

Left Party leader campaigns for SPD-Left-Green coalition in Germany

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One week has passed since the SPD started its operation to elevate Martin Schulz to the leadership of the SPD and as the party's leading candidate for the federal election this autumn. Now the Left Party has responded to offer its support.

On Monday, Gregor Gysi, the long-time party leader of the Left Party, who quit his post last year, gave a long interview to the Berlin newspaper Tagesspiegel. He declared that the SPD had to be “‘as socially democratic’ as it was under Willy Brandt” and proposed the Left Party's Sahra Wagenknecht as future Economics Minister.

Gysi described the newly announced Chancellor candidate and SPD chairman, Martin Schulz, as a fighter for social rights and expressed his own support for Schulz's hollow promises to oppose tax evasion and low-wages.

When the interviewer stated that the main obstacle to Left Party participation in government was not social policy, but rather foreign affairs, Gysi replied that he had no problems with foreign policy. The criticism of the Left Party with regard to militarism was well known, he said, but just as well known was the fact “that we make compromises.”

When asked, “And how would this compromise look with regard to NATO?” Gysi answered, “You quote our program incorrectly. Nowhere do we say that Germany has to leave NATO.” The Left Party is against NATO and favours a European security system, which includes Russia. But that is not an issue for the coalition, but rather “a vision.” In any event, consideration should be given to a new relationship with Russia and closer cooperation with this “nuclear world power.” On this question, however, Gysi saw more problems with the Greens than with the SPD.

Cooperation with the SPD was now very important

and urgent because the SPD had not only lost many voters during the years of the grand coalition (SPD with conservative parties), but had also “gradually lost its historical value.” Gysi stated: “The European Union is about to destroy itself. Uncertainty in Germany is increasing and a third of the electorate now says: ‘We have to try this way’ (i.e. red-red-green). I hope Martin Schulz understands this.”

Gysi's return to day-to-day politics and his campaign for a red-red-green government alliance are directly linked to the reaction of German political circles to Donald Trump's government in the US. Last year, Gysi retired his post with tears in his eyes and a big bouquet of flowers in his arms. But now, immediately after the Trump election, he has returned to centre stage. In December, the Left Faction in the European parliament elected him as their President, and in his Tagesspiegel interview on Monday, he announced his renewed candidacy for the Bundestag.

Influential sections of the ruling class in Germany regard the Trump government and its aggressive “America First” policy not only as a danger, but also as an opportunity to pursue their own plans for world power. The SPD has reacted by building up the conservative party bureaucrat, Martin Schulz, who supports both the social attacks of Agenda 2010 as well as the brutal EU austerity program against Greece, as the “new bearer of hope” for the SPD.

At the same time, former SPD party leader Sigmar Gabriel has switched from the Economics Ministry to the Foreign Office in order to assume responsibility for a new German global strategy. Gabriel told the business newspaper Handelsblatt: “If Trump starts a trade war with Asia and South America, this will open up opportunities for us.” Europe must “now quickly work on a new Asia strategy” and “use the space that

America frees up.” It is this world-power-offensive by German imperialism that inspires and mobilizes Gysi and the Left Party. Gysi demands more toughness and self-confidence in dealing with the US.

In an interview last Friday for German radio, Gysi stated: “We have to find our own role and deal with Trump in a confident and confrontational manner. Otherwise we have no chance. If you want to win Trump’s respect, you have to be self confident and even rude. That’s what he likes. Then he learns how to deal with you. But when you seek to win his favour and say nothing.... you are finished. He likes strong types, so you have to appear accordingly strong.”

Other top officials of the Left Party also use the widespread revulsion towards Trump’s reactionary policies to advocate a strong, self-asserting policy on the part of Germany. Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the Left Party parliamentary faction, called on the government in the party newspaper Neues Deutschland to “break with subordination to US policy” and replace NATO “with a collective security system including Russia.”

For his part, Left Party foreign policy representative on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Stefan Liebich, criticized Trump for “unnecessarily taking up the cudgels with the People’s Republic of China.” On the very evening of Trump’s election in November, Liebich responded by demanding that Germany and Europe “act in future with more strength, more independence, more self-assurance in future.” It is time to “end the pussyfooting” with Washington.

The demand that Germany once again appear more self-assertive and confrontational recalls the darkest chapter in German history. Similar appeals were made in the 1930s. A few years later, Europe lay in ruins. In addition to the 70 million victims of war, came the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

With his call for participation in government and his agreement with the SPD over foreign policy, Gysi is backing the change in foreign policy that began under the former foreign minister and newly designated federal president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Together with Federal President Gauck and Defense Minister von der Leyen (CDU), Steinmeier declared at the Munich Security Conference in 2014, that Germany must be “ready to engage in foreign and security policy issues earlier, more decisively, and more substantially.”

In the following period the SPD-led foreign ministry has drawn up several strategy papers directed at militarizing Europe under German control. Steinmeier himself has publicly campaigned for “Germany’s new global role.”

Millions of people are alarmed and angry over the reactionary policies of the new American government. The Left Party is seeking to transform the growing resistance to these policies into support for a new round of German great power politics.



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