

After the AfD's election victory: Pseudo-left tendencies stoke illusions in the Left Party

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The Left Party bears central responsibility for the victory of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the recent Saxony-Anhalt state election. Outrage over social cutbacks, war and the establishment parties found an outlet on the right because the Left Party and the trade unions blocked every avenue on the left.

The ruling class is responding to the deep crisis of capitalism by boosting militarism, stepping up the repressive powers of the state and imposing social cuts. The Left Party goes along with this and provides a left cover. It supports the federal government's great-power policies, voted in the upper house of parliament for €1 trillion in war credits and persecutes opponents of the Gaza genocide within its own ranks. In the federal states, where it is or has been in government, it has left a trail of social devastation.

The trade unions, with which the Left Party works closely, act as co-managers organising the destruction of jobs and social provisions and suppress all resistance to this. Just three days before the Saxony-Anhalt election, for example, the union IG Metall agreed to the destruction of a further 50,000 jobs at Volkswagen.

This is why the AfD—a free-market party backed by billionaires such as Henning Conle and Elon Musk—is able to channel social anger and outrage into right-wing channels with its demagoguery. The AfD contains numerous fascists, but it is not a fascist mass party. Many voted for it out of protest and opposition to the establishment parties, which offer them nothing but war, unemployment and poverty.

The Left Party is responding to the AfD's success by moving even further to the right. Even before the Saxony-Anhalt election, it had made clear that it was prepared to do anything, including supporting or joining a state government led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). It is obvious that such cooperation with the party of hated Chancellor Merz would be grist to the mill of the AfD.

Pseudo-left tendencies such as the Sozialistische Alternative (SAV), Marx21, Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO) and the Internationale Sozialistische Organisation (ISO), which play a significant role within the Left Party, are also aware of this. Unlike seasoned Left Party functionaries and politicians such as Gregor Gysi, Dietmar Bartsch and Bodo Ramelow, who make no secret of their right-wing positions, these tendencies pass themselves off as socialists. They try to prevent a political reckoning with the Left Party and an independent counteroffensive by the working class by fostering the illusion that through pressure from below, it can be pushed into a policy of class struggle.

They are sticking to this even after the AfD's election victory in Saxony-Anhalt. While the Left Party is running after the CDU, the pseudo-left is running after the Left Party, and all the while they keep moving further to the right.

The pseudo-left is forced to admit that directly supporting or just "tolerating" (i.e., providing confidence and supply votes) a CDU-led minority state government—something the party leadership has declared

itself fundamentally willing to do—would further strengthen the AfD. Yet it continues to support the Left Party regardless.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) categorically rejects this policy. It is a political trap designed to foster illusions in a party that repeatedly stabs the working class in the back. The Left Party is not a socialist party that makes mistakes, but a capitalist party that uses left-wing phrases to divert the radicalisation of the working class and youth and prevent it from turning against the capitalist order. The Left Party and its predecessor, the PDS, have proven this time and again.

How the pseudo-left campaigns for the Left Party

RIO, a Morenoite organisation that only joined the Left Party this spring, states:

Only the organisation and mobilisation of workers and young people, with a programme that combines social and anti-racist demands, can present a consistent alternative to right-wing politics. ... Toleration of the CDU by the Left Party would undermine these tasks by redirecting the fight against the right into institutional deals with the 'lesser evil.' That is nothing other than capitulation to the shift to the right, for the lesser evil is always followed by the greater evil.

But how does RIO intend to achieve this "organisation and mobilisation" against the AfD? The editors of its publication *Klasse gegen Klasse* answer:

The leaderships of the Left Party and the SPD [Social Democratic Party] are now responsible for using their positions in the trade unions to organise such strikes. But they will only do so if the pressure in workplaces, at meetings and on the streets is great enough.

So it is precisely these forces that are supposed to organise strikes against the AfD and the CDU: the SPD of Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil and Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, the trade unions that act as co-managers organising the destruction of jobs and social provisions, and the Left Party itself, which implements a right-wing, capitalist policy in state governments!

This shows that behind RIO's radical talk of "revolution," "class struggle" and "pressure from the street" lies nothing more than a pathetic appeal to the very organisations, which, through their policy of war and social cuts, paved the way for the AfD: Please, please organise a strike! That is like appealing to the arsonists to put out the fire.

The other pseudo-left currents within the Left Party differ from RIO in wording and style, but not in substance. They too insist that the key to the fight against the AfD lies with the Left Party.

The SAV, which is rooted in Ted Grant's Militant Tendency, writes under the headline "Only class struggle can stop the AfD":

The shift to the right can only be stopped if the Left Party takes up the task of becoming a genuine force for socialist change ...

Marx21, which traces its origins to Tony Cliff's "state capitalist" tendency and has been deeply integrated into the Left Party for 20 years, is forced to admit that the Left Party shares responsibility for the rise of the AfD. The experience of the Left Party's previous participation in government, it says, has always been the same:

The many compromises made in government have led to the betrayal of election promises, and economic pressure has led to social cuts being made as well. As a result, the party has been punished by voters in subsequent elections. The rise of the AfD is also a consequence of this betrayal, especially in the east.

Yet the Left Party's betrayal does not stop from continuing to support it. Marx21 claims "the 'Enough is enough!' protests brought into being with the help of the Left Party" are the model for a "strong movement" against the "planned reforms to health, long-term care and pension insurance," and that they would break the "vicious circle" benefiting the AfD.

This is a reference to demonstrations the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) is calling in 15 cities on September 26—the same DGB that has supported the federal government's policies of war and rearmament, backs the conversion of car plants into arms factories, is organising the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, and works closely with the governing SPD, of which DGB chair Yasmin Fahimi was formerly general secretary. The DGB is calling for these mass demonstrations to create a safety valve before it loses control entirely over the growing resistance to social cuts and war.

Supporters of the Pabloite United Secretariat in Germany take the same line. In *International Viewpoint*, Thies Gleiss, a long-standing leading member of the Left Party, warns that deals with the CDU and support for CDU-led state governments would be "fatal for the Left Party":

A coalition with, or toleration of, the CDU in particular would be to kowtow to the federal government, would be yet another boost for the AfD, and would mean surrendering any role as an opposition to that very same AfD.

Yet he does not draw the conclusion that one should break with the Left Party; instead, he claims:

Building a politically independent class party is the only option for the Left Party.

The ISO, also a member of the United Secretariat, states:

The Left Party must become clearer and more radical. ... It must become clear that the Left Party stands for clear opposition to existing conditions ... that it wants to overcome capitalist class society, and that this cannot be achieved through parliament alone. ... What is needed is a party that is represented in parliament and that is capable of shifting the balance of social forces through pressure on the streets, through roots in workplaces and neighbourhoods, and by fostering the self-confidence and self-organisation of those at the bottom.

The Left Party—a pro-capitalist party

The claim that the Left Party can be forced, through pressure from below, into a policy in the interests of the working class is not only refuted by the entire experience of recent years but is also historically false. Neither the Left Party nor its predecessor, the PDS, was ever a workers' party.

As the Berlin Wall fell and East Germany's Stalinist regime collapsed in 1989–90, the PDS emerged through the renaming of the former party of state, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), as the Party of Democratic Socialism. The SED was not a socialist party but a Stalinist one. It represented the interests of a privileged bureaucracy that leached off the nationalised property and suppressed every independent stirring of the working class.

When the "Ulbricht Group," the nucleus of the later SED, returned from exile in Moscow at the end of the Second World War, among its first actions was to dissolve the *Arbeiterräte* (workers' councils) that had sprung up spontaneously. In 1953, the Ulbricht regime then bloodily crushed the workers' uprising of June 17 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In the context of the Cold War, the SED found itself compelled to expropriate large, landed estates, companies and banks. This was a social advance upon which numerous social and cultural achievements of the GDR rested. But it was not yet socialism. A socialist society could no more be built within the narrow confines of East Germany than within the borders of the far larger Soviet Union. That required workers' democracy and access to the world economy through the international extension of the revolution. Stalinism rejected both.

As globalisation increasingly put the GDR economy under pressure and social tensions grew, the bureaucracy tried to save its privileges by introducing capitalism. It liquidated state property and all the social achievements bound up with it. That was the political content of the transformation of the SED into the PDS.

Hans Modrow, the last SED/PDS head of government in the GDR and later honorary chairman of the PDS, states this bluntly in his memoirs of his time in office. "In my view, the path to [German] unity was unavoidably necessary and had to be pursued with determination," he writes.

Modrow saw his most important task as defending the state order against a wave of protests and strikes by workers. He describes how strikes and social tensions increased and insists: "What mattered to me was preserving the country's governability, preventing chaos."

Modrow's economics minister, Christa Luft, also a PDS member, founded the Treuhand, the agency that privatised and wound down the GDR economy, destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs in the process.

The PDS and the Left Party have never since departed from the course

set by Modrow and Luft, protecting the state order and capitalist property. In the 1990s, working closely with the trade unions, the PDS played a key role in keeping resistance to the destruction of East German industry under control. In the 2000s, as the SPD's influence began to decline under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the PDS/Left Party took on government responsibility in several East German federal states.

In Berlin, where it participated as junior partner to the SPD in the state government under Mayor Klaus Wowereit from 2002 to 2011, it was responsible for massive job cuts and wage reductions in the public sector, as well as the privatisation of large stocks of public housing. No other state government carried out such radical social cuts. From 2014 to 2024 in Thuringia, where Bodo Ramelow was its state premier, it deported immigrants on a massive scale. At the same time, it plays a key role in the return of German militarism, which it cloaks in left-wing phrases even though German capital is pursuing the same imperialist interests as in the first half of the 20th century.

All of this created fertile ground for the growth of the AfD. In Thuringia, the far-right party is now about as strong as it is in Saxony-Anhalt, where it won 44 percent of the vote.

The pseudo-left and socialist politics

After more than three decades, the pseudo-left does not cling to the Left Party because it still has illusions in this pro-capitalist party, but because it rejects an independent movement of the working class. It speaks for better-off middle-class layers who fear a genuine offensive by the working class more than they fear the growth of the extreme right.

The SGP and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), of which it is the German section, represent a diametrically opposed policy. They are fighting to organise the working class independently of the Left Party and the ossified trade union apparatuses, to build rank-and-file action committees, and to construct the Fourth International as the new revolutionary leadership of the international working class.

The pseudo-left calls this “unrealistic” and “sectarian.” In fact, it is the only realistic perspective. It rests not on superficial impressions and false hopes, but on an objective analysis of the crisis of world capitalism and on the lessons of more than a hundred years of the Marxist workers' movement.

The same contradictions of capitalism that are driving the ruling class towards war and fascism are also creating the objective preconditions for socialist revolution. Imperialist wars and trade wars, rising military spending alongside falling social spending, the deep gulf between rich and poor, mass layoffs and rising living costs are driving the working class everywhere in the world into sharp confrontation with the capitalist order.

“The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historical events,” writes Leon Trotsky in the preface to his *History of the Russian Revolution*, the revolution he led to victory together with Lenin:

In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business—kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new régime.

This process is only just beginning. It unfolds neither automatically nor spontaneously. It requires a revolutionary leadership that understands and anticipates the political tasks ahead. Mass consciousness lags far behind objective conditions for a long time before it changes abruptly and erupts into fierce political and social conflicts. If a revolutionary perspective and leadership are then lacking, such struggles risk ending in bitter defeats.

The October Revolution in 1917 succeeded because the Bolsheviks, who had still been a minority during the February Revolution, strictly refused to adapt themselves to the illusions surrounding the supposedly left-wing Kerensky regime. Once the masses had convinced themselves through their own experience of Kerensky's reactionary character, the Bolsheviks won the majority in the soviets and established workers' power.

The fight against the AfD requires a political break with the Left Party and its pseudo-left satellites. An independent offensive by the international working class, directed against war, fascism, social inequality and their root cause, capitalism, will cut the ground from under the AfD.



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