

# German Left Party strives for coalition with Social Democrats and Greens in Berlin

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The Left Party in Berlin held a meeting of its parliamentary members in Erfurt, Thuringia last weekend entitled “Challenges in Berlin: Experiences from Erfurt.” It is revealing that the meeting took place in the same room where the Left Party in Thuringia negotiated its coalition agreement with the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens in November 2014. Germany’s first Left Party state premier, Bodo Ramelow, participated in the meeting on the weekend, traveling directly from Rome, where he had a private audience with Pope Francis.

The message from the meeting is unmistakable. In the elections to the Berlin state parliament set for September, the Left Party is striving for a coalition with the SPD and the Greens, two parties deeply involved in the remilitarization of Germany and the imposition of sweeping austerity measures directed against the working class.

“The CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and SPD cannot and do not want to continue working together,” stated parliamentary fraction head Udo Wolf at the beginning of the meeting. “As a result, SPD/Left Party/Greens is a potential option.” Thuringia proved that a three-party coalition could work, and the party was “very determined to prepare for government participation,” Wolf declared.

Workers and young people should take this as a warning. Having shared power in coalition with the SPD in Berlin between 2001 and 2011 and overseen a social catastrophe, the Left Party is now preparing to carry out similar policies with even greater brutality in a new coalition with the SPD and Greens.

What are the experiences from Erfurt upon which the Berlin party intends to base itself?

Since the Left Party/SPD/Green coalition came to power in Thuringia, the state government and Ramelow have implemented the federal government’s reactionary policies. These include a pro-business economic policy—Ramelow boasts of being more “investor friendly” than the CDU—the mass deportation of refugees, and the propagation of German militarism.

In recent weeks, the Left Party/SPD/Green government has

made headlines for deporting large numbers of refugees. According to the minister for migration, justice and consumer protection in Thuringia, Dieter Lauinger (Greens), the authorities carried out the deportation of 460 people last year. According to a report by the *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung*, this was “around twice as many as in previous years.” In total, 1,600 people left, of whom 1,154 are said to have left “voluntarily.”

In an interview with the *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, Lauinger recently boasted, “If one considers how many people have left Thuringia because there was no basis for their being granted asylum or otherwise tolerated, one finds a level, in percentage terms, much higher than in Saxony.”

Since late last year, the Left Party-led government has repeatedly organised mass deportations. Already at the end of 2015, the *Thüringer Allgemeine* wrote, “Recently, almost 200 people were sent back to the Balkans in a series of mass deportations carried out at night. Families with children were mainly affected, including some who had lived in Germany for years.”

A press release from the organisation Roma Thüringen described the mass deportation of Roma families from Erfurt to Belgrade on December 16 of last year. “Those targeted were awakened by police suddenly appearing in their rooms next to their beds and shining flashlights. They did not ring the doorbell or knock. Telephones belonging to the people were confiscated as they tried to inform others about their deportation. They were prevented from contacting lawyers.”

For the Left Party, such methods are insufficient. On the same weekend as the Berlin party meeting, the Left Party/SPD/Green Thuringia state government and the SPD/Left Party Brandenburg state government agreed to Asylum Package II in the Bundesrat, the upper house of the federal parliament. This legislation further restricts the right to asylum and facilitates deportations.

Lauinger criticized the legislation from the right in the Bundesrat. At the beginning of his speech, he stated, “The law has a goal of bringing about accelerated asylum proceedings. Whether the law can achieve this goal is

questionable, in my opinion. To accelerate asylum procedures it is necessary to hire more workers at the BAMF (Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees) and implement new regulations to process 700,000 asylum applications.”

The Left Party/SPD/Green government’s reactionary refugee policy goes hand in hand with its promotion of the German military. In an interview with Jacob Augstein in *Freitag* magazine, Ramelow gave his backing for “humanitarian” interventions by the Bundeswehr (German army) as well as for its domestic deployment.

Under the headline “We need majorities on the left of centre,” he said, “It is preferable to me that the Bundeswehr be deployed to save people, between Lampedusa and Africa, for example. Or at home. Currently, 1,000 soldiers are supporting us in the accommodation of refugees. I’ve never seen so many guys sorting clothes for women and children. Our Bundeswehr is doing great work accommodating refugees in Thuringia. I am grateful for that.”

Early last year, Ramelow said a major goal of the Left Party/SPD/Green state government was to overcome the pacifist convictions of the German population as part of the development of a new German great power policy following the defeats in the world wars of the last century. In an interview with the *Rheinische Zeitung* revealingly entitled “Pacifism has nothing to offer Germany,” he cynically declared that he “respected anyone highly... who says: ‘I am a pacifist.’” However, he considered such a position “not practical for a nation like Germany.”

On the question of what he wanted to discuss with the SPD and Greens, Ramelow said there had to be a “reform of NATO” and a “new architecture of world peace.” He had thought for many years about “whether each continent should take responsibility for its own security.” He said he favored the replacement of the global security system established in the fight against Hitler with a “World Security Council” in which representatives of the different continents would sit.

The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time: “Ramelow’s demand does not only have revanchist overtones, the Thuringia state premier directly connects it to an appeal to German militarism and rearmament.” The WWSW cited Ramelow’s statement: “For me, the Bundeswehr is necessary as a defensive army. For me, the Bundeswehr’s bases in Thuringia are important. And I don’t think it is right that the Bundeswehr has faulty guns, faulty ships and faulty helicopters.”

Along with the Green premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, Ramelow is among the most outspoken supporters of Angela Merkel’s foreign and refugee policies, which are increasingly taking the form of

the militarization of Europe under German leadership.

A Left Party/SPD/Green government in Berlin modeled on Thuringia would follow the same course.

It is entirely appropriate that the Left Party’s designated lead candidate in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, is a member of the Forum for Democratic Socialism (FDS), a right-wing tendency within the Left Party. The chairman of the FDS is Stefan Liebich, who participated as a leading politician in the drafting of the foreign policy strategy paper “New power—new responsibility,” which served as the blueprint for the revival of German militarism.

Along with its restrictive refugee policy, the Left Party would pursue intensified austerity and privatisations on the domestic front. This is made clear in a recently published book by the Left Party’s former “left” economic senator in Berlin, Harald Wolf. Entitled *SPD/Left Party in Berlin: 2002-2011, a [Self] Critical Balance Sheet*, Wolf explicitly applauds the social attacks carried out by the Left party.

He cynically describes the multi-billion-euro “safety net” for the bankrupt Berlin Bank as a “bitter pill”, the privatization of the state housing company GSW, which resulted in the explosion of rents in the city, as a “lapse,” and lauds “political decisions with high symbolic value, such as the cutting of benefits for the blind and the temporary removal of the social ticket.” One chapter is entitled “The politics of budgetary consolidation.”

Wolf and his colleagues have declared themselves to be proud of these measures, which drove hundreds of thousands of Berliners into poverty. In his summary, he writes, “At the end of the SPD/Left Party era, Berlin’s finances were stabilized once again—although today they pose a serious risk, with a debt of close to €60 billion and rising interest rates.”

Nevertheless, he concludes, “[T]he clean-up work of the SPD/Left Party government was successful.”

Twenty-five years after the forerunner of the Left Party, the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (SED/PDS), restored capitalism to East Germany, laying the basis for the unleashing of German militarism once again, the Left Party presents itself today as a better and more effective capitalist party than its opponents. Wolf, a former member of the Pabloite International Marxist Group, writes, “The SPD/Left Party completed (in Berlin) a transformation from a parasitic-clientelist model to a ‘normal’ model of capitalist development.”



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