

“Red-Red-Green” coalition in Thuringia: Welfare cuts and heightened state powers

Christoph Dreier
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On November 20, 2014, the Left Party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens unveiled their coalition agreement for the Thuringia state government. The document makes it unmistakably clear that a so-called “Red-Red-Green” coalition does not represent a political alternative, but will continue and intensify the policies of welfare cuts and heightened state powers of the outgoing Christian Democratic-led government.

The 110-page agreement was negotiated in two weeks. If it is accepted by the respective state party conventions—and by membership votes of the Greens and the Left Party—Bodo Ramelow will be elected as the first Left Party state premier, probably on December 5. The resulting Red-Red-Green state executive would command a razor-thin majority of only one vote.

In addition to the coalition pact, the parties agreed on the composition of the cabinet. Viewed in light of the election results, the SPD and the Greens have done better than their votes would suggest. The Left Party (28.2 percent) will provide the state premier and the ministers of infrastructure, education and employment. The SPD (12.4 percent) will get the key ministries of finance, interior and economy. The Green Party (5.7 percent) gets the ministries of justice and the environment.

At the beginning of the preamble of the coalition agreement, the parties lay out the direction their coalition will take, praising the policies of the previous administrations, which were invariably led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). “The development the Free State of Thuringia has made since the freedom gained in 1989/1990 is, despite some difficult and painful processes of change, impressive,” says the text.

In reality, the restoration of capitalism 25 years ago in the former East Germany was a social disaster for the

workers of Thuringia. Between 1989 and 1995, two-thirds of the existing jobs fell victim to privatization and restructuring. They were replaced by low-wage jobs and casual labor positions. In 2007, the average hourly wage in Thuringia was €14.91, lower than in any other German federal state.

The fact that unemployment has fallen to 7.5 percent this year is due mainly to the emigration of large sections of the young, working-age population. In the next few years, the social situation in Thuringia will become even more acute. In addition to the effects of the economic crisis, the payments to Thuringia within the framework of the “Solidarity Pact” will expire. This agreement provided special central government funds to boost the economic development of the former East German states.

In this situation, the Left Party, together with the SPD and the Greens, is taking over the state government to impose social attacks and restructure the state’s finances. “A successful stabilization of the state’s finances will result from consistent austerity measures,” it states in the coalition agreement. The new government will be committed to the “debt ceiling,” which prohibits any new net borrowings, including for investment purposes, and even promises to “repay the [existing] debt.”

At the same time, the coalition aims to improve conditions for corporations and businesses. The demand for “competitive industry” and the pledge to “foster entrepreneurial initiatives” are euphemisms for wage cuts, tax cuts for business and deeper attacks on working conditions.

The few social improvements that are mentioned in the coalition agreement, which have been highlighted by the media, are all conditional on available finance. A free year’s nursery spot and the hiring of new teachers

“are to be compensated by increases in income or savings elsewhere,” it says in the contract.

The coalition agreement explicitly states that thousands of jobs will be lost in the public sector in the next few years. The far-reaching plans of the previous administration for municipal “reform” are to be implemented: “The previously agreed job cut target will be maintained,” the coalition partners write.

One exception is the police. “The planned job cuts in the police force are initially suspended for 2015,” the document states. The State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (LfV—State Secret Service) is to remain and the practice of using undercover agents will be continued. In future, such measures must merely be agreed personally by Ramelow or his interior minister.

In Thuringia, the LfV had numerous undercover agents in the periphery of the right-wing National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group. It knowingly financed the neo-fascists while protecting them from prosecution. The findings to date suggest that the NSU was a creation of the secret service.

Nevertheless, the Red-Red-Green coalition is preserving the LfV and defends the practice of using such undercover agents. Instead of exposing the neo-Nazi morass within the state, the coalition wants to further strengthen the state apparatus. For example, the coalition agreement announces “prohibitions of right-wing organizations.” Such bans have always served as a pretext to strengthen the state surveillance apparatus and act against left-wing and socialist groups.

The planned build-up of state powers is directly linked to the policy of social attacks. Anyone who resists is to be brutally suppressed.

Given this policy, the references to the German Democratic Republic (GDR—the former East Germany) in the preamble of the coalition treaty is particularly cynical. In several places, the GDR is depicted as a “dictatorship,” a “rogue state,” and one not “based on the rule of law.”

In fact, there is a direct line connecting the oppression of the working class in the GDR to today’s police-state measures. The Stalinist state bureaucracy defended its privileges against the workers by means of its dictatorial apparatus. In 1989, it used this apparatus to organize the restoration of capitalism and stifle opposition to it. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, as social inequality grew, the state’s ability to monitor

every citizen was expanded to a degree that made the Stalinist Stasi seem amateurish.

When the coalition partners repeat mantras about the “injustices” in the GDR, they are really speaking about the nationalised property and social welfare system that prevailed. They seek to counter widespread sentiment that the introduction of capitalism into East Germany has been a retrograde step.

No party embodies this social orientation more clearly than the Left Party. Emerging from the remnants of the East German Stalinist bureaucracy, it played a central role in blocking workers from resisting the restoration of capitalism. In 1994, it supported the first Red-Green (SDP-Green Party) state government in the former East Germany, in Saxony-Anhalt.

Since then, it has played a vital role in imposing social cuts. From 2002 to 2011 in Berlin, in coalition with the SPD, the predecessor to the Left Party carried out an unprecedented austerity programme that set the benchmark for the whole of Germany. The Berlin Senate was the first state government to withdraw from the local government employers’ association in order to impose wage cuts on public-sector workers.

Should Ramelow be elected state premier on December 5, he will continue this policy and set a new benchmark for welfare cuts. With a ruthless austerity policy in Thuringia, the Left Party is showing its readiness to take on ministerial positions in the federal government.

“I am convinced that this state’s government will prove that Red-Red-Green is good as a political alternative,” tweeted the leader of the Left Party federal parliamentary group, Gregor Gysi.



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