Germany’s Left Party favours coalition with conservative CDU

Johannes Stern
23 March 2016

Germany’s Left Party is responding to its disastrous results in the March 13 state elections and the electoral success of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) with a sharp turn to the right. Having long declared its desire to enter a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, parties associated with German participation in foreign wars and the Hartz IV welfare counter-reforms, the Left Party has now signalled that it is also prepared to collaborate with the right-wing Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

This past week, Gregor Gysi, a leading spokesman for the Left Party and for many years the head of its parliamentary fraction, told the Madsack publishing group, “While working with the CDU is not yet the path to take, both the CDU and the Left Party must consider that we will one day have to go down that path.” The success of right-wing populist parties in Europe and Germany, Gysi continued, requires “everyone to act … from the Union parties [the CDU and its sister Christian Social Union—CSU] to the Left.” Gysi added that if the established parties do not work together to stop this trend “we are committing a serious historical mistake.”

The class character of the Left Party as a bourgeois party has never been clearer. The CDU is the traditional right-wing party of postwar German capitalism. It has stood historically for anti-communism, free market economics, conservative Christian values and a close alignment of Germany with NATO and the United States. Its chancellors include such reactionary figures as the first federal head of government Konrad Adenauer, former Nazi Party member Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, and the chancellor of the so-called “spiritual and moral turn”, Helmut Kohl.

The CDU of today, with which Gysi would gladly form a pact, is directly tied to these traditions and in recent years has shifted even further to the right. Chancellor Angela Merkel, her finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (all CDU members) are identified with the reactionary policies of “Fortress Europe”, the austerity program of the European Union, and the return of Germany to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy.

Gysi’s assertion that it is possible to stop the rise of the AfD by forming an alliance with right-wing bourgeois parties, including the CDU, is absurd. Several leading members of the AfD came out of the CDU and a large part of the CDU membership agrees with the program of the far-right populists. The heavy electoral losses of the Left Party and the growth of the AfD can be traced back to the Left Party’s support for government policies and its indifference to social questions.

Sahra Wagenkencht, the current leader of the Left Party’s parliamentary fraction, posted on her Facebook page: “The electoral success of the AfD did not come as a surprise.” She then asked, “Where did we lose contact with the social interests of our own voters? Why are we apparently seen by so many as part of the established cartel of parties and no longer considered a sufficient force of opposition?”

There is no mystery here. The Left Party is fully integrated into the “established cartel of parties” and is not different in any essential way from the other bourgeois parties. Wherever it has been in government, it has carried out social cuts just as ruthlessly as the SPD, the Greens, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Union parties. By presenting itself as the “left” while lining up behind the ruling class’ policies of war and social reaction, it has played the central role in enabling the AfD to tap into social discontent and

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divert it into right-wing channels, as reflected in the AfD's large vote—a protest vote against the established parties—in this month's state elections.

This connection is most clearly demonstrated in Saxony-Anhalt, where the AfD won almost 24 percent of the vote. The predecessor organization of the Left Party, the Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (SED/PDS), oversaw the restoration of capitalism in the eastern German state and then, between 1994 and 2002, supported an SPD-Green minority government that carried out sweeping social cuts and transformed the former industrial centre of East Germany into an industrial wasteland with the highest unemployment levels in Germany.

Since then, under regional chairman Wulf Gallert, the Left Party has endeavoured to suppress any form of independent social protest and campaigned for a future three-party coalition government with the SPD and the Greens.

The Left Party is also "part of the established cartel of parties" when it comes to foreign policy. It has played a critical role in the revival of German militarism, providing it with a cynical "left" and "humanitarian" cover.

Last weekend, the Left Party hosted a so-called "peace policy conference" in Berlin, where leading party representatives discussed the foreign policy strategies of German imperialism. War as an instrument of policy was by no means ruled out.

In a panel discussion Saturday evening, Jakob Augstein, the millionaire German publisher and close ally of the Left Party, declared, "One should wage war only if one can win and wants to win, and that is almost never the case. That's why one should almost never wage war."

In other words: as long as the German army is not strong enough to win wars, Germany should refrain from military adventures!

There is no real reason why the Left Party should not collaborate with the CDU, having worked with the SPD and the Greens. In any event, the policies and traditions of the conservatives have long worked their spell on the Left Party's leading representatives. In his farewell speech as leader of the party's parliamentary fraction last autumn, Gysi called the late 19th century "iron chancellor" Otto von Bismarck an "outstanding man." Wagenknecht's role model is Ludwig Erhard, the CDU economics minister and chancellor of postwar West Germany. Her latest book, *Riches without Greed*, extols the free market and the liberal theorists of postwar capitalism.

What is behind the Left Party's sharp turn to the right?

Under conditions of the worst crisis of capitalism since the 1930s and growing opposition among workers the Left Party is attempting by all possible means to suppress the emergence of a left-wing movement against capitalism. In doing so, it is prepared to appropriate the chauvinist and anti-immigrant nostrums of the AfD.

Shortly before the state elections, Wagenkencht warned in the *Berliner Kurier* that "children are growing up in an environment where German is no longer spoken." She rejected the immediate acceptance of refugees from Idomeni on the Greek-Macedonian border, saying, "Not all refugees can come to Germany."

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