

SPD continues talks with the Left Party, Greens about next Berlin Senate

Christoph Vandreier
24 September 2016

The first exploratory talks between the parties took place this week following the Berlin state election last Sunday. The Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Left Party have left it in no doubt that a so-called “red-red-green” Senate (state executive) would pursue an extremely right-wing agenda, and have agreed to further meetings.

The SPD and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) both suffered a massive loss in votes, and the Left Party, the Greens and SPD received their lowest vote since 1999. The vast majority of Berliners used the election to express their dissatisfaction with the policy of cuts and the stepping up of state powers.

The Greens and Left Party are gearing up to continue the hated policies of the SPD-CDU grand coalition in the Berlin Senate, and to keep the reigning mayor, Michael Müller (SPD), in office. After the exploratory talks of recent days, all participants expressed their broad agreement and stressed the good atmosphere of the negotiations.

The Greens and SPD met on Thursday to hold initial discussions. Representatives of both parties later praised the “respectful relations,” which had produced “a good feeling,” as Green Party state chair Bettina Jarasch said. Müller stressed how “open, clear and direct” the discussions had been about commerce, financial and urban development issues.

On Wednesday, the SPD met with the Left Party in a similarly harmonious atmosphere. During a break, Müller and Left Party state leader Klaus Lederer stressed it had been a “frank discussion” and that there had been “no insurmountable obstacles.”

Lederer left no doubt that the loose campaign promises of the Left Party, including its call for more investment, were pie in the sky. The Left Party leader made clear “that we will not impose suicidal new debt on the city.” After the break, the parties discussed the issues of

education, internal security and rents.

The SPD also met with the CDU and Free Democratic Party (FDP), but said “the commonalities are very limited.” Müller has already invited the Left Party and the Greens to further joint exploratory talks on Monday.

The fact that the first phase of coalition building between the SPD, Left Party and Greens has run so smoothly and amicably speaks volumes about the reactionary nature of a possible red-red-green coalition. It shows that there are no serious differences between the previous Müller-government and the former opposition parties.

Müller, who took over the mayoralty from Klaus Wowereit in December 2014, has continued the rigid austerity policies of his predecessor unchanged. In particular, he has further driven up rents. His government became infamous for its systematic mistreatment of refugees by the State Office of Health and Welfare (LaGeSo).

Refugees often had to endure weeks in the deepest cold at LaGeSo facilities, being crammed into makeshift camps for months before eventually being deported in their thousands. At the same time, the Senate has increased the powers of the state apparatus and declared entire neighbourhoods to be so-called danger zones where the police have extremely far-reaching special powers.

That the Greens and Left Party have no major differences with Müller is not surprising in light of their own position in other state administrations. In the state of Thuringia, the Left Party already heads a red-red-green coalition, which is pursuing an anti-refugee policy. State premier Bodo Ramelow supported the election campaign of the Left Party in Berlin and was praised by Lederer as a model.

In Berlin itself, the Left Party and SPD coalition that ruled the city from 2002 to 2011 imposed social cuts more vicious than any other state government in West German

history. Wages in the public sector and in public transport were reduced by about 10 percent, more than 100,000 apartments were privatized and tens of millions of euros cut in the education system.

Given this record, there can be no doubt that a red-red-green Senate will continue and intensify the policy of social attacks and increased state powers. Shortly before the elections, the former finance senator (state minister), Thilo Sarrazin (SPD), praised the Left Party for its rigorous austerity measures. “In some respects, budgetary consolidation was easier with them than with our own party comrades,” the right-wing populist said.

For the ruling elites, a red-red-green Senate is also attractive because in carrying out its ruthless policies it can rely on various pseudo-left groups who seek to dress up the right-wing policies of the Left Party in left words. The Socialist Alternative (SAV) and Marx21 groups are part of the Left Party and organized a large measure of its election campaign in Berlin.

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Now both are drumming up support for the Müller government. Marx21 openly advocates a red-red-green Senate, but at the same time says this cannot meet the “expectations of Berliners” because this would require “radical tax increases for the rich and corporations at federal level.” For this reason, the group calls for “a massive social movement with the participation of the trade unions.”

What this means can be seen in the actions of the SPD-Left Party Senate. In its 10 years in government, no cut was adopted without consulting the unions and then jointly pushing it through against the workers. For example, the wage cuts in the public sector were agreed during the infamous “walk in the woods” by Economics Senator Harald Wolf (Left Party) and Verdi union boss Frank Bsirske. Now Marx21 is offering itself as a mediator.

The SAV is advocating support for a red-green government, without itself taking on ministerial posts. The Left Party “should be ready to help an SPD-Green Party minority government into office, to block the CDU and Alternative for Germany (AfD), but cannot be bound by any coalition or toleration agreement,” it writes on its web site. Clearly the group believes it is better able to keep social resistance to the Müller-government under control if the Left Party nominally remains in opposition.

Such considerations as to which constellation the Left Party could be involved in, in order to enforce the

unpopular policy of social attacks and militarism against the population, have long since even reached federal level. The major media outlets are openly discussing whether the red-red-green model could be transferred to the federal government in 2017, when there is a general election.

There was “hardly any fear of contact” between the SPD and Greens, says newsweekly *Der Spiegel*. With the “erosion of Merkel’s chancellorship, the political constellation has changed,” writes *Die Zeit*. The most important task facing a red-red-green government would be to forge ahead with German militarism. Like the Greens in 1998, the Left Party has the task of mobilizing the petty bourgeoisie in order to justify the war policy on “humanitarian” grounds.

“We are reaching agreement with the Left Party,” *Die Zeit* quoted an SPD foreign policy expert. Maximum positions have long since been conceded; representatives of the Left Party leave no doubt about this. For example, Left Party parliamentary leader Sahra Wagenknecht told the *RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland*, she saw “clear movement in the SPD’s” foreign policy stance, and praised the policies of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, one of the architects of the return of German militarism.

In an interview with *Die Zeit* on Wednesday, Wagenknecht did not exclude support for foreign missions by the Bundeswehr (armed forces). One had to discuss this in coalition talks, according to Wagenknecht. In the summer, she had already declared that “Germany would not, of course, leave NATO on the day we join the government.” Former Left Party leader Gregor Gysi and Ramelow had earlier announced support for Bundeswehr peacekeeping missions.



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