

Germany's Left Party joins hands with far-right Alternative for Germany

By Peter Schwarz
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When the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Free Democrats (FDP) united with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) February 5 to elect a minister president in the German federal state of Thuringia, it triggered a wave of outrage around the world. Protests erupted across Germany against joining hands with a party that trivialises Hitler, stokes racism, and has neo-Nazis in its ranks. The minister president elected with the AfD's support, Thomas Kemmerich, was forced to resign, and after long and drawn-out negotiations behind the scenes, an agreement was reached to elect the Left Party's Bodo Ramelow at the head of a minority government.

Yet just two days after his election, it was Ramelow's turn to extend a hand of cooperation to the right-wing extremists. With his vote, he helped ensure that the AfD secured one of the vice president positions in Thuringia's state parliament. AfD deputy Michael Kaufmann was elected with 45 votes from a total of 89. The deciding vote was cast by Ramelow, as he later announced on Twitter. In justifying his vote, Ramelow said that he had taken "a very principled decision to use my vote to clear the way for the parliamentary participation to which every parliamentary party must have a right."

Anyone familiar with German history knows very well what this means. The Nazis systematically used their "parliamentary participation" to take power and establish their terror regime. It was in Thuringia in January 1930 where the NSDAP participated for the first time in a state government. This served as a trial run for the "legal taking of power" throughout Germany with the assistance of liberal and bourgeois parties.

The fascist character of the AfD is shown particularly clearly in Thuringia. The party is led there by the frontman of the Volkish-nationalist "Faction" Björn Höcke, who has close ties to the "New Right" and militant neo-Nazis and who, according to a court ruling, can be described as a "fascist."

Höcke aggressively advocates historical revisionist, racist and anti-Semitic positions. He trivialises the Nazi regime,

has demanded a 180-degree turn in Germany's policy of remembrance and described the Holocaust monument in Berlin as "a monument of shame." On September 1, 2018, Höcke called for an anti-immigrant parade in Chemnitz, which he led with Pegida founder Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the right-wing extremist Identitarian Movement Martin Sellner and representatives of banned right-wing extremist organisations. On the sidelines of the rally, participants targeted immigrants and attacked a Jewish restaurant.

Ramelow's open embrace of this far-right, fascist mob even compelled his own party to distance itself somewhat from his actions. The leader of the Left Party in Thuringia, Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, wrote on Twitter that she advocated another position, noting, "No vote for the AfD." But she has no doubt that she and Ramelow "stand together with our views on anti-fascism," she added. The acting federal executive of the Left Party also declared Ramelow's behaviour to be "wrong."

This is nothing but a transparent attempt to cover their tracks. Ramelow's support for the AfD was neither a misstep nor an individual decision; rather it arises directly out of the Left Party's political and social orientation. Regardless of its name, the Left Party is a bourgeois party committed to the defence of capitalism by all means necessary—including alliances with the AfD.

It is by no means the first time that the Left Party and its international co-thinkers have marched in lockstep with the far-right.

In Greece, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras, who was hailed at a series of meetings by the Left Party as an example to be followed, governed in a coalition for four years with the ultra-nationalist Independent Greeks (Anel). He needed the right-wing extremists to impose the devastating austerity measures demanded by the European Union and international banks on the working class. Tsipras now supports the policies of his conservative successor, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who is brutally cracking down on desperate refugees on the Greek-Turkish border with live ammunition,

tear gas and fascist thugs. None of this has been deemed by the Left Party to necessitate an ending of its close cooperation with Tsipras.

The same nationalist positions exist within the Left Party. The long-standing leader of the Left Party in the federal parliament, Sahra Wagenknecht, was repeatedly praised by the AfD for her anti-immigrant positions. Wagenknecht spoke out over the weekend to support the violent sealing of the Greek border to refugees. Opening the borders would not provide any solution, she stated on television and on her YouTube channel. Tentative proposals by the Greens to accept a handful of refugees were “trite” and “dishonest.” In a manner typical of the AfD, Wagenknecht added that a repetition of the “total loss of control as in 2015” could not be permitted.

Ramelow is proud of the fact that during his time in government, Thuringia had one of the highest deportation rates among the German federal states. Like other Left Party members in state governments in eastern Germany and in the Berlin state senate, he slavishly follows the prescriptions of the grand coalition, not only on the issue of refugees, but also on social spending cuts and the maintenance of the debt brake in the state’s budget.

Since losing the election on February 5, Ramelow has done everything to roll out the red carpet for the AfD. He was less shocked about the CDU and FDP’s pact with the right-wing extremists than he was over the mass upsurge of popular opposition it triggered. Since then, every step he has taken has been calculated to suppress and demoralise this opposition.

Although large sections of Thuringia’s CDU sympathise with the AfD, he offered the CDU the opportunity to head a transitional government, and rejected holding immediate new elections, which would have been disastrous for the CDU. After the CDU refused to abandon its policy of rejecting all cooperation with the Left Party, Ramelow agreed to be elected minister president on the basis of a “stability pact” that gives the CDU—and indirectly the AfD—a veto right on all of his government’s policies.

Ramelow repeatedly justified this by stressing that the defence of the existing order and the state is more important than political interests: “First the state, then the party, and only then the individual.” He thus stands in the tradition of right-wing Social Democrats, like Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Nosske, who during the November Revolution in 1918 allied with the German army and far-right Freikorps to suppress working-class opposition to the bourgeois order.

He is also embracing the tradition of Stalinism, from which the Left Party emerged. From France and Spain in the 1930s, to Chile in 1973, Stalinism paved the way for numerous right-wing dictatorships by suppressing all

revolutionary struggles of the working class in the name of forming alliances with so-called “democratic” parties. The other element in this “people’s front” policy was the Moscow Trials and the Great Terror, which claimed the lives of almost the entire leadership of Lenin’s Bolsheviks, tens of thousands of Trotskyists and hundreds of thousands of revolutionary workers, intellectuals and artists.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) has long warned that the AfD is being consciously promoted and built up by the ruling class so as to impose their policies of militarism and social spending cuts in the face of widespread public opposition. As Christoph Vandreier, the deputy leader of the SGP, demonstrated in detail in his book *Why Are They Back?* the rise of the AfD “cannot be comprehended without analysing the role of the government, the state apparatus, the political parties, the media and the ideologues at the universities.” He continued: “If the ruling elite’s conspiracy in 1933 was based on an existing fascist movement, today the opposite is true. The rise of the AfD is the product of such a conspiracy.”

Ramelow’s support for the AfD underscores that the Left Party is part of this conspiracy. It views every mobilisation against militarism, fascism and capitalism with hostility and seeks to divert it into a hopeless dead end. The Left Party is striving to be accepted by the other parties as a partner in government also on the federal level and has, at most, tactical differences with them—the AfD included.

The WSWS warned in a February 14 Perspective that the Left Party responded to the Thuringia election with “another cowardly shift to the right. It is not only courting the CDU, but also indicating that it is prepared to collaborate with the AfD.” This has now been confirmed. The only political party and tendency consistently fighting the rise of the AfD and militarism in Germany and internationally is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and the International Committee of Fourth International.

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