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Germany's Left party intensifies campaign for government coalition with Social Democrats and Greens

Just over two weeks before the federal elections, the question of who will form the next German federal government remains wide open. Three parties could potentially name the Chancellor, the Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Greens. They are all almost equally hated by the population and, according to the latest Forsa opinion poll of September 7, enjoy the support of just 25 percent (SPD), 19 percent (CDU/CSU) and 17 percent (Greens) of voters. If these levels of support remain, a three-party coalition would be necessary to form a government majority.



Wissler and Bartsch

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All parties are at least officially ruling out an alliance with the right-wing extremist AfD (Alternative for Germany), which has the support of 11 percent of voters, and the CDU/CSU and the Left Party have also declared that they do not want to form a coalition with one another. In addition to alliances including the liberal FDP (13 percent), the option of a so-called red-red-green coalition is increasingly being discussed. Even though the Left Party is hovering around 6 and 7 percent in the polls, such a coalition is possible according to current forecasts.

Under these conditions, the Left Party, which has been looking for a government alliance with the SPD and the Greens since the beginning of the election campaign, is aggressively promoting a red-red-green alliance. On Monday, the two top candidates, the co-chairman Janine Wissler and parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch, presented a so-called “immediate program” of the party, which had the character of a handout to the SPD and the Greens.

At the press conference in Berlin, Bartsch and Wissler made repeated advances to the SPD and Greens, calling on their leadership to finally form a coalition with the Left Party at the federal level. This would allegedly enable the coalition to carry out a “progressive change in policy.”

“If you take your own program and your own campaign seriously, then the SPD and the Greens should actually make it relatively clear that this cannot be implemented with the FDP and the CDU/CSU,” explained Wissler. A “traffic light,” i.e., an alliance of the SPD, Greens and FDP, was “ultimately a major electoral fraud,” added Bartsch. There will be “no minimum wage, no higher taxation of the super-rich and no basic child security.”

Who do Bartsch and Wissler think they are kidding? The claim that the pro-austerity, pro-war SPD and Greens would pursue a fundamentally different policy with the Left Party than in an alliance with the FDP and/or CDU is an obvious fraud. Everyone knows that a red-red-green coalition would not be a “progressive” or even “left” alternative, but would continue and intensify the reactionary course of the grand coalition just as aggressively as any other possible governing coalition.

A look at the top candidates from the SPD and the Greens and their election campaign shows that. Olaf Scholz, the lead candidate for the SPD and current Finance Minister, is an

architect of billions in gifts to large corporations and banks, and a massive program of rearmament over the past few years. At almost every appearance he boasts that the military budget has grown to over 50 billion euros on his watch and vows to continue on this course as Chancellor.

The Greens' chancellor candidate Annalena Baerbock is even more aggressive than her opponents on foreign policy issues. At every opportunity, she calls for more aggressive action against Russia and China as well as a strengthening of NATO, the development of a European army and higher defense spending. In the last three-way debate, she accused the grand coalition of "dodging" international responsibilities and advocated a "more active German foreign policy."

The closer the elections get, the more openly the Left Party swings behind a pro-war policy. Already at the end of August, the Left Party supported an international deployment of the armed forces, officially described as the "deployment of German armed forces for the military evacuation from Afghanistan." At the press conference, Bartsch praised the unity of his party on this issue. "Not a single member of the Left Party parliamentary group said in any way that we don't want to save people. In fact, the opposite is the case. We were committed in a special way and remain so now."

Significantly, in contrast to earlier programmatic documents, the Left Party's "immediate program" no longer contains a rejection of NATO, referring instead merely to "military missions abroad." That is a clear signal. As part of a government, the Left Party would fully support NATO and German militarism.

At the press conference, Bartsch made it clear that possible coalition negotiations with the SPD and the Greens would by no means fail because of the NATO issue. It is "nonsense to claim that the Left Party will only start talks after we have left NATO." To be honest, he could "no longer bear to hear that. Everyone knows that we naturally go into talks and then we are still in NATO."

Wissler struck a similar tone. When asked by a press representative whether she wanted to "abolish" the armed forces, she replied in no uncertain terms, "We don't have that in our program." Her party's demand is "not to abolish the armed forces."

Even in domestic politics, election campaign phrases cannot hide the fact that the Left Party pursues the same anti-social and anti-working class policies as all other parties in parliament. In Bremen, Thuringia and Berlin, the Left Party is already ruling in coalitions with the SPD and the Greens. These governments have cut spending on education and health, ruthlessly deported refugees, strengthened the repressive state apparatus and supported the mass infection of the population during the pandemic.

Significantly, there is not a single word in the Left Party's emergency program about measures to combat the deadly coronavirus, which has already claimed more than 92,000 lives in Germany alone. That is not surprising. Last March, the Left Party voted in parliament for the billion dollar "coronavirus emergency bailouts," which benefited the banks and large corporations in particular. Since then, the Left Party has been pushing the policy of easing restrictions wherever it is in government, forcing teachers and students back into schools under unsafe conditions in order to squeeze the huge sums of money out of the population.

During the press conference, Wissler and Bartsch repeatedly made it clear that the already limited social promises of their "immediate program"—including a minimum wage of 13 euros and a nationwide rent cap—are not even worth the paper on which they are written.

"All of these are points where we say we can negotiate," Bartsch clarified. In his opinion, the basic child protection model of the Left Party is "the best, but of course we can talk about how it can be done differently." It is the same "with many other points," he added. With the minimum wage, "twelve euros would also be okay." He added cynically, "If we get ten percent of the vote, we won't get one hundred percent of our program."

The longer the press conference lasted, the more openly Wissler and Bartsch presented their party as what it is at its core: a right-wing bourgeois party that has long worked closely with the federal government and represents the interests of German capitalism and the economy on all central issues.

"Talks with the SPD's candidate for chancellor are held at comparatively short intervals," Bartsch said in front of the assembled capital city press. "It would also be strange not to talk to the finance minister comparatively often." Scholz is also regularly "at the

parliamentary executive committee of the Left Party” and of course there is “a direct line” with him. The same applies to Annalena Baerbock and the Greens.

“Wherever the Left Party has appointed the Senator for Economic Affairs or the Minister, as in Berlin, you can ask industry and the aristocracy whether that was so terrible. The opposite is the case,” he boasted. The Left Party is “good for Germany as a business location” and strengthens it. He noted, “Whenever I am somewhere where business representatives are, I cannot say that there is not a significant positive response.”

Indeed, influential sections of the ruling class see a red-red-green coalition as an option to push through the next round of massive attacks with the help of the unions against the growing resistance of the working class.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* describes “the new immediate program of the Left Party for a red-red-green government under Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz” as an enrichment for “the babbling federal election campaign.” One question is, “which political consequences the coming—socially, fiscal and economic—politically very unforgiving legislative period will bring about.”

Then the mouthpiece of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange stated: “It’s not just cynics who say: In case of doubt, social cuts can be implemented better and more credibly by left-wing governments—see the red-green agenda reforms from 2003 to 2005.”

This must be understood as a warning. Red-red-green is not a supposed “lesser evil” compared to government alliances with nominally right-wing parties. This is also underscored by countless international experiences over recent years. In Greece, the sister party of the Left Party, Syriza, formed a coalition with the far-right Independent Greeks (ANEL) from 2015 to 2019 in order to enforce the brutal austerity dictate of the Troika against the enormous opposition of the population.

In Germany, too, the Left Party has long been making pacts with the CDU and even the AfD at the state and local level. With Sahra Wagenknecht, the party has a figure in its ranks who is celebrated in right-wing extremist circles for her nationalism and her xenophobic tirades.

The fight against militarism, fascism, rearmament, social cuts, war, climate change and the pandemic policy of mass infection and death requires the development of a revolutionary movement of the working class against capitalism and all its political representatives. It is precisely this goal that the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting for in the federal elections on the basis of an international socialist program.

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