

Left Party prepares to cooperate with far-right Alternative for Germany in Thuringia

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In the small state of Thuringia in eastern Germany, a development is taking place that exemplifies the situation throughout the country. The ruling class and all its parties, from the Left Party to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), are drawing closer together and preparing to form an alliance against the working class.

At the end of October, the Left Party/Social Democratic Party (SPD)/Green coalition led by Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) lost its majority after five years in government. Although the Left Party was able to improve its share of the vote slightly from 2014, the SPD lost 4.2 percent to finish with 8.2 percent of the vote, while the Greens barely managed to surpass the 5 percent hurdle for parliamentary representation. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, also lost more than half its total votes.

The AfD, with its fascist state leader Björn Höcke, was able to benefit in part from the generalised anger towards all the capitalist parties. The AfD doubled its share of the vote to 23 percent. Since the election, Ramelow has been seeking to lead a Left Party/SPD/Green minority government with the support of the CDU and Free Democrats.

Former German President Joachim Gauck met with Ramelow and CDU Thuringia leader Mike Mohring on January 12 for dinner and urged the CDU to form an alliance with the Left Party. “I really ought to be able to distinguish between a hard-core communist who is a Left Party member and a Minister President from the trade union tradition who has already shown that he won’t harm this society with his left-wing profile,” Gauck told news broadcaster n-tv.

During the existence of Stalinist East Germany (GDR) and later as state commissioner for the archive of the Stasi, the former Stalinist secret police, Gauck was already known as a notorious anti-communist. As German president, he played a key role six years ago in implementing the return to German militarism and an imperialist foreign policy.

Responding to Gauck’s repeated urgings, former long-term CDU Minister President Dieter Althaus proposed a “project government” with the Left Party, meaning an

agreement that the two parties would collaborate on certain issues. *Der Spiegel*, the weekly news magazine, reported January 9 that Ramelow viewed Gauck’s proposal favourably. According to the publication, Ramelow said that he welcomed “any movement in the CDU that results in reliable governing.” In addition to the talks with the CDU, the Left Party has continued coalition talks with the SPD and Greens. A total of 22 policy areas were identified on which the CDU, SPD and Greens would seek common ground.

There is nothing truly surprising about the collaboration between the Left Party and CDU. After all, the Left Party has long supported the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU)/SPD coalition at the federal level on all key issues. The significant thing is that in Thuringia, this cooperation now includes the AfD. The ties between the CDU and AfD are especially close in the state. The dividing line between the two parties is “fluid.” A large number of AfD members were formerly in the CDU, and the right-wing of the CDU strives to cooperate with the AfD.

On Monday, the broadcaster MDR invited all the parties to the programme “Fakt ist!” (The reality is!). On the programme, the AfD parliamentary group’s head of parliamentary affairs, Stefan Möller, suggested his party was more than ready to support a Left Party/SPD/Green coalition on key issues. His party would not pursue opposition at all costs, but would “decide according to purely objective criteria based on the AfD’s electoral programme.” Already in the last parliamentary session, there were initiatives “where the AfD certainly agreed with the Left Party/SPD/Green camp.”

Benjamin-Immanuel Hoff, head of the State Chancellery, responded for the Left Party. He said there were a number of issues on which the governing and opposition parties had indicated they wanted to seek solutions in the interests of the state. Cross-party exchange had already been practiced over recent years between the Left Party, SPD and Greens, he continued.

Regardless of the “differing political and ideological lines” existing between the parties, effective cooperation on

technical issues is not only possible, but necessary, noted Hoff, before adding cynically, “I will certainly not draft a law with Mr. Höcke that describes the Holocaust memorial in Berlin as a memorial of shame.” However, issues related to the municipal financial settlement could certainly be discussed and resolved with AfD municipal politicians, he added.

Hoff is a typical representative of the Left Party’s right-wing, pro-capitalist course. He earned his political spurs in Berlin when the Social Democrat/Left Party state government was in power. As state secretary for health, the environment and consumer protection, he was involved in drafting social spending cuts and other austerity measures.

As state Minister for Culture and head of the state chancellery in Thuringia, he participated last November in a public ceremony for new soldiers swearing their oath of allegiance. He marched alongside Brigadier General Gunnar Brüchner and appealed for closer ties between the public and the army.

The support from the AfD for the Left Party/SPD/Green coalition did not come out of the blue. Over the past five years, Ramelow effectively adopted the AfD’s policies towards refugees and with anti-worker measures. Since the Left Party came to power in Erfurt five years ago, Thuringia has had the second highest average rate of deportations in Germany. Last year alone, his government initiated 1,650 deportations. The government’s ruthless deportation practices have repeatedly been criticised by refugee aid organisations.

On domestic policy, Ramelow and the Left Party have pursued a hard-line law-and-order agenda. They even boast of going farther than the CDU. Their election programme stated, “While the CDU reduced the number of police trainees to 120 per year by 2014, we have reversed the declining trend. We increased the number of police trainees in successive years to 300 in 2019.”

The new coalition agreement continues this law-and-order agenda. It states, “We declare our support for a modern, comprehensive state police force that is close to the citizens and ready for deployment. We will support it with appropriate upgrades in equipment and necessary innovations. We will also further develop prevention, which is just as important for public security, with a results-oriented approach.”

The strengthening of the repressive state apparatus will proceed rapidly. “To this end, we will review the already agreed upon police officer numbers by 2025 within the framework of a personnel development strategy to ensure the achievement of the goal of the required increase in personnel and the necessary long-term plan for new hires and departures,” states the new coalition agreement.

In spite of this abstruse-bureaucratic language, it is clear that the strengthening of the apparatus of state repression is directed against mounting opposition in the working class. Social conditions in Thuringia are explosive. It is among the poorest of Germany’s states. According to current figures from the Federal Statistics Office, one in six households (16.6 percent) are at risk of poverty, including one fifth of children and young people under 18.

The Left Party’s right-wing policies and collaboration with all other parties are paving the way for the coming class battles and strengthening the AfD.

Thirty years after German reunification, the social and political effects of the reintroduction of capitalist property relations in the former GDR are plain for all to see. The social decline in the east was used as a battering ram to decimate social conditions in the west, create a huge low-wage sector and impose social misery. At the same time, the ruling class responded to the global capitalist crisis by rearming and preparing for war, and building up the AfD as a fascist party.

To combat the fascist danger, the role played by the Left Party must be spelt out clearly: with its right-wing pro-capitalist policies, the party, whose predecessor organised the reintroduction of capitalist property relations in the GDR 30 years ago, bears significant responsibility for the rise of the AfD. In particular, the fact that the party has imposed a social disaster while posturing as a nominally “left” party has intensified the social frustration and political confusion that the far-right exploits.

It is necessary to draw the lessons from this. Under conditions of the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, all the established parties are closing ranks and orienting politically towards the AfD. The return of the ruling class to militarism, fascism and war can be stopped only through the mobilisation of the working class independently on a socialist programme. The decisive question is the construction of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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