Pseudo-lefts appointed to leadership of Germany's Left Party

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The growing social opposition to austerity in Europe has plunged the German Left Party into crisis. In Greece, the protests are directed against Syriza, an affiliate of the Left Party. In France, they are directed against the ruling Social Democrats. In Germany the Left Party wants to form a ruling coalition with the German counterpart of the French Social Democrats.

Within Germany, the Left Party is increasingly viewed as a right-wing, bourgeois party, which spouts left sounding phrases, but is no different in practice than the established parties. In state parliamentary elections, in the middle of March, it lost almost 100,000 votes, mostly in Saxony-Anhalt, where it had hoped to win the post of minister president, but ended up far behind the far-right AfD.

Now the pseudo-left groups inside the Left Party—SAV (Socialist Alternative), Marx 21, International Socialist Left (isl), etc.—are rushing to the assistance of the party leadership. Previously, they had justified their membership in the Left Party with the claim that one could also pursue left-wing policies from within. At the most recent party congress in Mageburg at the end of May, six supporters of the so-called "Anti-capitalist Left" (AKL) were elected into the party leadership.

Marx 21's Janine Wissler is one of four deputy chairpersons. Christine Buchholz, who is in the leadership of the party, is a member of the defence committee in the German Parliament.

Thies Gleiss, also a member of the party leadership, is a member of isl. This washed up left cynic has been a member of the Pabloite United Secretariat for over 40 years. He is an IG Metall union functionary and was a founding member of WASG (Work and Social Justice Electoral Alternative).

Lucy Redler, a member of SAV, was newly elected into the party leadership at the Magdeburg congress. Ten years ago, she was the leading candidate of the WASG, which was running against the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in the Berlin House of Representatives, although WASG and PDS were already working closely together at the federal level, and were preparing to found the Left Party.

The PDS had been in the Berlin state government for five years already at that point and had implemented massive social cuts, privatizations, and public sector wage and job cuts in collaboration with the SPD. In order to preempt opposition to these policies, Redler and her supporters participated in the election with their own list of candidates.

The election had scarcely ended before SAV joined the Left Party in 2008, although the Left Party and SPD were intensifying their antisocial policies through the senate. They justified this at the time with the claim: "We joined the party because we are convinced that the Left Party has an important role to show the way out of the deepest capitalist crisis in decades.

In reality, the SAV joined the Left Party in order to strengthen its bureaucratic apparatus and its influence in the unions in the face of growing opposition.

However, opposition arose from inside the Left Party. While most SAV members were admitted without difficulty, the party leadership blocked the acceptance of Redler at that time. She was forced to beg for several years and even sought the assistance of the party arbitration commission before she finally gained entry to the Karl Liebknecht House (party headquarters). The fact that she has now been elected into the party leadership is symptomatic of the level of crisis in the Left Party and its urgent need for a left fig leaf.

Redler was profusely thankful for the election result (just under 45 percent of delegate votes). Afterwards,

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the SAV published a celebratory article about the party congress, claiming it had provided a clear “signal to the left.” It stated that the “signals sent by the delegates were clearly further to the left than at previous party congresses,” and “the insidious shift to the right of the past few years was at least slowed down.”

On the contrary, the very facts cited by the SAV article prove the opposite. They show that the “insidious shift to the right” of the past few years has become a rapid gallop.

This is why the SAV was forced to admit that the “powerful wake up call,” called for by party head Riexinger had not taken place. “An open debate” aimed “at clarifying the different political positions” was absent. This was “mostly prevented by the need to demonstrate unity to the outside.” However, this need for unity only affected critics from the left. Right-wingers like Gregor Gysi disregarded it and had already begun campaigning for an orientation towards participation in government before the congress had started.

The efforts by several delegates to distance themselves verbally from Gysi’s course did not amount to “a fundamental rejection of participation in a government with the SPD and the Greens,” the SAV article continued. This was demonstrated by “statements made by Sahra Wagenknecht (‘We are suited for a coalition’).”

In reality, the purpose of the entire congress was to prepare for Left Party participation in government. The Left Party has already placed a minister president in the government in Thuringia and is participating in a ruling coalition with the SPD in Brandenburg. The re-elected party president, Katja Kipping, also emphasized that the Left Party sought to make itself even more open to a coalition with the SPD and the Greens, and would emphasize commonalities with the SPD rather than what divides the two parties.

These efforts are bound up with a right-wing nationalist political orientation, as demonstrated by the parliamentary debate about refugees and deportation policy.

As the SAV was forced to admit, there were “scarcely any critical statements about Wagenknecht’s political positions on refugees” at the congress. The president of the Left Party faction in parliament publicly espoused opinions that are barely distinguishable from those of the AfD. Among other things, she demanded an upper limit on refugees and more deportations. “Anyone who abuses the right to hospitality also forfeits the right to hospitality,” she said.

In her congress speech, Lucy Redler issued a warning about a loss of credibility if “people are ripped from their beds at night and families are separated” even in Thuringia, where there is a Left Party minister president. State president of Thuringia, Susanne Henning-Wellsow, replied: “Yes, Thuringia must deport people. Anyone who believes that that does not gnaw away at our humanity has made a mistake.” However, federal law must be implemented, she insisted, and, therefore, deportations are no reason “not to enter or continue a ruling coalition.”

If brutal deportations are no reason for refusing to participate in a ruling coalition, then drastic austerity measures, pension cuts, police and military build-up and participation in war will also be viewed as acceptable. This is the reactionary logic of the political orientation of the Left Party, which SAV and Marx21 seek to obscure and conceal with pseudo-left phrases.

The more openly the Left Party shifts to the right, the more they are attracted to this political orientation. Their admission into leading bodies of the Left Party shows that they fully support the right-wing, capitalist political orientation of the party.

The orientation of the pseudo-left corresponds to their place in society. They speak for a privileged middle- and upper-class layer, and a well-off caste of functionaries, with lucrative posts and privileges in the various branches of the party and foundation apparatus of the Left Party and the unions. They feel threatened by the intensification of the class struggle and are well aware that the radicalisation of workers and youth currently taking place in France is also directed against them.

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