

How Germany's pseudo-lefts support the Left Party's right-wing politics

Peter Schwarz
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Two pseudo-left tendencies within the Left Party—Marx21 and SAV—have published assessments in recent days of the Social Democratic Party-Left Party Senate, which governed the state of Berlin between 2001 and 2011. Both paint a devastating picture of their own party. Marx21 is the German affiliate of Britain's Socialist Workers Party, while SAV (Socialist Alternative) is the German offshoot of Britain's Socialist Party, formerly the Militant Tendency.

In the ten years that the Left Party and its predecessor the PDS were jointly responsible for state politics in Berlin with the SPD, it shared responsibility for massive attacks on social welfare, education, healthcare, public sector jobs and democratic rights. The assault on the public sector by the so-called “red-red” Senate (state executive) in Berlin was far greater than by any other previous state government, including those led by conservative parties.

“This alliance was apparently the only one imaginable that could have carried out and maintained such an austerity course,” write Lucia Schnell and Irmi Wurdack from Marx-C21, citing *Die Zeit*. Lucy Redler of SAV comes to the conclusion, “With the inclusion in the SPD/Left Party coalition, something was achieved that would not have been possible under a continuation of the grand coalition [the previous Social Democrat-Christian Democrat Senate].” This was a “similar phenomenon, as became clear, with the implementation of Agenda 2010 by the SPD/Green Party federal government: [SPD Chancellor] Schröder imposed measures that [CDU Chancellor] Kohl had not dared to.”

Only one conclusion can be drawn from the disastrous balance sheet of the SPD/Left Party coalition: without breaking from the Left Party and combatting it politically, not a single social achievement or democratic right can be defended. This is even more correct given the fact that the Left Party is striving for a return to the Senate in the current state elections, to continue attacking the working class—but now in coalition with both the SPD and the Greens. “The core policies from 2001 to 2011 are still justified today and a similar participation in government to defend the interests of the state is being sought,” Redler bluntly admits.

Marx21 and SAV are not seeking to break with the Left Party, but are, instead, participating in its election campaign and standing candidates on its slate. During ten years of the red-red Senate, 195,000 of 366,000 voters and 4,000 of 12,000 members turned their backs on the party. However, the pseudo-lefts are heading in the opposite direction, climbing the career ladder inside the Left

Party.

In 2005, Lucy Redler was the lead candidate of the WASG (Election Alternative for Social Justice), standing against the then SPD/PDS Senate. She was opposed to the federal leadership of the WASG, which was already preparing to merge with the PDS to form the Left Party. The reason for this, as she openly acknowledges in her latest article, was the “strong opposition among students, teachers, healthcare workers and public service workers to the SPD/PDS Senate.”

The WASG wanted to prevent this opposition from developing in an independent direction and breaking out of the control of the Ver.di trade union, which was closely collaborating with the SPD/PDS Senate in imposing cuts on public services. Shortly after the election, the Berlin WASG dissolved itself and began knocking on the Left Party's door. Redler is now a member of its federal executive.

Lucia Schnell and Irmi Wurdack, who authored the Marx21 article, are also playing a crucial role in the Left Party's election campaign. Schnell is party spokeswoman in Neukölln and Wurdack is a constituency candidate in the same district.

The glaring contradiction between their critique of the legacy of the SPD/Left Party Senate and their campaign to continue the same policies speaks volumes about the politics of Marx21 and SAV. They support the Left Party not in spite of, but because of its right-wing politics. Both articles show that they are well aware of the right-wing, anti-working class policies of the Left Party. They know that it paralyses and weakens the working class and prepares the ground for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

As Schnell and Wurdack write, “In addition, a much greater danger threatens with possible government participation [by the Left Party] than in 2001 and 2007, namely a weakening of the struggle against the AfD and other racists who want to turn the lack of housing, insufficient social security and wage dumping against refugees.”

Despite this, they are doing all they can to strengthen the Left Party, and, although they know better, spreading illusions that the party can be transformed into an instrument of social resistance. The contradictions they fall into are becoming ever more obvious and their attempts to deceive the population ever more transparent.

The Marx21 article begins with a long catalogue of sins committed by the SPD/Left Party coalition. It refers to the Berlin banking scandal, in the course of which the state paid out “around €15 billion” and laid off “4,000 workers” so as to “rescue” the

Berlin State Bank “and its junk property fund from bankruptcy.” The Senate blocked a referendum which would have rejected rescuing speculators using public funds.

There follows an account of the cuts made by the Senate following the motto, “cut until it hurts.” Over ten years, “the SPD/Left Party cut spending by the state of Berlin by almost €4 billion. The costs were borne by the population.” According to Marx21, those affected were workers in the public sector, social services, and education and healthcare workers.

Initially, Marx21 asserts that a continuation of this course can be prevented if the Left Party rules out participation in government and prepares for opposition from the outset. “In conclusion,” they write, “we are declaring that it is more effective to be in opposition and push ahead with building movements against social cuts, for social improvements and a left-wing refugee policy.”

However, they do not attempt to explain why a party that has proven itself such a reliable defender of the interests of the ruling class would be capable of organising resistance against the same interests in opposition. By the end of their long article, they even give up their initial reservation, writing, “It would be wrong to exclude participation in government from the outset in the election campaign.”

The article concludes with an unconditional declaration of praise for the Left Party: “The Left Party is the only party with wide social influence that has the potential to articulate protests against the profit logic of the capitalist system, war and racism, and organise people from below to resist. ... Despite the grave weaknesses in the positions of the party’s Berlin state association, it is important to engage energetically in the election campaign and mobilise to elect the Left Party. It is the only party providing left-wing answers to the capitalist crisis and capable of offering an alternative from the left to the SPD, which dominates in Berlin.”

The SAV’s Redler argues along similar lines. She also presents a long list of crimes committed by the SPD/Left Party Senate, including “the privatisation of over 100,000 homes”; “the elimination of 35,000 jobs in the public sector”; “wage cuts and outsourcing in public operations”; the “reduction of personnel levels in the schools and the removal of the free use of learning materials” and the “expansion of surveillance.”

As “successes” of the coalition, Redler can only cite “the abolition of repeating a school year”; the “introduction of the Berlin pass” for social welfare claimants; the “police’s duty to identify themselves” and the creation of a “Public Employment Sector (ÖBS).” She is, however, forced to add that the ÖBS replaced 35,000 fulltime regular jobs with 7,000 compulsory jobs on low wages.

Redler avoids providing any explanation for why she sits on the executive of a party that is responsible for all these attacks. Instead, she ends her article with the banal sentence, “Improvements were not made in the past and will not be made in the future by clever government action, but through pressure from below.”

In reality, social improvements can only be secured if the working class breaks from the influence of all bourgeois parties, including the Left Party and SPD, wages an independent struggle and takes up an internationalist and socialist programme.

In the face of globalisation and the global capitalist crisis, national reformist programmes are bankrupt. The ex-reformist parties have moved far to the right and are immune from any “pressure from below.” This is proven not only by the legacy of the SPD/Left Party Senate in Berlin, but also by Syriza in Greece. When the Greek working class overwhelmingly rejected the austerity dictates of the European Union in a referendum on July 5, 2015, the Left Party’s sister party in Greece responded by agreeing to an even stricter austerity programme.

Pseudo-left organisations like Marx21 and SAV play a key role in covering up such politics and suppress the development of an independent political movement of the working class. They are not merely creating a pseudo-left fig-leaf for the Left Party, but are also strangling all social opposition. The SAV’s trade union functionaries ensured that the struggles by workers against the Senate’s cuts at the Charité hospital and the Berlin public transport company were led down a blind alley.

Both organisations are parts of international tendencies that which play similar roles in other countries. SAV is a member of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) and Marx21 emerged from the International Socialist Tendency (IST).

For some time, the *World Socialist Web Site* has characterised these organisations as pseudo-left. This concept “denotes political parties, organizations and theoretical/ideological tendencies which utilize populist slogans and democratic phrases to promote the socioeconomic interests of privileged and affluent strata of the middle class,” wrote David North in the book “The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-left”, which subjected this phenomenon to a careful examination.

They do not represent the interests of the working class, but those of privileged sections of the middle class which that are moving further to the right under the pressure of deepening class conflicts. This is why they support the Left Party ever more openly the more it displays its right-wing character. Whoever is unwilling to tolerate social attacks, poverty, the strengthening of the state apparatus and militarism must vote for and help build the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) on September 18 and support the building of the party.

Note:

(1) LINKE in Berlin: eine Linke Koalition für eine Gerechtere Stadt, Lucia Schnell and Irmi Wurdack, and Normale kapitalistische Entwicklung, Lucy Redler



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