

SPD youth leader defends Germany's grand coalition government

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6 December 2019

There is a popular saying—"Start young if you want top marks"—and it sums up the cynical politics of the leader of Germany's Young Socialists, Kevin Kühnert. His entire career, as official head of the youth movement of the Social Democratic Party, has been to provide left-wing blather to cover up the tracks of the right wing inside the SPD.

Two years ago, Kühnert was the main spokesman for those opposed to Germany's grand coalition government. Now, following the adoption of an extreme right-wing course by the government—a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/CDU, Christian Social Union/CSU, and Social Democratic Party/SPD—making it more hated by workers than ever, Kühnert is defending the grand coalition.

In a long interview with the *Rheinische Post*, he warned "of the consequences of a hasty exit ... If you leave a coalition, you lose some of your control." Then, praising the work of the government, he continued, "Even critics like me cannot deny that the content of the [government's] work was clearly dominated by the SPD."

Kühnert also declared he did not wish to renegotiate the coalition agreement, claiming, "Nobody ever demanded that." There was, however, a clause in the coalition agreement stipulating that new plans could be agreed if fundamental conditions changed. "We are relying on this clause," Kühnert said.

Kühnert's public defence of the grand coalition is in response to the election of the duo, Norbert Walter-Borjans and Saskia Esken, as the new leadership of the SPD. The pair are expected to be confirmed in office by an SPD party conference at the weekend.

Walter-Borjans and Esken were the surprise victors in a ballot of the SPD membership, winning more votes than the candidates of the party's right wing, the

current finance minister and vice chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and the Brandenburg state deputy, Klara Geywitz. Kühnert and the Young Socialists backed Walter-Borjans and Esken, portraying the pair as a "left-wing alternative" and "opposition to the grand coalition." Esken in particular had repeatedly promised in the SPD leadership election campaign that she would renegotiate the coalition pact and end the grand coalition, should the CDU and CSU fail to make concessions.

Following the announcement of the election result, Esken and Walter-Borjans have been back-peddalling fast. The main motion for this weekend's congress no longer refers to renegotiations, or a possible break by the SPD with the coalition. Instead, it merely expresses the desire to "talk" to the CDU and the CSU without any conditions being laid down.

Ministers in the federal and various state governments together with parliamentary deputies have all made clear they oppose any premature ending of the grand coalition and new elections. Nevertheless, there is considerable nervousness on the part of the media that something could go wrong at the party congress, and the government, which has just agreed further austerity measures and a massive increase in its military budget, could fall prematurely. Kühnert has now assured them that the Young Socialists stand by the grand coalition and will not rock the boat.

When asked in the same interview if he regretted in retrospect not running for the party presidency himself, Kühnert replied that it was not about the "chairmanship of a fishing club" but rather leadership of the "oldest democratic party in Germany." Although he had renounced an immediate candidacy, a future candidacy on his part was "thinkable," he said. The SPD was "also supporting the two chairpersons."

In other words, the SPD establishment—its ranks of federal and state ministers, its parliamentary groups, party executive and presidium—is the centre of political power and determines the programme and politics of the party.

And this is where Kevin Kühnert has set his sights. In the same interview, he announced that he would run for the post of deputy party chairman at the upcoming SPD congress. He is well aware of his own role in the dishonest game of draping a pseudo-left cloak over the SPD.

Despite its catastrophic poll ratings, the SPD is intent on closing ranks behind the grand coalition. It is the party's response to the emergence of class struggles in Germany and throughout Europe. This Thursday, for example, witnessed the biggest general strike in France for many years against the pension plans of the Macron government.

In Germany, there is widespread discontent among public service workers confronting intolerable working conditions in hospitals, schools and public transport. At the same time, Germany's major auto companies and suppliers have all announced tens of thousands of job cuts in the past few days. The trade unions are finding it increasingly difficult to control and contain growing widespread public outrage.

Under these conditions, the SPD lines up loyally behind the state, big business and the trade unions, which are all working together to enforce social cuts and job losses while suppressing the class struggle. The true character of this party is becoming increasingly evident. It is a right-wing state party that represents the interests of the banks, large corporations, intelligence services and the army.

This also applies to the Young Socialists and Kevin Kühnert. Two years ago, we pointed out that the YS campaign opposing the grand coalition was primarily motivated by their "fear of the demise of the SPD and the associated loss of offices and benefits."

We wrote: "Kühnert and the Jusos are not concerned with organising a political struggle against the grand coalition, let alone mobilising workers and young people for new elections based on a socialist programme. Their goal is to forestall the collapse of the SPD in a new edition of the grand coalition and to prevent growing popular opposition from breaking out of the official party spectrum."

The SPD is reacting to the crisis of capitalism, the growth of trade war and, above all, increasing resistance by the working class with a sharp shift to the right. In many spheres of politics, the party constitutes the right wing of the grand coalition. On the issue of foreign policy, it has attacked Merkel, the CDU and CSU from the right and stressed that the SPD is better placed to enforce the great power interests of German imperialism. In view of the party's dismal poll ratings, it leans more and more directly on the state repressive apparatus and aims to impose dictatorial forms of rule.

Kühnert's call for the defence of the grand coalition is an expression of this right-wing development, which will dominate the party conference this weekend.



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