privatisations. It proscribes, inter alia, the accruing of any more new debt from 2020.

A red-red-green state government under Ramelow would not be "left-wing", but rather a right-wing administration. This is also evident from the approaches made by the extreme nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD). In September, the AfD lead candidate Björn Höcke publicly opposed the re-election of the Conservative state prime minister Christine Lieberknecht (CDU), but did not exclude the election of Ramelow.

The AfD's sympathy for Ramelow is no coincidence. The recent red-red-green exploratory talks were characterised by anti-communism, a central feature of

right-wing politics. The highlight was a paper published by the Left Party, SPD and the Greens at the end of September that called the regime in former East Germany (GDR) a “rogue state”. The term “rogue state” is traditionally used by right-wing parties to attack communism under the guise of criticising the Stalinist state of the GDR.

When the Left Party, SPD and Greens attack the GDR system, they do this not out of solidarity with the working class, which had certain social rights in former East Germany but was politically suppressed by the Stalinist bureaucracy. They attack the GDR from the right. They despise the GDR because a high degree of social equality prevailed, key industries were under state control and strict limits were set to prevent the enrichment of a tiny minority.

It is no coincidence that it is above all Ramelow who is playing a leading role in the anti-communist campaign. Again and again, he repeated his right-wing mantra on the radio, television and in newspaper interviews: “The GDR was a dictatorship and not a state founded on the rule of law.” While the restoration of capitalism in the East resulted in a social disaster, it offered untold opportunities for advancement for trade union bureaucrats from West Germany.

After a nine year career as a union secretary in the western state of Hesse, Ramelow was sent to Thuringia in 1990. There, he was the state chair of the HBV union covering commerce, banking and insurance; and from 1992 to 1999, chair of the supervisory board of the Zukunft Housing Association in the state capital Erfurt. In 2002, he became a member of the advisory board of the Thuringia Development Bank (TAB).

In April 1999, Ramelow joined the PDS where he soon climbed the party ladder. The same year, he was the number two candidate on the party’s list and was elected to the Thuringia state parliament. From 1999 to 2001, he was PDS deputy parliamentary group chairman, and from 2001, chairman. In 2005, he was PDS campaign manager for the general election. Before he returned to state politics, he played an important role in the merger of the Election Alternative group into the Left Party in his role as chief negotiator for the Left Party.

Now, Ramelow is to be elevated to the highest office as the Left Party’s first state premier, in order to initiate a new stage of the social counterrevolution, 25

years after German reunification. In an editorial entitled “The final defeat of the GDR”, *Spiegel Online* celebrates the role the former Stalinist cadres and union bureaucrats now play in supporting the capitalist state.

The Left Party has long since become “part of the Federal Republic [of Germany] and its representatives take on many positions and political responsibility. They have (at least mostly) made their mark in this country, as one says. The integration of the Left Party into the democratic system of the Federal Republic is a success story.” For the Left Party, the “issue is now: it can demonstrate in Thuringia, as the leading party of government, that it can undertake a responsible political line. If it is successful, then new perspectives will open up, including even a red-red coalition at federal level.”

The establishment of a “red-red-green” state government in Thuringia is aimed at integrating the Left Party more directly into government policy at a federal level. Workers and youth should take heed. Twenty-five years after the reunification of Germany, and 10 years after the vicious Hartz IV anti-welfare laws, the ruling class is preparing a new round of huge social attacks. The Left Party is being groomed to play a central role in the enforcement of such attacks and in the suppression of resistance against them.



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