

Lars Klingbeil to lead German Social Democrats

Peter Schwarz
10 November 2021

The executive committee of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) on Monday unanimously nominated Lars Klingbeil, the current secretary general, to become party chairman. He is to replace Norbert Walter-Borjans and co-lead the SPD with the current co-chair Saskia Esken, who was also nominated unanimously. The election of the two nominees by a special party congress in early December is considered certain.

Klingbeil's rise to the heights of the party shows how meaningless the media's labels of "left" and "right" are. A "left-wing Social Democrat" is a contradiction in terms.

Esken and Walter-Borjans were elected to the chairmanship by the membership two years ago after a week-long election marathon. Their victory was presented, under the guidance of Jusos [the SPD youth organization] Chairman Kevin Kühnert, as a triumph of the "left wing." Among the defeated candidates at the time was German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz.

However, Esken and Walter-Borjans then chose Scholz as their candidate for chancellor in personal negotiations. Since then, "unity" has been the party's highest virtue, meaning any public criticism of its right-wing and militaristic course is considered treason and sabotage.

Following his nomination, Klingbeil emphasized in an interview with the party organ *Vorwärts*, which, as secretary general, he himself publishes: "Everyone has understood that unity is the starting point for success."

Klingbeil becomes, counting provisional holders of the position, the twentieth chairman of the SPD in 24 years. Previous to that, Willy Brandt led the party for 23 years. Klingbeil's most important task will be to provide cover for the new chancellor and his or her "traffic light" coalition (the respective coalition party colors are red-SPD, yellow-Free Democratic Party, and the Green party).

Until now, Klingbeil had mainly attracted attention due

to his membership in the Seeheimer Circle, the association of conservatives and reactionaries within the SPD, and his closeness to the Bundeswehr, the German armed forces.

He was born the son of a professional soldier in 1978 in Munster, Lower Saxony, the location of the largest German army base, where he remains anchored today. Like many SPD careerists, Klingbeil had his rebellious phase, his being especially feeble and brief. In 1998, he abstained from obligatory military duties and opted instead for civilian service. But even as a student, he worked in the constituency office of then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, with whom he remains friends to this day.

This prompted the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) to worriedly wonder whether Klingbeil might not be too friendly toward Russia and supportive of "the bomb-proof permanent assertion of his paid friend" that "the Russian Baltic Sea pipelines Nord Stream 1 and 2 are in no way geopolitical weapons in [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's fight against Ukraine, but 'industrial projects' in the service of German jobs."

However, the FAZ also appreciatively conceded that Klingbeil does not suffer from the "combination of a historical sense of guilt regarding Russia and elemental postwar pacifism," which "had obscured the German left's view of the Soviet Union in the old Federal Republic." Here, Klingbeil is "not suspect": "He comes from a family of soldiers, and he has publicly demanded that German soldiers be protected by armed drones. That shows courage."

After studying political science, sociology and history, financed through a scholarship from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Klingbeil quickly climbed local, state and federal rungs of the Social Democratic ladder without ever coming into contact with the working class. From 2003 to 2007, he was deputy federal chairman of the

Jusos.

As a member of the Bundestag (federal parliament), Klingbeil was active in the Defense Committee (Verteidigungsausschuss) and is under consideration for defense minister in the upcoming federal government. On his website, he writes: “As a Munster resident, to this day I am engaged in the Defense Committee on behalf of our servicemen and women and for the modernization of Bundeswehr bases in our region.”

Klingbeil’s second substantive focus is digitization. Here he maintains close ties with IT industry corporations. His wife of two years, Lena-Sophie Müller, has served as managing director of the lobbying association “Initiative D21” since 2014.

This non-profit association describes itself as “Germany’s largest partnership of politics and business for shaping the information society.” Founded with the support of IBM and then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, it has become a cross-sector network of 200 companies and representatives from federal, state and local governments. Among others, Intel, Microsoft, Ericsson and the business consultants Deloitte, KPMG and EY are represented on the board. More than 100 companies and institutions participate in its funding.

Since the 2011 attack by right-wing terrorist Anders Breivik in Norway, Klingbeil has also advocated increased surveillance and censorship of the internet by German security agencies.

Digitization likewise remains a priority of the impending traffic light coalition. This is not simply about—urgently needed—expansion of German digital infrastructure. As the WSWS points out in our analysis of the incoming coalition’s exploratory paper, the SPD, Greens and FDP are planning “a ‘comprehensive renewal of our country,’” at the end of which nothing will remain of the rights and gains for which the working class fought in the post-World War II decades.”

Among the key points of the exploratory paper is the retention of so-called “debt brake” budget restrictions and the rejection of any tax increase on the rich, a policy that depends on drastic cuts in the social budget.

The traffic light coalition likewise wishes to further increase defense spending. According to a report in *Der Spiegel*, a confidential Defense Ministry paper for negotiators proposes the establishment of “Bundeswehr special means” that could “ensure planning and financing security for long-term multinational cooperation projects as well as highly complex major projects with large financial volumes.” In addition, the defense budget would

increase to NATO’s two percent target. The paper puts the cost of outstanding defense projects alone at 40 billion euros.

The coalition negotiations, which involve more than 300 experts from the three parties, organized in 22 working groups, are taking place in strict secrecy. If information leaks out, the entire issue affected must be renegotiated. Nevertheless, the contours of the future traffic light coalition are beginning to emerge.

Most apparent is its policy on the pandemic. On Monday, the parliamentary groups of the SPD, FDP and Greens presented a draft of a new infection protection law, which is slated to be passed by the Bundestag and Bundesrat before the new government is formed.

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of infections to the highest levels since the beginning of the pandemic, the new coalition partners wish the “epidemic situation of national scope” to expire on November 25. The current policy allows the federal and state governments to order lockdowns and other protective measures without a prior parliamentary approval. That will longer be possible.

Instead, the new law provides only for certain, wholly inadequate measures that the states can enact independently. These include the extension of special regulations on child illness benefits and simplified access to Hartz IV, the German social welfare system.

Even the much-heralded reintroduction of free COVID tests and national health certificate regulations are absent from the law. Retirement and nursing homes will be allowed to process data only on vaccinations and recoveries of their employees; there is no provision for compulsory vaccination or daily testing.

The consequences will be another steep rise in infections, overcrowded intensive care units and tens of thousands of preventable deaths. The traffic light coalition is preparing to walk over corpses in the interest of the profits of the rich, which have increased enormously during the pandemic. Klingbeil’s task as head of the Willy Brandt House will be to implement this brutal policy over all opposition.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact