



Austria: After the Ibiza video

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With the publication of the "Ibiza Video" a week before the EU elections, Austria was plunged into what may be the worst government crisis in the history of the Second Republic. That does not, however, mean a definitive end to the current governing coalition between the conservative Austrian People's Party, ÖVP, and the extreme right populist Freedom Party, FPÖ, mainly because there is no well thought-out strategy of left-wing resistance. Revolutionaries and leftists now need to combine people's justified discontent at the corruption of the Vice-Chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache and Johann Gudenus, the FPÖ's Deputy Leader, with criticism of the entire corrupt capitalist system and a fight against all the reactionary measures of their government.

First and foremost, the corruption of the FPÖ, its closeness to the richest capitalists, which the left has been writing and speaking about for years, is now public knowledge. But the scandal has also given a flash of insight into the corrupt character of the whole political and economic system. Tax cuts for donations, anti-worker reforms in return for media support, scandals over construction contracts, advertising scams and so on - all this affects not only the FPÖ but all the bourgeois parties. This has shown that, in a capitalist democracy, not all votes have the same value. This can be the starting point in the fight for a socialist alternative. That, however, is still a long way off and the opponents of the coalition's plots and policies will need a sharp analysis and a class struggle strategy to achieve it.

The Video

On Friday, May 17, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Spiegel published video clips in which Strache and Gudenus give an alleged Russian investor insights into the corrupt plans and financial systems of their party. Specifically, they make a proposal that the woman should take over Austria's largest daily newspaper, the Kronen-Zeitung, dismiss unreliable journalists and provide election campaign support to the FPÖ. In addition, she should donate money to the party through front organisations, as some Austrian capitalists allegedly do. Strache speaks of sums of 500,000 to 2 million euros. In return, the supposed niece of an oligarch would receive lucrative government contracts for road construction, which would currently go to STRABAG (in which a supporter of the liberal NEOS, Hans-Peter Haselsteiner, is involved). A privatisation of the Austrian water supply, which the FPÖ officially opposes, is also offered. In summary, Strache and Gudenus drop the mask of the "cosy domestic party" in the excerpt and speak plainly about their business-friendly and client-oriented programme.

Balance sheet

A detailed assessment of the events is of limited use at the present time, when revelations and parliamentary manoeuvres are changing all the time. However, some aspects of the last few days are crucial.

Most obvious is the political problem for the FPÖ, whose leadership has shown how it makes policies for capitalists at the expense of the working population. In addition, there are shocking details such as the planned coordination of the media landscape and the awarding of government contracts to political supporters.

What is certain is that Strache makes clear which capitalists have given powerful financial support for the right-wing restructuring of the republic. With Heidi Horten, René Benko and the gambling group Novomatic, he names donors who were thought to be more closely connected to the ÖVP. This indiscretion will make him unacceptable as a person for important parts of the ruling class (at least for some time).

Kurz's reaction was long in coming, probably because he would have liked to continue the coalition. Finally, Kurz and

Herbert Kickl, the FPÖ Minister of the Interior, broke up the coalition mutually and step by step. The Federal Chancellor demanded the resignation of Kickl and the FPÖ replied by withdrawing from the coalition. The ÖVP is now trying to go onto the offensive with an election campaign that emphasises the "successful coalition project". A new edition of the coalition, which will complete the remaining planned reforms (tax cuts for the rich, smashing of the social security system, attacks on the Workers' Chamber), is therefore anything but out of the question.

In his campaign, Kurz is trying to distract from the parallels between the Ibiza video and his own politics. So far, an ÖVP supporter (René Benko) not an FPÖ-related oligarch, has bought the Kronen-Zeitung. Large donations from industry, hotels and construction firms went to the People's Party, and Kurz presented the political and economic gifts; the 60 hour week, 12 hour day, lower penalties for social dumping, for example, as his achievements.

Neither the NEOS, who voluntarily voted with the government on these political crimes, nor the SPÖ, seem averse to the idea of playing the servant for the next government. Both parties call for stability, that is, the stabilisation of Kurz, while at the same time keeping open the possibility of a motion of censure. That would lead to the resignation of the Chancellor and the formation of a new government.

The SPÖ's hesitant stance shows its willingness for a political compromise. Instead of sharpening the political debate with the ÖVP government, it is artificially depoliticised. Instead of attacking the brutal enforcement of Austrian capital's interests against workers and refugees, the SPÖ chairman, Rendi-Wagner, offers the prospect of a technocratic "government of experts". At the same time, the SPÖ leadership openly refuses to vote against Kurz by a motion of censure. With this "state-supporting" option, the SPÖ wants to keep open a possible role as a junior partner in a coalition with the ÖVP after the elections!

Any toleration of an ÖVP government, and especially the undemocratic charade of a technocratic expert government, must be clearly rejected. The SPÖ should bring down the Chancellor with a vote of no confidence.

Perspective

The euphoria after Strache's resignation will not last. The right-wing majority in Austria has not been broken and, above all, there has been no collapse of the ÖVP and there are apparently willing supporters of Kurz's chancellorship to be found in three parties (FPÖ, SPÖ and NEOS). A "Grand Coalition" would not reverse the reactionary measures already introduced but could even deepen them under the pretext of moderating some of the worst features.

The political crisis is also a crisis of the existing parliamentary balance of power. One of the strategic tasks now is to give the right answer with regard to the new elections. Many voters see this as central to solving the current chaos. A successful candidacy to the left of the SPÖ is unlikely, such forces are poorly rooted and could at most achieve a PR success in the election campaign with vague left-wing social democratic concepts (see KPÖ-plus).

Regardless of this, the central task of the forces on the left of the SPÖ is to promote the division in social democracy between the complacent leadership and the increasingly dissatisfied grassroots members. Carrying concrete, class-struggle demands into the Social Democratic election campaign and focussing the arguments where most progressive Austrian workers still orient themselves will be a decisive step towards rooting revolutionary ideas in the working class.

Tasks

The government crisis has not been brought about by left-wing resistance on the streets, by parliamentary opposition, or by party-political exposure. This is important for the current situation for two reasons. Firstly, there is no evidence that the widespread and justified anger has turned into support for the opposition parties or rejection of the Coalition's policies. Secondly, the strength of the left has not improved overnight either. Turning the current crisis into an offensive against the political setbacks of recent years will be very difficult, but it is possible.

A central problem here is the campaign style of the SPÖ in the EU parliamentary elections. Even in the face of blatant disagreements in the party, the call for unity in the election campaign traditionally acts as a reliable tranquiliser for left-wing and militant parts of the SPÖ. A political turnaround can only succeed if a strong movement for class struggle,

instead of "social partnership", takes up the cause. At the same time, anti-capitalists and extra-parliamentary leftists must succeed in building an alliance with the progressive and militant parts of social democracy and trade unions. Many of these "red activists" also do not want a toothless election campaign or to play a role as passive agents.

The recent united front of Thursday demonstrators, social democrats and extra-parliamentary leftists at the rally on Ballhausplatz is a positive approach in this direction.

Strategy

We therefore propose a united front to all activists who want to fight against either an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition or a Grand Coalition from the left, around the following demands, which must be addressed in particular to social democracy: Disclose all political donations to investigate the extent of clientele politics in capitalist politics. Likewise, disclosure of the accounts of corporations and banks to representatives of the workers' movement.

Withdrawal of all the current coalition's anti-social and racist measures - 12-hour day, social assistance, destruction of savings, deportation regime, etc. - supported by mobilisations on the streets and trade union struggle, up to and including the general strike. Instead of tax breaks for the rich, we demand property taxes and expropriation to finance a welfare state offensive.

Down with the ÖVP-led transitional government! The SPÖ must not tolerate such politics any longer. Critical support for social democratic minority government that makes the withdrawal of anti-worker and racist laws its task and enables the workers' movement to investigate the corruption.

Stop the social partnership policy, no to any government of social democracy together with FPÖ or ÖVP! Any new edition of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition must be answered by a class-struggle opposition.

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