

The German Left Party after the elections

By Johannes Stern
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The Left Party has reacted to the result of the German federal election by intensifying its calls for a Social Democrat (SPD)-Left Party-Green government (a “red-red-green” coalition). It is signalling to the German ruling class its support for planned social cuts and a more aggressive foreign policy—either in a coalition government with the SPD and Greens, or as a loyal opposition in the German parliament (Bundestag).

In recent days, leading Left Party representatives have made clear in several interviews that the party’s social-reformist and pacifist slogans during the election campaign were merely empty phrases aimed at winning votes. In fact, the party advances right-wing, anti-worker policies.

On Monday the deputy leader of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, gave an interview to Zeit Online, lamenting that the SPD and the Greens were negotiating on a new government with the conservative parties (Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union, CDU-CSU), but not with the Left Party.

“I think that’s all very sad,” she said. “If the SPD took their own campaign even the slightest bit seriously, they could implement a series of their demands with us right after the constitution of the Bundestag.”

A brief recall of the election campaign of the SPD and its chancellor candidate, Peer Steinbrück, shows the reactionary character of this statement.

In its election campaign, the SPD repeatedly attacked the outgoing conservative government led by Angela Merkel from the right. Domestically, it accused the chancellor of not having the courage to impose on the German people the cuts Merkel has demanded in Greece and in Southern Europe. On foreign policy, the SPD criticized the Merkel government for its “inaction” in preparing a military strike against Syria.

After the elections, the German ruling class has made absolutely clear what it expects from the incoming

government—be it an alliance of the conservatives with the SPD, or with the Greens—an intensification of social cuts and an aggressive foreign policy. With its advances to the SPD and the Greens, the Left Party is confirming that it is ready to support such a course.

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on October 1, Stefan Liebich, who sits on the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee for the Left Party, declared: “We must work to ensure that a red-red-green coalition is not only arithmetically feasible, but also has a substantive basis. To this end the SPD and the Greens must abandon their taboos. And we need to work on our substantial positions.”

Liebich, who is known for his plain speaking about the policies of the Left Party, went on: “For many of us, foreign policy is a difficult field because each step is understood as opening a door ... should we pass through, then we can end up, like the SPD and Greens, agreeing to military deployments. I certainly understand this fear because the pressure is immense. Nevertheless, this should not mean that we just barricade the door and stay silent on issues we need to talk about. Fear is a bad counsellor.”

Liebich then pressed home his point. “If the United Nations negotiates a truce between two warring parties and both sides agree that this truce be protected by peacekeepers, Germany should not always say no. I insist that each case is examined in detail. What would we do in the case of a genocide such as that in Rwanda in 1994, which claimed a million lives? Just stand by and watch?”

Asked if “there was a need for further changes in the Left Party,” Liebich said: “What is true in foreign policy applies to all spheres of policy. We have admirable aims. But we must be clearer in enunciating how we achieve them.”

In other words, the Left Party is now willing to dismantle all programmatic obstacles that might stand

in the way of a federal-level coalition with other parties. During the campaign, the Left Party claimed it was opposed to foreign deployments by the German army and the anti-welfare Hartz IV laws, while calling for a €10 minimum wage. Now this is all to be junked.

In an interview with Zeit Online at the end of September, Left Party chairman Katja Kipping had already made clear: “We recognize that our hundred page manifesto could not be implemented in all respects.”

On the minimum wage, Kipping said: “Like the SPD and the Greens, we want to set a nationwide minimum wage. And it is important that it happen. The direction in which we are going is important, not how far we go ... we can talk about the exact amount” of the wage.

In another interview she made clear that the Left Party no longer calls for the abolition of the Hartz IV laws, but rather regards “the sanctions involved in the Hartz IV system” as “unworthy.”

This course is supported by the entire party. On Wednesday, Gregor Gysi was confirmed as party chairman by a party conference. Before the election, he campaigned vigorously for his party to be involved in a future government. In early August he indicated he would be prepared to take over the post of foreign minister in a red-red-green government.

In the state of Hesse, the Left Party, led by Janine Wissler (a member of the state-capitalist Marx 21 group) is also prepared to enter a red-red-green state government or tolerate an SPD-Green administration. Before exploratory talks on Tuesday, Wissler indicated that she would be prepared to accept the state’s constitutional “debt brake”, which imposes strict limits on budgetary spending and forces deep social cuts. In an interview with the *taz* newspaper, she said in late September that it would be difficult “to remove this from the constitution.”

Left Party politicians like Gysi have long ago found their place in the German political establishment, but this acceptance is now to be extended to pseudo-lefts such as Wissler. On the day of the exploratory talks between the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party in Hesse the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published a paean of praise to Wissler and the Hessian Left Party.

Under the heading “A thoroughly normal Left Party,” the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented: “Someone like Janine Wissler is appreciated by the competition in

Hesse. The other parties in the election campaign could have profited from the charm and clarity of the top candidate of the Hessian Left. While the others land up dogged in controversy, Wissler radiates fearlessness and authenticity, a sympathetic figure even for her opponents.”

For the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, an SPD-Left Party-Green government in Hesse could open up “new perspectives”. The Hesse Left Party had become “broadly normal”. What was abnormal was “the treatment of the party up to now.”

This comment is important in two respects. First, it shows that the ruling class has come to regard pseudo-left representatives such as Wissler for what they are: i.e. “normal” bourgeois politicians.

Second, a section of the ruling class increasingly favours drawing on the services of the Left Party to impose fresh social attacks and a more aggressive foreign policy against growing popular opposition. The advances made towards the SPD and Greens at both a state and federal level make clear that the Left Party will not let the ruling elite down.

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