

What is the significance of a red-red-green coalition in Berlin?

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Following the Berlin state election on Sunday, Mayor Michael Müller (SPD) announced coalition talks would start with the Christian Democrats (CDU), Left Party, Greens and Free Democrats (FDP) on Wednesday. Even though SPD-CDU-Green or SPD-CDU-FDP coalitions are mathematically possible, the most likely outcome is a coalition between the SPD, Left Party and Greens.

Politicians at the state and federal levels of all three parties have spoken out positively about such a coalition. “The Left Party in Berlin contributed to the budget being balanced,” SPD Bundestag parliamentary group chairman Thomas Oppermann told *Deutschlandfunk*. “I think it could be a model for Berlin.”

The election result on Sunday showed the growing opposition and anger of a majority of the population to the entire political establishment. The so-called people’s parties, the SPD and CDU, which had governed Berlin in a coalition, were punished at the polls with both achieving their worst election results in the entire post-war era. In this situation, the Left Party and Greens stand ready to continue the hated programme of austerity and the buildup of the state apparatus at home and abroad within the framework of a red-red-green coalition.

Green Party lead candidate Ramona Pop spoke out in favour of an SPD-Green coalition on election night, claiming that it was the coalition that a majority of Berliners wanted. The Left Party was even louder in its calls for a red-red-green coalition. The *Berliner Zeitung* commented, “Klaus Lederer can barely be held back. The Left Party leader would like most of all to “take the rebellious momentum” in the capital city “to change something on the federal level from Berlin.”

A red-red-green coalition would not be a coalition of

the “majority” or of the “rebellious.” It would be a coalition of bankrupts, who are in favour of sweeping attacks on democratic and social rights, and are widely hated among the population. Since the reunification of Germany, the three parties have always held a majority in the Berlin state House of Representatives, but they have never won so few votes as they did on Sunday.

Compared to the 2011 election, the three parties together lost over 5 percent of the vote. Although the Left Party gained 3.9 percent, it fell well short of the results of its predecessors, the PDS in 2001 and PDS-WASG in 2006. In 2011, the SPD and Greens could have formed a coalition without the Left Party, but the SPD opted for a coalition with the CDU.

In the 10 years prior to this, the SPD and Left Party formed the so-called red-red Senate in Berlin and carried out sweeping social austerity. After they rescued the Berliner Bankgesellschaft state bank with billions in guarantees, the SPD and Left Party imposed more brutal cuts than any state government in the history of the German Federal Republic.

They exited the Municipal Employers’ association so as to cut wages by some 10 percent in the public sector. They acted similarly at the state-owned Berlin transport companies. They privatised over 100,000 apartments, drove up rent prices and cut university and school budgets.

With these right-wing policies, the SPD and Left Party paved the way for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The right-wing extremist party won a disproportionate number of votes among workers in the east of the city. These are areas where the Left Party has dominated politics and administration since reunification, and once again lost a significant number of votes. In the Left Party stronghold of Marzahn-Hellersdorf, the AfD even finished as the largest party.

According to a poll by Infratest Dimap, only 26 percent of AfD voters voted for the party because they were convinced by its programme. By contrast, 69 percent gave their reason as disappointment with the other parties. Despite their overall increase in votes, the Left Party lost 12,000 votes to the AfD.

The AfD was also strengthened by the fact that its right-wing programme has been adopted and made respectable by the three nominally “left” parties. While the SPD bears direct responsibility for the inhumane living conditions of refugees in Berlin and has deported thousands, the Left Party and Greens have repeatedly criticised these policies from the right.

Sahra Wagenknecht, who appeared at Left Party election campaign events in Berlin, denounced refugees earlier this year, declaring, “Whoever abuses the right to hospitality has forfeited the right to hospitality.” She went on to speak of “significant problems” which were bound up with the integration of refugees and contained “potential dangers.” Similar statements came from Green representatives like Boris Palmer.

On the issue of the buildup of the state apparatus, the positions of the SPD, Left Party and Greens are virtually indistinguishable from those of the AfD. All three parties agree that the police force has to be strengthened and expanded. In its election programme, the Left Party demanded “sound training and equipping” of the security forces and the hiring of “more police officers.”

Nothing could better sum up the character of a red-red-green coalition than this unanimous demand for a strong state. Such a coalition would continue with austerity policies and brutally suppress all opposition. But red-red-green would not simply be a repeat of the red-red Senate. It would be a model for a coalition at the federal level between the SPD, Left Party and Greens. The Left Party is signalling to the ruling class that under conditions of a deep capitalist crisis, it is the force most capable of defending German imperialism’s interests at home and abroad.

In the week leading up to the election, Left Party parliamentary group chairman Dietmar Bartsch attacked the grand coalition in the Bundestag. He called for a “state capable of action” and accused the federal government of having “weakened, humiliated and neglected the police.” He directed a warning to SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel, adding, “Europe’s crisis was

never greater than today. And it’s not only Brexit. Look at what the situation is in the member countries! It is, I believe, the greatest crisis that Europe ever had. That’s why we need a political shift here in Germany.” And, “Yes, the Left Party wants to take responsibility for this political change in government. Just so that is clear for everyone!”

This can only be understood as a warning: In foreign policy, a red-red-green coalition would mean not less, but more war and an even more aggressive German foreign policy. Already during the election campaign, Gregor Gysi, the former Left Party parliamentary group chairman and the public face of the party, told the conservative *Die Welt* that he had “never demanded that Germany has to leave NATO.” “An agreement could be reached” with foreign minister Steinmeier and the SPD on foreign policy issues like the war in Syria, he added. Prior to this, in the summer interview on public broadcaster ARD, Wagenknecht reassured listeners that Germany “will of course not exit NATO on the day we enter government.”

The coalition being sought with the parties of Hartz IV social attacks and unabashed German militarism underscores the reactionary character of the pseudo-left groups that function either within the Left Party or in its environs. Marx 21, Socialist Alternative (SAV) and the Revolutionary International Organisation (RIO) conducted an election campaign for the Left Party not in spite of, but because of its right-wing politics. They are therefore already fully responsible for the anti-working class policies of a red-red-green coalition!

The moves towards a red-red-green coalition underscore the significance of the election campaign of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party). The PSG participated in the election in order to build an international movement against capitalism and war. However, from the outset, the PSG emphasised that this required a struggle against the right-wing politics of the SPD, Greens and Left Party, and all of their pseudo-left hangers-on.



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