Leading German news weekly *Der Spiegel* attacks Die Linke / Left Party

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Six weeks after Berlin's state election, the campaign against the formation of a Senate (state executive) led by Die Linke (Left Party) has reached a new peak. Although Die Linke clearly won the election, leading media outlets and politicians will stoop to any dirty manoeuvre, slander or lie to prevent the result from being implemented.

The campaign is aimed less at Die Linke and its candidate for Mayor, Elif Eralp, than at the predominantly young voters who surprisingly gave the party more than a quarter of the vote and a lead of 7 percentage points over the second-placed Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which previously headed the Senate. They tied their vote to hopes of affordable housing, to rejection of the federal government's policy of war and drastic social cuts and to resistance to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

In its previous spells in the Berlin Senate, Die Linke has already proved that it will fulfill none of these hopes. It is prepared to impose the most brutal austerity measures whenever the interests of capital require them. Eralp herself has spent a large part of the past six weeks fighting opponents of the genocide against the Palestinians within her own ranks and driving them out of the party and its parliamentary group.

But that is not enough for the ruling elites. They want guarantees that Eralp will withstand political pressure from below—or else they will keep the election loser, the hated CDU, in power. Together with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, the CDU would have a narrow majority of two seats.

That is the background to the latest cover story in Germany's leading news weekly *Der Spiegel*, headlined "Elif Eralp's fears." In its sensationalist presentation, the magazine accuses Die Linke's lead candidate of being afraid of "terror sympathisers" within her own ranks.

The article is based on a breach of trust. *Der Spiegel* had interviewed Eralp and, as is customary among German media outlets, sent the edited text to her press spokesman for authorisation. But instead of the authorised text, what came back—whether by mistake or through a deliberate leak—were internal comments by Eralp and her staff that were not intended for the public.

Among other things, Eralp expressed security concerns for herself and her family if she named certain people in the party's orbit. The security authorities had advised her "not to pin political problems on individuals in public statements, especially if their alleged links to organised crime or terrorist organisations have been reported in the media," Eralp's spokesman later explained to *Der Spiegel*.

Der Spiegel decided to make the confidential documents public anyway. It cobbled together an amalgam that indiscriminately mixed political terror, organised crime and antisemitism. It painted the picture of a capital in which "the security authorities are only just managing to get the situation under control," in which "there are neighbourhoods, streets and milieus where the state has to fight for control. Where rules of their own apply and the German rule of law counts for little."

Eralp is not up to the task of restoring order in this Babylon—That is the message of *Der Spiegel*, which other media eagerly picked up and further dramatised and embellished.

"Elif Eralp wants to become Mayor of Berlin," said *Der Spiegel* Editor-in-Chief Dirk Kurbjuweit in justifying the publication of the confidential documents. "She wants to be responsible for the capital of this country, for the safety of 3.9 million people. This politician is afraid of terrorist sympathisers, of people who have ties to parts of her party. … As human as that is, in some roles one must not allow oneself to be intimidated, one must overcome one's fear. In Eralp's case, doubts are justified as to whether she is capable of doing so. … In the end, Berlin's security ranks above the security of a Mayor."

Der Spiegel's accusations rest on insinuations, slander and unproven claims by the far-right Verfassungsschutz (domestic intelligence agency). According to *Der Spiegel*, the alleged "terrorist sympathiser" whose name Eralp is afraid to mention is Ibrahim Ibrahim, a German citizen of Palestinian origin. Ibrahim is not a terrorist and has threatened neither politicians nor their families. He has registered several pro-Palestinian demonstrations with the authorities and spoken at them. He himself firmly rejected the accusation of supporting terrorism in the daily newspaper *Junge Welt*. In 2019 he stood in the European elections on the list of the Maoist Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD). Although he is now 70 years old,

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he has never been convicted of a criminal offence.

Nevertheless, Ibrahim is being treated like a terrorist and a criminal. Security circles accuse him of expressing sympathies for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which took part in the attack on Israel in October 2023. The German government classifies it as a terrorist organisation. In numerous other parts of the world—such as Russia, China and many developing countries—the PFLP, by contrast, is recognised as a secular political party and a legitimate member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). PFLP representatives were elected to the West Bank parliament in 2006, at the last regular election.

Eralp herself has repeatedly made clear that she supports the campaign against alleged antisemitism and alleged "terrorist sympathisers." In the exploratory paper agreed with the SPD and the Greens as the basis for Senate coalition negotiations, she has already committed herself to strengthening "the police and the Verfassungsschutz in their mission to protect Jewish life in Berlin."

For years this campaign has served Germany's security authorities as a pretext to undermine democratic rights and persecute political opposition. Demonstrations against the Gaza genocide are routinely attacked and banned by the police, and activists intimidated with arrest, raids on their homes, professional bans and deportation. The legal aid association 3ezwa e. V. estimates that some 12,000 criminal proceedings are underway as a result and that the costs they will incur over the next four years will total €12 million to €14 million.

The aim of these repressive measures is to suppress any opposition to the federal government's policy of war and cuts. It supports Israel's army and intelligence service despite—or because of—their war crimes: the targeted assassination of political opponents, the killing and starvation of Gaza's civilian population, and the illegal war against Iran, in which the country's leadership was deliberately assassinated. The reason for this is not the supposed "protection of Jewish life" but the pursuit of Germany's own imperialist interests in the region. Any criticism of this policy is met with state repression.

This repression is taking on ever more hysterical forms because opposition to war and social cuts is growing across Europe. The youth protests in France have triggered panic in Germany's ruling circles. Although hundreds of thousands have demonstrated peacefully, the media reports almost exclusively on looting and riots—while systematically ignoring the brutal actions of the police.

In Germany, where protests against social cuts, dilapidated schools, rising living costs and the reintroduction of conscription took place in many cities on Saturday, the government, police and media began an intimidation campaign days beforehand. In Berlin, the Young Union, the CDU youth organisation, even appealed to the Bundeswehr (armed forces) for "administrative assistance," demanding, "The planned 'student' protests must be prevented." How rotten must a party be whose youth wing calls for the army to be deployed against people their own age before they have even set foot on the street?

The fears of the rich and powerful were articulated most clearly by the mouthpiece of the Swiss banks—the German edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Its editor-in-chief Eric Gujer put workers demanding decent pensions and social spending on a par with young people looting shops. Both, he said, were criminals.

"What happens when the legal order legitimises negative behaviour? Things can be entirely legal and yet harm society," he writes. "The 'casseur' ['vandal'] looting shops belongs to a criminal minority. They face rapid justice. … But when the majority of law-abiding citizens plunder the public coffers, it is called the welfare state and is completely legitimate."

That is the view of a defender of a state that made 200 billion Swiss francs ($242bn) available to rescue the country's second-largest bank, Credit Suisse, from collapse, creating UBS, a banking monster at whose mercy the country now stands, for better or worse. In the eyes of these parasites, social spending, education and decent wages are theft from the rich.

The smear campaign against Die Linke and Elif Eralp in Berlin must be rejected. It is directed against all those who oppose the rightward shift of official politics. But the defence of democratic rights and social gains and the fight against war must not be left to Die Linke. It only spouts left-wing phrases in order to contain and suppress the growing opposition.

In the exploratory paper with the SPD and the Greens, it has long since committed itself to austerity and stepping up the repressive powers of the state. In this, it is no different from its role models of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain or Mamdani in New York, who met Trump as mayor-elect.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) wrote in its manifesto for the Berlin state election, "The decisive task is to give the class struggles—which are international in their very nature—an international form and a socialist perspective that rejects the logic of capitalist exploitation. This requires a political struggle against all defenders of capitalism—and the building of a new revolutionary workers' party."

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