Antisemitism campaign against the Berlin Left Party

Peter Schwarz
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The result of the Berlin state election had barely been announced when a smear campaign erupted against the Left Party, the clear election winner. The accusations range from antisemitism to support for criminal clans and terrorist gangs.

The opening shot came from Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), who on election night itself railed against a "hard-left alliance calling for 'shoot the rich,' 'capitalists out,' 'expropriate' and 'rent caps.'" She was followed by the Springer press, led by the tabloid *Bild*, and other media, and by representatives of all the Bundestag (federal parliamentary) parties, including the Left Party itself.

On Wednesday, at the AfD's request, a Bundestag debate took place in which the AfD, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens ganged up on the Left Party. Gregor Gysi, who spoke for the Left Party, contritely conceded that "some members are clearly overdoing their criticism of Israel" and promised to do better.

This nauseating spectacle was directed less against the Left Party and its lead candidate Elif Eralp, who is seeking to form a Senate (state executive) with the SPD and Greens, than against its voters.

The Left Party has proven time and again that it is a reliable pillar of capitalist interests. In Berlin, where it was part of the Senate for some 16 years from 2002, it played a pioneering role in the destruction of jobs and incomes and the privatisation of public housing. It also supports the federal government's policy of war and rearmament. Eralp had already fiercely attacked her own Neukölln district branch during the election campaign.

The real target of the campaign is the broad popular rejection of the genocide in Gaza and of the government's war policy. According to post-election surveys, 88 percent of Left Party voters and 60 percent of all voters approved of the Left Party having spoken critically about Israel.

This widespread mood is not to find the slightest reflection in the Senate but is to be, effectively, criminalised. The Left Party has either to ensure that nobody in its own parliamentary group steps out of line in any way, or the election losers, the CDU and SPD, are to form the government together with the Greens right away.

What is remarkable about this campaign is not only its vicious, aggressive tone, but also the close cooperation of supposed democrats with the AfD. Representatives of the establishment parties, far-right extremists and influential figures in the capital's press are vying to howl the loudest. The campaign is preparing the ground for the AfD's inclusion in future governments.

In a commentary on ARD's Tagesthemen news programme, Jörg Thadeusz, a presenter at the Berlin-Brandenburg public broadcaster RBB, called on the SPD and Greens to stop attending commemorations of the liberation of Auschwitz "if representatives of their parties in Berlin ally themselves with this Left Party." He accused the Left Party's "representatives of hate" of spreading an "anti-Jewish sound" and put them on a par with neo-Nazis. The lessons of German history, he said, applied not only to the AfD but also to "dark-red antisemites."

Chancellor Friedrich Merz claimed that Berlin had been experiencing "an increasingly radical, openly expressed antisemitism for some months." He said he very much hoped that the SPD and Greens in Berlin would give a "very clear answer" to this. Bavarian State Premier Markus Söder of the Christian Social Union (CSU) even threatened to cut the payments Berlin receives from wealthier states under Germany's revenue-sharing system if Eralp became Mayor of the capital.

Ulf Poschardt, one of the most influential journalists at the Springer publishing house, warned of a "return of the GDR [East Germany] with Arab Islamofascists on board." That, he said, was more dangerous than Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. He described Green voters as "hobbyless, dishonourable, godless Berlin-Mitte morons" who were now getting their comeuppance in the form of an alliance with the Left Party.

Thorsten Alsleben, managing director of the Institute for a

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New Social Market Economy, accused young Berlin women of having voted for the caliphate, declaring, “Burqa instead of bare midriffs.”

In the Bundestag, AfD deputy Gottfried Curio declared that the Berlin state election had been “the first clearly ethnic election in Germany,” since more than 50 percent of Muslim voters had voted for the Left Party. Beatrix von Storch, also of the AfD, added, “Never since the war has a party used hatred of Jews to mobilise voters as the Left Party has in Berlin.”

Green deputy Irene Mihalic sang from the same hymn sheet. She accused the Left Party of accepting hatred of Israel and antisemitism and of poisoning the political culture in the country.

The pretext for the campaign is the fact that some Berlin Left Party politicians condemn the Israeli genocide in Gaza and campaign for Palestinian rights. Ahmed Abed, its candidate for district mayor in Neukölln, where the Left Party received 32 percent of the vote, and Bundestag deputy Ferat Koçak in particular have come under fire.

The lawyer Abed, who among other things represents the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign in court, has Palestinian roots and has lost family members in Gaza. He is accused of having called the mayor of Neukölln’s Israeli twin town, a member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, a “genocidal murderer.”

Koçak, who was the first Left Party politician to win a direct Bundestag mandate outside the former GDR and has Kurdish-Alevi roots, has been the target of neo-Nazi attacks. He is now accused of alleged links to “clan crime.”

Issa Remmo, regarded as the head of the Remmo clan, an extended family from Lebanon several of whose members have committed criminal offences, turned up at the Left Party’s election party in Neukölln. However, Remmo has never been convicted of any crime, and the Left Party says it did not invite him and immediately sent him away. The accusations against Koçak are therefore based on suspicions, not on proven facts.

It speaks to the right-wing character of the Left Party that its own leading representatives immediately joined the chorus against Koçak. Former Bundestag vice-president Petra Pau wrote on X that she could no longer believe his naivety and that he should finally take responsibility. In an Instagram video, Thuringia state parliament deputy Katharina König-Preuss called on Koçak to resign his Bundestag seat. Eva von Angern, the Left Party parliamentary group leader in the Saxony-Anhalt state parliament, shared the video. Koçak has since suspended his mandate.

In contrast to Pau and other leading representatives of the Left Party, 150 Jewish people from Berlin have opposed the smear campaign in an open letter. They explicitly reject the portrayal of the Left Party as a danger to Jews and advocate a coalition of the Left Party, Greens and SPD.

Signatories include numerous prominent figures: the writer Eva Menasse, the author and commentator Deborah Feldman, the musician Peaches (Merrill Nisker), the director of the Potsdam Einstein Forum, Susan Neiman, and others.

While Koçak’s alleged links to clan crime are pure speculation, a clan of a quite different kind was meeting in the nearby Springer building. Springer CEO Matthias Döpfner presented the “Axel Springer Award” there to Peter Thiel, the tech billionaire and backer of Donald Trump and JD Vance, to honour his contribution “to the resilience of democracies.” Thiel’s company Palantir supplies intelligence agencies and security forces around the world with surveillance software that undermines every democratic right.

Thiel accused the German media of having “degenerated into a kind of left-wing hate factory.” He praised Döpfner, saying that without people like him the situation would be “really very, very bad.” Döpfner and Thiel have long had close business ties and invest together in armaments projects. Döpfner’s son Moritz was chief of staff at the investment firm Thiel Capital.

Also in the audience was CSU leader Markus Söder, who is positioning himself as a possible successor to the beleaguered Chancellor Friedrich Merz.

The episode shows how closely the interests of the financial oligarchy, the attacks on democratic rights and the strengthening of the AfD are intertwined. Confronted with a crisis to which it has no answer other than war and dictatorship, the ruling class in all capitalist countries is moving to the right.

The Left Party, although the target of the latest smear campaign, does not resist this development. On the contrary, it uses left-wing phrases to contain the growing opposition to war and genocide while itself moving ever further to the right. Elif Eralp’s role model, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, is now working closely with the fascist US President Trump.

Only an independent socialist movement of the international working class, fighting against war and capitalism, can stop the attacks on democratic rights.

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