

Germany's Left Party backs multibillion-euro bailout of banks and big business

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The coronavirus pandemic has thoroughly exposed the class character and political orientation of the Left Party and its pseudo-left satellites. While the pandemic has shed light on the social, economic, political, cultural and moral bankruptcy of capitalism, the Left Party is defending the interests of the big banks and corporations and has entered into an alliance with Germany's right-wing grand coalition government against the working class.

The clearest expression of this occurred on 26 March, when the Left party parliamentary group voted unanimously with deputies from the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Free Democrats and the far-right Alternative for Germany in favour of the government's multibillion-euro bailout of the banks and big business. "Yes" votes were also cast by members and supporters of the "anti-capitalist left" and "socialist left" factions of the Left Party, which are associated with the pseudo-left tendencies Marx21 and Socialist Alternative (SAV), respectively.

The long-standing Left Party parliamentary deputy and leading member of Marx21 Christine Buchholz boasted on her Facebook page that she had voted "together with several deputies from the Left Party parliamentary group" for the government's legislation to "protect the population amid an epidemic of national scope." It was "correct that the ridiculous debt brake was suspended and state funds deployed to overcome the crisis on a large scale."

In parliament, Left Party parliamentary group leader Amira Mohamed Ali explained her support for the measures, stating: "The federal government's bailout programme to overcome this unprecedentedly grave crisis includes many good measures with which we are in agreement. The talks we held on this with the federal government over recent days were very constructive."

The message is clear: The Left Party is working hand in hand with the federal government to defend the interests of German capital and place the burden of the coronavirus crisis on the backs of working people. All attempts to conceal the class character of the measures adopted cannot cover up this fact. The main purpose of the "many good measures" is to safeguard the profits of the major corporations and large financial institutions and ensure the continued enrichment of a tiny wealthy minority at the expense of the working class.

A total of €600 billion of the €756 billion made available by the government will be funnelled into the coffers of major corporations. The short-time work benefit celebrated by the Left Party, which amounts to 60 percent of a worker's former wages, is

aimed above all at allowing corporations to place their workforces on starvation wages and carry through long-planned restructuring measures.

There are absolutely no state funds for precariously employed workers, including the approximately eight million who have so-called "minijobs." For those workers, and many who are self-employed, their only option is to apply for Hartz IV social welfare.

The Left Party also backs the European bailout programs that are likewise aimed at transferring billions into the coffers of the banks and the super-rich. In March, the European Central Bank (ECB) announced a bailout programme worth €750 billion for the financial markets. Earlier this month, European Union leaders agreed on an additional €500 billion package that will benefit the stock markets, banks and speculators.

Despite this, Martin Schirdewan, executive committee member of the Left Party and parliamentary group leader of the European United Left (Nordic Greens) in the European Parliament, indicated his party's backing for the measures. "We welcome the loans from the EIB (European Investment Bank) to support small and medium-sized businesses through the crisis and the help provided to employees and their companies with short-time work benefits for a limited period," he declared in a statement.

Schirdewan, the Left Party and its European sister organisations know full well that the EU measures will not benefit working people, but rather the financial oligarchy. As was the case following the 2008-09 financial crisis, the multibillion-euro bailouts will be squeezed out of the working class by means of vicious cost-cutting programmes and an intensification of austerity policies.

Schirdewan attempts to conceal this fact by calling for the issuing of joint European bonds, so-called "coronabonds," instead of the €240 billion in loans to be made by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). "Offering loans under a regime of macroeconomic conditions through the ESM" is "a slap in the face for those already suffering most," stated Schirdewan, before warning, "It could lead to a further state debt crisis, because the restructuring fund is nothing more than an empty promise." The EU budget is "not large enough to guarantee Europe's recovery," he added.

The Left Party's support for coronabonds, which are supported by the majority of EU governments, including France, Italy and Spain, has nothing to do with support for workers or the most vulnerable sections of society on the continent. Rather, the Left

Party is supporting a financial instrument that even significant sections of the German bourgeoisie consider necessary for uniting Europe under Berlin's leadership and pursuing German and European imperialist interests on the global stage.

In an article titled "How to strengthen our Europe," EU Commission President and former German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (CDU) appealed for "major investments" and a "Marshall plan for Europe." What is required is a "strategic investment in our future" to "build a Europe that is more modern, sustainable and capable of resistance," she wrote.

Von der Leyen left no doubt about the fact that the billions made available from the EU will flow overwhelmingly into the financial markets and will be linked to decades of austerity policies. It is necessary to "create planning security for investors," she said. She continued: "The many billions that have to be invested today to avert a greater catastrophe will bind generations together."

The Left Party is enthused by these plans. Von der Leyen's suggestion of "presenting a Marshall plan for the EU" is "overdue," stated Left Party leader Bernd Riexinger on Twitter. The EU has "restrained itself for far too long," and it is now "urgently necessary for us to present a major investment programme for the EU."

The Left Party's only concern is that the reactionary character of these plans not become too obvious. "We cannot allow it to appear as though we are adopting a major investment programme to get business and the EU up and running again in the same way they work currently," stated Riexinger with his own brand of cynicism.

While the class character of government policy becomes ever clearer, the Left Party is providing crucial support to Berlin and Brussels as they implement antiworker policies. In early April, Left Party parliamentary group coleader Dietmar Bartsch told the Phoenix television channel: "Yes, this is the time of the executive (branch of government). But we have to ... above all ensure that the adopted measures are implemented and don't sink in the swamp of bureaucracy. That is our task."

He went on: "The federal government's crisis management can be evaluated in retrospect ... now it is above all necessary to act. Left Party politicians are doing so—Bodo Ramelow as the minister president of a federal state, many local politicians and mayors—so we all have to get on with it and focus in particular on those who fall through the cracks."

What the Left Party understands by "getting on with it" is shown most clearly by what the party is doing where it exercises governmental responsibility. In Thuringia, the Left Party/SPD/Green minority coalition government under Ramelow is exploiting the crisis to intensify its cooperation with the right-wing CDU.

"We constantly consult with the CDU," enthused the Left Party parliamentary leader in the Thuringia state parliament, Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, in comments to *Der Spiegel*. "It's working. We are finding common ground, as we agreed to." In March, Ramelow even backed the AfD by using his vote to ensure that the far-right party obtained one of the vice presidential posts in the state parliament.

This "finding common ground" with right-wing and far-right forces obviously has nothing to do with helping those who "may

fall through the cracks." Rather, the goal is to discipline the most vulnerable sections of society and suppress any opposition to the social and political consequences of the crisis.

Significantly, the Left Party is endorsing the massive deployment of the Army domestically. According to the German Army's website, soldiers are being deployed as part of "assistance to the authorities in connection with the coronavirus" in Thuringia and Berlin. The Ramelow government even intends to hand control of refugee accommodation centres to the Army. According to an Army spokesman, the state has applied for "the supplying of soldiers to enforce house rules on the basis of shift working" at the centre in Suhl.

The "back to work" campaign is also being supported by the Left Party. On the Markus Lanz talk show on 16 April, Ramelow defended the decision of the federal and state governments to gradually open areas of public life in spite of the continued rapid spread of the pandemic. He made no secret about the fact that the main goal was to strengthen big business and restart production. "The economy in Germany has not been abolished," he said. "We didn't halt it. And there we have an entirely different problem of global work that has not been changed by the coronavirus."

In other words, no less than the federal government and the most aggressive representatives of German capital, the Left Party insists that millions of workers in Germany and around the world return to their jobs to re-establish supply chains and produce profits. The Left Party has only contempt for the safety and health concerns of workers. Responding to the question of how the population could be equipped with masks, Ramelow answered blandly, "We don't have them. We can't make them available."

Workers and young people must decisively settle accounts with this party, which describes itself as "left" but places the profit interests of big business ahead of the population's health and well-being. Thirty years after its predecessor organisation, the Stalinist SED/PDS, organised the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany, the Left Party can no longer conceal the fact that it speaks on behalf of privileged sections of the middle class, whose interests are entirely compatible with those of Germany's banks and big business.



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