

Leading members of the Socialist Alternative Group join German Left Party

By Lucas Adler and Peter Schwarz
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For two years leading members of the German Socialist Alternative group (SAV)—a petit bourgeois “left” group affiliated with the Militant Tendency in Britain—have unsuccessfully sought to join the Left Party. At the end of August, however, they were allowed in and leading figures such as Lucy Redler, Sascha Stanicic and Holger Dröge are now full members of the Left Party.

The Left Party, which was formed by ex-members of the Stalinist ruling party in East Germany and disaffected Social Democratic Party (SPD) leaders, is a crucial component of the German capitalist state. In Berlin, where the Left Party has shared power with the SPD for nearly a decade, it has imposed a brutal program of welfare cuts and other austerity measures on behalf of the banks and big business.

Two years ago SAV spokeswoman Lucy Redler announced in a press release her intention to join the Left Party and advised her supporters to follow suit. Most of the SAV members were admitted to the Left Party without difficulty but the deputy chairman of the party at that time, Klaus Ernst, blocked the admission of Redler and a number of other leading SAV figures.

In January 2009, their case was discussed in the state commission of the Left Party and in May 2009 by its federal arbitration commission. Both bodies decided in favor of Ernst and for the continued exclusion of the SAV leaders. The latter group made a new application for membership earlier this year and was accepted into the party, despite the fact that Ernst had moved on to take over the leadership of the Left Party.

The main point of contention between Left Party and the SAV was the decision by the latter to stand its own candidates in the Berlin Senate elections held in 2006. At that time the Electoral Alternative organization (WASG), in which the SAV exerted considerable influence, stood its own list of candidates against the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)—the successor to the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which ruled the East Germany until 1990. This was despite the fact that both the WASG and PDS had stood joint candidates in the federal election a year previously and were on the verge of fusing together to form the Left Party. The leading candidate of the WASG in the Berlin election was SAV member Lucy Redler.

The WASG declared it was standing independent candidates in Berlin to oppose the collaboration of the PDS in the Berlin state administration. The PDS had shared power in Berlin in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party since 1992 and had participated in the implementation of ruthless social cuts. The SAV was fearful that the policies of the PDS in Berlin could discredit the newly planned Left Party. It decided upon a manoeuvre: while the organization supported the establishment of the Left Party on a federal level, it posed in Berlin as an apparent left alternative to the PDS.

Following the foundation of the Left Party, the SAV in Berlin allowed a certain amount of time to go by before also scampering into the new party. In April 2007 the Berlin SAV set up a grouping called the Berlin Alternative for Solidarity and Resistance (BASG) only to join the Left

Party one and a half years later.

Justifying their entry into the Left Party, Redler, Stanicic and Dröge stated, “We entered the party because we are convinced that the Left Party will play an important role in showing a socialist way forward and politically strengthen the resistance to the German government and employers in the course of the deepest capitalist crisis in decades.”

There has not been the slightest change in the policy of the Left Party since the Senate elections in Berlin in 2006. The party continues to share power in the capital city and impose harsh austerity policies. In addition the Left Party is backing an SPD-Green state government in North Rhine Westphalia and at a federal level is feverishly seeking to establish a future coalition government with the SPD and the Greens. The claim that such a government could assist in “showing a socialist way forward”—in particular based on the experience of the militarist and pro-business SPD-Green coalition, which governed Germany between 1998-2005—is a complete fraud.

In an interview with the Internet site Linke Zeitung in the summer 2009 Stanicic was somewhat more circumspect. He admitted that, “the forces in favor of the implementation of welfare cuts and anti-worker policies in the Berlin Senate and for further government participation with the pro-capitalist SPD... dominate in the apparatus, the parliamentary groups and the leadership of the Left”.

But, he continued, the Left Party is “a contradictory party”. There are “many thousands of members and millions of voters who see the party as a chance to articulate at a political level the interests of wage earners and the socially disadvantaged.” Disputes about the programmatic and organizational basis of building a socialist workers movement take place above all in the Left Party and its milieu, according to Stanicic.

This attempt to justify his organization’s support for the Left Party on the basis of the alleged illusions of “millions of voters” is neither new nor original. It belongs to the standard repertoire of opportunism.

If millions of workers had illusions in the Left Party the task of Marxists would be to oppose these illusions instead of adapting to them. Genuine Marxist parties—such as the Bolsheviks, the German Spartakusbund or the Fourth International—developed in an irreconcilable political and theoretical struggle against the centrist parties of their time. It is the obligation of Marxists to tell workers the truth—even if this clashes with existing illusions.

But the SAV is not a Marxist party. Instead it represents an upper middle class social layer that is entirely hostile to the working class. It functions as an appendage of the trade union, Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies and aids them in their efforts to block the emergence of genuine socialist and internationalist party of the German working class.

Stanicic’s claim that millions of workers support the Left Party is pure fantasy. Many of those who vote for the party and a large majority of its members support the Left Party precisely because it is an instrument to suppress the class conflict. This is clear from even a brief look at not only

its political practice, but also its social composition, history and political objectives.

The Left Party is based on an affluent petit bourgeois layer, which is chiefly made up of former SED, SPD and trade union officials, as well as “left” petit bourgeois organizations, which for decades were active on the periphery of these bureaucracies. Its leadership consists of tried and trusted bureaucrats, who have proven their reliability in the highest offices of state, party and the trade unions.

The origins of this social layer lay in the expansion of social reformism and the welfare state during the post-World War II boom. In West Germany these layers were centered in the trade unions and the SPD, which suffocated the class struggle via a system of “social partnership” and “co-determination”. In East Germany they were assembled in the Stalinist ruling party, the SED, which ruthlessly suppressed any political struggles by the working class and maintained stability through a series of social concessions within the framework of the nationally autarchic German Democratic Republic.

The globalization of the 1980s undermined the methods of social reconciliation and the response of these parties was a pronounced turn to the right. The SED paved the way for the restoration of capitalism and the reunification of Germany. According to Hans Modrow, the last SED prime minister and the current chairman of the Council of Elders of the Left Party, unification on the basis of capitalist conditions “was inevitably necessary and had to be carried out with determination”. In West Germany the SPD and the trade unions dismantled the social reforms carried out in the 1960s and 1970s and supported the anti-welfare Agenda 2010 policy of the SPD-Green coalition led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

The policies enriched the bourgeoisie and an upper-middle class stratum of former Stalinists, social democratic and trade union bureaucrats, academics and others who benefited from the attacks on the jobs and living standards of the working class.

During this time millions of workers turned their backs on the trade unions and the SPD, with the SPD losing approximately half of its members and a large part of its voters. Under these conditions, the possibility emerged for the growth of a genuine socialist movement of the working class. The Left Party was founded precisely to stymie such a development.

Programmatically, the Left Party is a bourgeois party fully committed to capitalist private property, the market economy and capitalist state. Its “socialism” does not go beyond the demand for social reforms, such as those carried out by the SPD in the era of Willy Brandt. However, with capitalism facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression none of these reforms have been implemented. This has been proven every time the Left Party has come into government.

The Left Party is now trying to disguise its right-wing politics with a “left” cover. That is the reason why various wings—even so-called Trotskyists—are tolerated within the party. The SAV takes this as evidence that the Left Party is a “socialist, democratic, pluralistic and open party”. In reality, the leadership around Klaus Ernst and Gesine Löttsch needs such “left wing” poster boys (and girls) to preserve the fiction that the Left Party constitutes an alternative to the SPD.

The SAV is providing the Left Party with precisely such a cover. It praises the Left Party as a socialist force, and is actively involved in its construction. As early as September 2008, Lucy Redler told the *Junge Welt* newspaper she would join the Left Party in order “to build a strong anti-capitalist party, one that focuses on extra-parliamentary movements, and for which the struggle for socialism is not a utopia, but a measure of its daily work”.

Behind this attitude is more than a grotesque miscalculation concerning the Left Party. A movement of the working class, which develops independently of the old bureaucracies, is thoroughly opposed by the SAV. Just as certain plants can only survive if they feed on a particular

host, so the SAV requires a bureaucratic apparatus in order to exist politically. The declining influence of this apparatus fills them with terror, and they will do everything to prevent the working class carrying through a complete rupture with it.

The international tendency the SAV is associated with—the Committee for a Workers International (CWI)—specializes in painting the most right-wing social democratic organizations in “progressive” and socialist colors.

The Italian section of the CWI, Contocorrente, has worked inside Rifondazione Comunista, which since its establishment in the early 1990s, coming to the aid of the bourgeois government during in every political crisis. In 2006, Rifondazione Comunista joined the Prodi government, whose rightwing politics then helped Silvio Berlusconi to a third term within the shortest time. The Greek section of the CWI, Xekinima, is part of SYRIZA, which plays a vital role shielding the Papandreou government against the working class.

The SAV itself was founded in 1973 as the Voran group, modeled on the British Militant Tendency. Until the mid-1990s, it worked within the SPD, trying to give it a left-wing cover. Only in 1993, when its British supporters were expelled from the Labour Party, did the SAV abandon its work in the SPD. However, it has preserved its basic orientation to the social democratic bureaucracy. In 2004, when high-ranking SPD and union officials created the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), the SAV immediately oriented towards this organization. Following the merger of the PDS and WASG and the formation of the Left Party, this became the focus of the SAV’s activities.

The SAV web site claims it stands “in the tradition of Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition, and the Fourth International he founded.” This claim is absurd. The focus of the programme of the Fourth International is the fight for the political independence of the working class from every political representative of the bourgeoisie, especially its pseudo-left variants.

As its founding document, the Transitional Program, stated in 1938, “The Fourth International, already today, is deservedly hated by the Stalinists, Social Democrats, bourgeois liberals and fascists. There is not and there cannot be a place for it in any of the People’s Fronts. It uncompromisingly gives battle to all political groupings tied to the apron-strings of the bourgeoisie. Its task: the abolition of capitalism’s domination. Its aim: socialism. Its method: the proletarian revolution.”

The SAV represents a diametrically opposing position. Under conditions where the Left Party—a product of the decay of the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracy—becomes increasingly discredited, the SAV hammers at its door, offering the Left Party a new political cover and the facilitating its further shift to the right. In next year’s elections to the Berlin Senate there will be no more reliable supporters of the rightwing politics of the Left Party than the SAV.

The SAV passed its first test at the end of September in Berlin. Outside Berlin City Hall, Lucy Redler chaired a rally against the austerity measures being imposed by the European governments. But the speakers at the rally did not utter a critical word about the Left Party or the unions. Instead, Left Party national executive member Ulrich Maurer was given a platform on which he was able to advocate co-operation with the SPD and the Greens. The boos from the audience that greeted Maurer showed how urgently the right-wing forces in the Left Party need the support of the SAV.

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