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German election: The Left Party pledges its allegiance to the ruling class

By Peter Schwarz

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The focus of the Left Party's campaign in the September federal election is to stress its reliability for the German ruling class and the indispensable role it can play in implementing the next round of social attacks. In recent days, leading members of the party have inundated the Social Democratic Party with offers to participate in a future federal government led by the SPD's lead candidate, Peer Steinbrück.

Left Party chairperson Katja Kipping told the *Abendzeitung* in Munich: "The SPD must decide whether they want a change of policy or end up ensuring that Angela Merkel remains Chancellor." Kipping and her co-chair, Bernd Riexinger, had "signalled from the beginning: We are interested in talks about a left-wing government."

Kipping then named a handful of vague minimal demands, such as the introduction of a minimum wage, on which the Left Party wants to negotiate before entering a government. She stressed: "These are not utopias. We have not said we demand the abolition of capitalism."

The lead candidate of the Left Party, Gregor Gysi, was even more explicit. He told the *Bild am Sonntag* there is “a large overlapping” between the SPD and Left Party. “The SPD can best implement its election program with us”, he said. “Without us, the SPD will never fill the post of Chancellor,” he told the paper. “Talks [on a joint government] will not fail because of us.”

For anyone familiar with German politics during the last 15 years, the message is clear: the Left Party is offering the SPD and the Greens a blank check to support their right-wing policies.

The SPD and the Greens have played the main role in attacking social benefits and worker's rights, while strengthening the state apparatus and intensifying German participation in war since the assumption to power of the SPD-Green coalition led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Joschka Fischer (the Greens) 15 years ago.

As finance minister in the first Merkel government (2005-2009) the SPD's lead candidate, Peer Steinbrück, was responsible for handing over hundreds of billions of euros to ailing banks—money which is now being recouped through drastic social cuts.

Over the last four years, the Merkel government has profited from the huge low-wage sector and declining social benefits created by SPD-Green policy. At the same time, she ruthlessly transferred the burden of the euro crisis to the populations of Greece, Spain, Portugal and other southern and eastern European countries—with the full support of the SPD and the Greens.

It is an open secret that, due to the on-going financial and economic crisis, another round of social attacks is on the agenda after the election - irrespective of whether Merkel, Steinbrück or someone else heads the government. It is to this end that the Left Party offers the ruling class its support.

The minimal demands the party raises on its election placards - a minimum wage, a minimum pension, a wealth tax, no to intervention in wars - are mere fig leaves aimed at disguising its anti-worker policies. Wherever the Left Party or its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism, participated in state governments - in Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and currently in Brandenburg - it carried out policies diametrically opposed to its current election propaganda.

The State of Berlin, which the Left Party governed in 2002 - 2011 in coalition with the SPD, played a pioneer role in the nationwide attack on jobs and wages in the public sector and in cuts in social spending. Asked about this in an interview with the *Deutschlandfunk* radio station, Gysi complained in his typically cynical manner that it was “meanness” that the Left Party always received electoral support where poverty prevails. “I would also like to govern a wealthy state,” he said.

The Left Party has made it clear that it does not want to limit its role to merely tolerating a SPD-Green coalition government, as it did from 2010 to 2012 in North Rhine-Westphalia. It hopes to fill ministerial posts.

“You’re either in government or in opposition,” Gysi told the German television station, ZDF. According to a report in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the executive committee of the Left Party plans to adopt a resolution at its meeting on August 17-18, explicitly excluding toleration at a federal level in favor of direct participation in government.

In *Bild am Sonntag*, Gysi even raised the possibility that he assume the post of future German foreign minister. Gysi is aware that this is not an immediate prospect. The SPD only recently publicly rejected any intention to form a coalition with the Left Party after the election. But Gysi does not rule out such a promotion for the future.

What is more important is the political message Gysi sends with this proposal. It recalls the appointment of Green Party leader Joschka Fischer as foreign minister 15 years ago. At that time, no one imagined that the former street fighter, high school dropout and taxi driver would be given the prestigious ministerial office, previously only occupied by tried and highly educated members of the ruling elite.

Fischer's appointment symbolized the complete integration of the 1968 protest generation into the bourgeois state and the final transformation of the Greens into a right-wing, pro-imperialist party. Fischer's inauguration was directly bound up with Green Party support for the German Army's first-ever post-World War II participation in an imperialist war, the bombing of Serbia by NATO.

Another founding member of the Greens, who had switched to the SPD, interior minister Otto Schily, was responsible for the biggest build up of the state security apparatus since the founding of the Federal Republic.

By offering his services as a future foreign minister, Gysi is signalling that the Left Party is ready to play a similar role to that of the Greens - but under conditions of a far more severe economic crisis and more profound social and international tensions.

The leaders of the Left Party are well aware that the coming period will be marked by sharp class conflicts. In a recent article in the party's paper, *Neues Deutschland*, the chairman of the Left Party in Lower Saxony, Manfred Sohn wrote: "Not only individual symptoms, but also a closer examination shows that this system is approaching breaking point in the decades ahead due to its own inner limitations."

Sohn cites the former chief economist of the European Central Bank, Jürgen Stark, who declared: “I believe the crisis will come to a head in late autumn. We are entering a new phase of crisis management.”

The Left Party is not only willing to support the SPD’s reactionary Agenda 2020 in this “new phase of crisis management”. It is also offering its services to forcibly suppress resistance to social cuts and fight wars in the interests of German imperialism.

The Left Party is preparing to play a counterrevolutionary role in the most literal sense of the word, as it spells out on its first large format election poster displayed all over the country. It emblazons the word “Revolution?” and a question mark in huge letters. Below the small, but very clear reply is “No”.

In fact social revolution is the only means for millions of workers to break the stranglehold of a small financial elite over social life today. Without it not a single social problem can be solved. The Left Party categorically rejects such a revolution and will do all that is necessary to suppress it - that is the central message of their election poster.

Its stance recalls the statement by former SPD chairman Friedrich Ebert: “I hate revolution like sin.” As German Chancellor Ebert, together with his party colleague Gustav Noske, then bloodily crushed the uprisings of workers who rose up against capitalism following the slaughter of the First World War.

The only party participating in the election with a socialist program enabling the working class to fight against capitalism is the Socialist Equality Party, PSG. In the course of its campaign the PSG will conduct an implacable political struggle against the Left Party and the numerous pseudo-left groups active within and around it.