

# German Left Party pushes for red-red-green coalition before federal election

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Germany's Left Party parliamentary group chair Dietmar Bartsch called on the Social Democrat (SPD) leadership Friday to end the grand coalition (with conservative CDU and CSU) and establish a red-red-green (SPD-Left Party-Green) coalition before the federal election. He proposed a broad agreement on the Agenda 2010 social welfare cuts and support for foreign interventions by the German military in exchange.

Bartsch told the online edition of the *Rheinische Post* that SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel could be chancellor in a week "if he and the SPD wanted, and agreed with us and the Greens on the issues we want to implement prior to the election."

Responding to a question on whether this would mean "the end of Agenda 2010" social welfare cuts, Bartsch stated, "Not everything about Agenda 2010 was bad." One only had to change elements of it "that have damaged or endangered the social fabric in Germany."

Bartsch answered the question on whether the Left Party would make a condition of agreement the ending of German army interventions abroad: "Of course in this area there are principled conflicts with the SPD, but also opportunities for agreement." The Left Party leader made clear that he supported foreign interventions and merely opposed the current government's US-dominated strategy.

He asked rhetorically, "Where have the soldiers and bombs brought permanent peace?" before noting in the next breath, "But I voted, along with others in my parliamentary group, in favour of the German army mission to destroy Syrian chemical weapons."

Bartsch knows full well that agreement to military rearmament and foreign wars are inviolable preconditions for obtaining access to the levers of power. This was the case in 1998 with the Greens, who are now among the chief warmongers, and so it is now with the Left Party. The Left Party has been noting for some time that the use of arguments about peace, humanity and human rights will be far more effective in implementing a militarist policy in the face of broad popular opposition.

In the summer, the Left Party's first minister president in

Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, declared bluntly that Left Party members were "no pacifists." Bartsch's parliamentary group colleague Sahra Wagenknecht stated reassuringly in the ARD summer interview, "Germany will of course not leave NATO on the day we enter government."

Bartsch's call for an early end to the grand coalition provoked a media storm on Friday. Just a few days earlier, exploratory talks were held in Berlin between leading representatives of the SPD, Left Party and Greens discussed behind closed doors about a red-red-green coalition. Even SPD leader and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel made a "surprise" appearance to hear the opening talk with social philosopher and Adorno pupil Oscar Negt.

At the same time, the Left Party is trying to press ahead with the talks over a coalition government in Berlin state. The potential coalition partners negotiated last week behind closed doors on health care, the economy, labour and social affairs, and, as always, "good governance." The limited information that was made public after the meetings consisted mainly of declarations of intent and minor social promises, which all remain under the budgetary regulations.

These included an alleged improvement to the financing of hospitals, access to health care for the disabled, the elderly and refugees, as well as assistance against the cold for the homeless, who will now have 1,000 instead of 800 shelter places. The minimum wage will rise to €9 for public contracts. In essence, these amount to measures to better manage the social decline in the capital.

Some journalists described as particularly spectacular proposals to charge companies who fail to train care staff, as well as the expansion of the Berlin pass to claimants of housing assistance, meaning they could get help with transport costs and cheaper tickets to sporting and cultural events. But even these are vague promises within the budgetary framework.

There was "substantial unity" on economic questions, according to media reports. Harald Wolf (Left Party), who pursued an anti-working class and pro-big business strategy in the so-called red-red Senate of the SPD and Left Party

from 2002 to 2011, noted that an “industry 4.0” programme was required to secure a “long-term growth perspective” for Berlin.

Red-red-green, according to Wolf, intended to secure investment in five “clusters,” information and communications technology, health care economy, energy technology, optics and mobility. Digitalisation is one of the central, cross-cluster goals. They also intend to support the creative economy as its own independent economic factor.

This amounts to nothing more than creating better profit-making opportunities for investors. Similar demands are being made by big business associations and think tanks. These include the IHK chamber in a piece titled “Mastering growth,” the association of Berlin Businessmen and Industrialists (VBKI) in a white paper titled “Agenda for a growing city” and the Berlin Institute, which is sponsored by BMW and the Quandt Foundation among others, in a study titled “Berlin 2030: Outlines of a smart growth strategy.”

The main thing agreed under the heading of “good governance” by the potential coalition partners was that the “coalition committee” would not, as before, meet only when matters of conflict arose, but “meet regularly, consider relevant matters and plan joint work.” In other words, a troika made up of leading party officials will determine the line to be pursued and enforce it. So much for the Left Party’s electoral promises of “more democracy” and “citizen participation.”

Although the coalition talks on security and the police begin this week, it is already clear how much the SPD, Left Party and Greens fear coming social conflicts and are trying to build up state forces.

It is particularly cynical of the Left Party to justify a red-red-green coalition with the argument of stopping the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In his Berlin speech, Negt also raised the threat of the “danger of Weimar.”

In reality, the right-wing policies of the SPD and Left Party are mainly to blame for the rise of the AfD. The PDS, the successor to the Stalinist state SED party in East Germany and predecessor to the Left Party, organised the reintroduction of capitalist relations in the former East Germany and smothered all social opposition against job and social cuts in their east German and Berlin strongholds. In the red-red Berlin state coalition under Klaus Wowereit (SPD), the PDS and Left Party imposed the job and social cuts.

The newly elected Berlin House of Representatives came together for its first sitting on Thursday. For the first time since the end of the war, a far-right party, the AfD, entered parliament with 25 deputies. With a combined total of 27 seats, the Left Party and Greens only have a few more.

Among the AfD representatives are former Christian

Democrat (CDU) members, business figures and a large number of professional army officers, including the leader of the state party and parliamentary group, Georg Pazderski, a former colonel in the army.

The district of Lichtenberg provides a perfect example of how a Left Party stronghold was transformed into one for the far right. Since German reunification, the PDS and Left Party controlled the area and pursued policies in the interests of property speculators and investors. Poverty in this district is now particularly high.

Now, in an impoverished section of Lichtenberg, a far-right AfD candidate secured the direct mandate previously held by the Left Party. Kay Nerstheimer, a former member of the neo-Nazi German Defence League, won 26 percent of the vote in Berlin-Lichtenberg 1, where voter turnout was especially low. He is now sitting as a nonaligned deputy, because his racist and homophobic tirades did not fit with the AfD’s current image.

Another extreme right-wing figure is the likely district council leader, mathematics tutor Wolfgang Hebold, who has lost his position at three Berlin colleges due to reported Islamophobia.

A red-red-green coalition in Berlin state and at the federal level will not stop such far-right tendencies, but further strengthen them. The real reason why the Left Party is working so hard to seal a coalition with the parties of war and welfare cuts in the SPD and Greens is not the AfD, but the rapid intensification of the European Union’s crisis, the wars in the Middle East and America’s growing aggressiveness towards Russia.

The Left Party is offering its services to defend German imperialist interests in foreign policy and to suppress the growing opposition of workers by defending the existing order.



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