

Germany: Left Party proposes a Christian Democrat as state premier in Thuringia

Ulrich Rippert
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On Saturday, 20,000 people demonstrated in Thuringia's state capital Erfurt against the political conspiracy of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD). Now, the Left Party is collaborating closely with the CDU, reacting to the enormous opposition against fascism and war by moving further to the right and closing ranks with all the establishment parties.

On Monday evening, former Thuringia state premier Bodo Ramelow proposed on behalf of the Left Party that former CDU state premier Christine Lieberknecht be appointed head of the state executive. According to Ramelow's proposal, Lieberknecht, who headed the state government from 2009 to 2014 and pushed through radical social cuts, should form a "technocratic government" with three ministers for about 70 days and prepare the election of a new state legislature.

The same party, which has close ties to the fascists of the AfD, and which ten days ago, in a political provocation, elected FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich as state premier in alliance with the AfD, is now to take over the government. At the protest rally on Saturday, Left Party officials had called Kemmerich's election with the votes of the AfD a "coup from the right." Now, the Left Party is proposing the putschists take over the government.

The Left Party could hardly express more clearly that it is part of the political conspiracy that has made possible the rise of the AfD. In the face of growing opposition to the AfD and the shift to the right of the entire political establishment, the Left Party is forging an alliance of all establishment parties in order to strengthen the state apparatus and implement a policy of blatant social inequality.

Former head of government Ramelow justified his proposal on Tuesday morning by saying he wanted to open "a non-partisan path acceptable to all" and make a "contribution to the stabilization of the federal state." He would not run for the office of state prime minister for the time being, he promised. Thuringia needed a government that is capable of acting, he said.

The leader of the Left Party in Thuringia, Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, explained a timetable for Ramelow's proposal. According to the schedule, the state parliament would be dissolved at the beginning of March and agree to new elections. After that, the technocratic state government with Lieberknecht at its head would be installed. Seventy days later, a new government would be formed following fresh elections.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) reacted enthusiastically and applauded. Thuringia's SPD state leader Wolfgang Tiefensee welcomed Ramelow's proposal, saying, "This is a very good plan." Ramelow deserved "high respect" for stepping aside and placing the interests of the federal state and good governance at the centre of his actions.

The negotiating group of the Thuringian CDU faction reacted cautiously on Monday and asked for time to consider the matter. On Tuesday afternoon, they in turn went on the offensive and set conditions. The election of Christine Lieberknecht as state premier was a good proposal, but the stability of the federal state demanded by Ramelow did not allow for immediate new elections and a limitation to three ministers.

Instead, the state executive must be "fully staffed" and "formed across party lines by appointing experts." Such a government, headed by Lieberknecht and the CDU, would have to draw up the budget for the coming year and pass it in parliament. "Rushed new elections" would not help, said a CDU spokesperson.

Last week, Ramelow had offered the CDU to renegotiate the state budget already approved by the previous "red-red-green" (SPD-Left Party-Green Party) government—at that time, to try and persuade the CDU to support his own re-election as state premier.

On Wednesday, Lieberknecht finally turned down Ramelow's offer: "I was prepared to lead a transitional government if it would cut the Gordian knot. The goal would have been to finally create stable political conditions again," she told German daily *Die Welt*. "But the negotiating

partners are simply too far apart on a key issue. The Left Party wanted to create stable conditions by holding new elections quickly. That is not how my party sees it. The Thuringian CDU wanted to pacify the situation in the existing state parliament.”

Lieberknecht is now urging her own party to form a coalition government with Ramelow and the Left Party. “We will only get this stability if the CDU and the Left Party agree on reliable parliamentary cooperation,” she said.

It is not clear how the political conspiracy in Erfurt will unfold. What is certain, however, is that the Left Party is providing the hated CDU—which is losing votes massively in federal and state elections and is making deals with the AfD—with critical government responsibility. In the most recent election in Thuringia, the CDU, whose leader has been federal chancellor for 15 years, lost almost 12 percent, plummeting to 21 percent. In recent polls, it now only reaches 13 percent in Thuringia.

The collaboration of the Left Party with the CDU is neither new nor surprising. For years, the Left Party has supported the policies of the federal government consisting of the SPD and CDU/CSU on all important issues. In Thuringia, it is now clearly visible that this cooperation extends to and includes the AfD.

While millions of people are appalled that the CDU had elected a state premier together with the AfD, the Left Party supports the CDU, even though the boundaries between it and the AfD are fluid. A large part of the AfD cadre comes from the CDU, and the CDU’s conservative wing is seeking close cooperation with the AfD. Recent developments in Thuringia make it abundantly clear that the Left Party is also willing to cooperate with the AfD.

In mid-January, Stefan Möller, parliamentary secretary of the AfD faction in Erfurt, emphasized to the media that his party was quite willing to cooperate with Ramelow and the Left Party on important legislative projects. His party did not operate an all-out opposition, and there had already been legislative projects and political decisions in the last legislative period, “where the AfD was definitely also on the line of the red-red-green camp.”

On behalf of the Left Party, Benjamin-Immanuel Hoff, acting head of the Thuringia State Chancellery, replied at the time that there were a number of issues on which both the governing parties and all opposition parties would have to cooperate in the interests of the federal state. Hoff added, “I will certainly not make a law with [AfD leader] Mr. Höcke in which the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is described as a monument of shame.” But problems of municipal fiscal equalization could certainly be discussed and resolved with local politicians of the AfD. Hoff has now also helped to draft the Lieberknecht plan, which provides that he will

remain head of the state chancellery under the CDU state premier.

In its collaboration with right-wing parties, the Left Party is no different than its sister party Syriza in Greece. The Radical Left (Syriza) coalition led by Alexis Tsipras concluded a pact with the right-wing populist and ultra-nationalist Independent Greeks (ANEL) in spring 2013 to defend Greece’s national interests.

Two years later, as massive opposition to the EU’s devastating austerity measures developed in Greece, and Syriza won the elections, Tsipras formed a coalition with the radical right-wing party and passed even worse social cuts than the conservative governments before them.

The Left Party’s cooperation with the CDU is not limited to Thuringia but is particularly evident there. This right-wing development is driven by far-reaching changes in the political situation.

The same weekend that Ramelow and Hoff arranged their political coup with Christine Lieberknecht, the Munich Security Conference was taking place, where transatlantic tensions and imperialist antagonisms broke out in a big way. In response to this, Germany’s military rearmament, which had already been drastically increased last year, is once again being significantly stepped up. This is associated with massive attacks on social provisions and democratic rights and is meeting with fierce resistance from workers and young people.

The Left Party reacts to this intensification of class struggles with an appeal to the state to maintain peace and order. It is not opposed to the right-wing conspiracy but is part of it. The only way to fight the rise of the far-right is an independent movement of workers, directed against all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament). This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting for.



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