

Red-Red-Green coalition heads Berlin state government: Austerity repackaged

Verena Nees

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Last week saw the installation of a Social Democratic Party-Left Party-Green state administration in the German capital. The SPD, which many Berlin workers and young people rejected in the September state elections because of its anti-social and anti-democratic policies, once again heads the Berlin state executive. Merely the coalition colours have changed from “red-black” (SPD-Christian Democrat) to “red-red-green.”

Michael Müller (SPD) is again governing mayor. The four SPD state ministers in the incoming administration were all in the outgoing “black-red” coalition. Thus, the ex-banker Matthias Kollatz-Ahnen remains state finance minister and will continue his austerity diktats. Also staying is Sandra Scheeres as state education minister, whose name is synonymous with the misery in Berlin’s schools, teacher shortages and overcrowded kindergartens. The previous SPD state transport minister, Andreas Geisel, takes over internal affairs; the former state labour minister Dilek Kolat takes over the health portfolio.

The SPD now firmly holds the reins when it comes to security issues and the police apparatus, as well as the finance portfolio in the capital, which is still in debt to the tune of €60 billion. During the coalition negotiations, Kollatz-Ahnen already made clear that the budget continues to be committed to the austerity-driven “Stability Pact.” His budgetary objective reads: debt reduction.

However, the haggling over positions has had no savings effect. The Greens and Left Party demanded their fair share of the spoils of power, and ensured that instead of seven state ministers there will now be 10—inclusive of state secretaries and offices—all paid for by the public purse. Bündnis 90 / The Greens will have three ministries (justice, economic affairs and transport), the Left Party will also have three (housing and construction, labour and social affairs, and culture).

Two Left Party state ministers, Katrin Lompscher (housing) and Elke Breitenbach (labour and social affairs), already belonged to the earlier “red-red” state administration—Lompscher as health minister, Breitenbach

as personal assistant to the social affairs minister Knake-Werner. They are now responsible for key areas affecting the urgent problems of the people of Berlin, and where there have been many protests over recent months. As culture minister, Lederer, former regional chair of the Left Party, will not halt the sustained orgy of cuts in the sector, but look after his favoured clientele among the cultural in-crowd.

For the second time since the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, the Left Party (or its predecessor the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) has formed part of the Berlin state government. At the end of 2001, it entered the state administration following a wave of protests against the Berlin banking scandal. In 10 years in power, it proved conclusively it is a reliable bourgeois, pro-capitalist party. For the broad masses of Berliners, the “red-red” state administration of Klaus Wowereit meant massive social cutbacks. After 10 years of rule, the Left Party lost half of its votes and the SPD-Left Party administration was thrown out of office by voters.

In re-joining the Berlin state administration, the Left Party continues these reactionary policies; however, because of the growing economic crisis the “red-red-green” administration will impose even harsher social attacks. Working families and young people confront a very right-wing state government that will seek to brutally impose its will against resistance in the population.

The government programme adopted in mid-November contains much smoke and mirrors, praised by the media and by pseudo-left groups as “social reforms”—more homes, a few alms for refugees and Hartz IV welfare recipients, better cycle paths, etc. But all of this is “subject to financial restraints” and serves as a fig leaf to cover over the real policies.

The character of the new state administration in Berlin will be determined by the rapid intensification of the international and European crisis, the increasingly aggressive foreign policy of German imperialism and the systematic arming of the police and intelligence apparatus, with which the ruling class is preparing for coming

revolutionary convulsions.

The new administration is taking on the role of making Berlin the capital of militarism, war propaganda and the police state, and to suppress any opposition by workers and youth. This is also made clear by the appointment of two “surprising personalities.” The deputy spokesperson of federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), Sawsan Chebli, is moving into the office of Mayor Müller to “coordinate” federal and regional affairs. Torsten Akmann, previously Head of Unit in the federal interior ministry and its representative at the parliamentary committee of investigation into the crimes of the far-right National Socialist Underground, will become secretary of state for domestic affairs in the Berlin state executive.

It is not only the parties responsible for the Hartz IV welfare and labour “reforms” and for taking Germany to war again—the SPD and the Greens—who are standing for a right-wing and militarist agenda in Berlin. In recent months, the Left Party has also signalled that it is willing to advance all of German imperialism’s major projects.

On the issue of foreign policy, several top Left Party functionaries have declared their support for Bundeswehr (armed forces) missions abroad, including the party’s parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch, recently crowned as lead candidate in next year’s federal elections. Following the election of Donald Trump as the next US president, his parliamentary colleague Stefan Liebich expressed his support for plans to create a European army.

The EU, which is hated by millions of people in Europe as an instrument of big business and the banks, was vehemently defended by Left Party politicians Axel Troost and Harald Wolf in a recent “polemic for another European Union.”

Also on the issues of Agenda 2010 (welfare cuts and austerity) and refugees, the Left Party has signalled it will help to implement the official policy. Bartsch said “not everything is bad” about Agenda 2010. Sahra Wagenknecht, also a lead candidate for the general election, calls for a restrictive limit on the number of refugees.

The assertion in the coalition agreement that there would be fewer deportations is designed to throw sand in the eyes of refugees and their supporters. In truth, the “red-red-green” coalition wants to realize the current planned mass deportations by increasing pressure for “voluntary return.”

The character of the new state administration is most evident from the unanimous call by the SPD, Greens and Left Party to increase police numbers and equip them with modern weapons and armoured vehicles. The political establishment in Berlin, and that has long included the Left Party, is reckoning with growing opposition to the policies of war and social devastation. For this reason, a massive apparatus of oppression is being assembled in the capital.

The Left Party will play a special role in the coalition. Its leadership cadres are composed of cynics who deploy left phrases to impose right-wing policies. With radical verbiage, the Left Party seeks to place itself at the forefront of any protest movements, using its networks in the trade unions, neighbourhood initiatives and social clubs to bring any real movement from below into the orbit of official politics and stifle it.

The Left Party in Berlin is mostly recruited from the PDS and the former East German state party SED, and is particularly sensitive to social and political opposition to the ruling elite. Ultimately, it was the SED/PDS, which in the early 1990s ensured the smooth restoration of capitalism in the former GDR (East Germany).

Neither currently nor in the GDR has the party stood for socialism, as falsely claimed, but has always been committed to Stalinism, which is hostile to every independent movement of the working class. Many Left Party politicians who set the tone in the state legislature and various levels of state politics come from this Stalinist tradition.

However, the period of the SPD-Left Party state legislature and its anti-social policies is still well remembered and has discredited the Left Party in large parts of the population. For this reason, the pseudo-left tendencies like Marx21 and SAV (offshoots of Britain’s Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party) endeavour to give the party a “left” guise.

Symptomatic of this is the statement by Lucy Redler (SAV), who also sits on the Left Party federal executive, reproduced by Zeit online: The Left Party must not “become part of the one-party cartel,” she says, because this would “further strengthen the AfD [far-right Alternative for Germany]”. Instead, one must exert “pressure from below,” only then in the next breath to insist: “I am in favour of the Left Party governing.”

Significantly, the SAV and Marx21 fawned over US Senator Bernie Sanders, who received 13 million votes in the US primaries, after he claimed to be a socialist and promised to fight the billionaires on Wall Street. However, at the crucial moment he called on his followers to support Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, and even now speaks positively about the fascist president-elect Donald Trump. This is the kind of political treachery that animates the Left Party.



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