



Austria: Facing a new version of Black and Blue?

Arbeiterinnenstandpunkt, Vienna, September, 2019 Sat, 28/09/2019 - 18:51

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In May of this year, the "Black and Blue project", so named after the colours of the Austrian conservative party, ÖVP, and the racist-populist "Freedom Party", FPÖ, was less than one and a half years old, but it was already over. After Vice Chancellor Strache had to resign because of the Ibiza Affair, the ÖVP refused to continue in government with Interior Minister Kickl and the government collapsed because the FPÖ insisted on keeping him. A few days later, Chancellor Kurz was overthrown by a vote of no confidence from SPÖ, FPÖ and the NOW List. Since then the country has been governed by an unelected cabinet of "experts".

During its brief existence, however, the black-blue government managed to carry out substantial attacks on the vast majority of the population. This began with the introduction of tuition fees for working students who do not complete their courses quickly enough, a tax bonus for high-income families, and attacks on the rights of asylum seekers. Soon after, probably the largest and most important "reform" of Black-Blue took place. The 12-hour day was hurried through parliament. For the first time, the government showed openly that it would not only attack one or the other oppressed part of society, but that it would also attack the entire working class. Together with the voices of the NEOS, the "Reform of Daily Maximum Working Hours" was adopted at the beginning of summer 2018. Although the ÖGB mobilised a powerful demonstration with more than 100,000 participants within a short period of time, the opposition from the ÖGB leaders was mainly based on the fact that they had not been invited to negotiations as in the past. Despite the undoubted potential and dynamism, no further action was taken. The treacherous role of the trade union leadership, which is oriented towards social partnership, was demonstrated once again.

With the 12-hour day, the Black-Blue attacks were by no means over. Even before the end of 2018, a reform of the social security system was decided, which, in addition to merging the insurance funds, also significantly shifted the weight in the decision-making bodies to the employers. The last major project was the reform of the minimum income support system, which did not bring any major savings, but, with its racist focus, made access more difficult for people without Austrian citizenship, especially for families with many children. Acting clearly in the interest of capital, alongside these attacks care was always taken to present the refugees and Muslims as popular enemies in order to preserve a popular basis for themselves. That still works very well today. The current polls show that the ÖVP and FPÖ together account for a similar percentage as in the 2017 elections, albeit with a slight shift towards the ÖVP.

All the same, in order to prepare for the likely attacks of the next government, it is important to look not only at the attacks carried out, but also at those which were not, because of the fall of the government. At the top of this list is the reform of unemployment benefits and emergency assistance. In the government programme, the declared goal was to merge them into a "new unemployment benefit". Above all the practically unlimited reference time of the emergency assistance was to be abolished, which would lead to a model like the German Hartz IV. This would mean that, after the end of the unemployment benefit period, which would be based on previous contributions, personal assets would have to be used up to a specified level before the minimum benefit could be drawn.

This project was also the one that had caused the most disagreements between the FPÖ and the ÖVP and which was probably scheduled for autumn/winter 2019/20. We can safely assume that it will be found in a new Black-Blue government programme. The trade unions must prepare now for this attack and develop counter-strategies in order not to be completely taken by surprise again as with the reform of the 12-hour day. There were also other attacks that could not be carried out, such as the introduction of tuition fees, a landlord-friendly tenancy law or the withdrawal of finances

from the Chamber of Labour.

All hunt Kurz

What the Ibiza affair has clearly shown is that the established parties, including those like the FPÖ, which like to pretend to be the "party of the little man", are not much more than corrupt outfits to pursue politics in the interests of the rich and powerful. The ÖVP has been put in a bad light by the donations affair surrounding the billionaire Heidi Horten, who Strache referred to as the FPÖ's donor in the Ibiza video. After the ÖVP donation lists were presented on various media, the ÖVP published its donors from 2018 and 2019. Unbeaten is Heidi Horten, who transferred € 49,000 (from € 50,000 it would have to be reported) to the ÖVP every month since the takeover by Kurz. In total, this amounted to almost 1 million euros. Other capitalists, such as Pierer or Ortner, also donated several hundred thousand euros.

In spite of all these apparently advantageous conditions, the SPÖ has so far found it difficult to gain ground in the election campaign at the expense of Chancellor Kurz. On the one hand, it clearly tries to denounce the politics of the rich of Kurz and Co but, at the same time, it finds it difficult to stand up for the interests of the workers in a really radical and aggressive way. That's hardly surprising, since it doesn't want to block its way into a government as a junior partner of the ÖVP. The FPÖ, on the other hand, is currently close to a split. Behind the scenes there are reportedly fierce disputes between the more radical wing around the German national fraternity and former interior minister Kickl on the one hand and the more moderate wing around party leader Hofer, who is fully oriented towards a continuation of the government with the ÖV, on the other. Strache is also currently trying to work on his comeback and is thus clearly on a confrontation course with Hofer.

The Greens are probably the party that will be able to make the most gains. However, this is not primarily their own achievement but mainly due to the international environmental issue. With Fridays for Future, there has been a strong environmental movement for several months now, which is dominated by the Greens in many countries and of course the Austrian party has benefited from this, as has already been shown in the EU elections. In this movement, however, the Greens play above all the role of a "realistic" alternative to the other parties, which only address environmental protection as a secondary issue. It is quite clear that with its policy of a green or social-ecological market economy it does not want to go beyond the borders of this system and in the end will not be able to really solve the problem of environmental destruction and climate change.

The Workers' Movement and the Elections

On the left of the Social Democrats and the Greens, "Change" and the Communist Party (this time as "Alternative lists, KPÖ PLUS, Linke und Unabhängige") will be standing throughout Austria. Both try to present themselves as an alternative with a more or less ambitious reform programme in these elections. Neither offer more than left-wing reformism without any significant base in the working class, it is rather a matter of bringing the programme of classical social democracy into the 21st century. A clear break with capitalism and a proletarian class standpoint are missing in both.

The SPÖ, still the dominant force in the unions and in the organised parts of the working class, brings little more than a tame programme of breaking with the black-blue coalition to these elections. Their programme does not even include repeal of all the counter-reforms of the last two years. Officially, of course, they hope to become, once again, the strongest force but, in the light of the polling results, the role of the junior partner under Sebastian Kurz is probably more realistic, not least in order to oust the FPÖ from the government. Nevertheless, many progressive workers, the unemployed and young people will vote for the SPÖ as the lesser evil and as a force against a new edition of Black-Blue.

It is therefore not enough for us just to point out the shortcomings of past SPÖ governments: To the austerity policy after the economic crisis, in which Faymann shifted the costs of the bank rescue onto the workers, to the racist border policy in the wake of the "refugee crisis" and to the social-partnership orientation of the social-democrat-dominated trade union leaders. The SPÖ is a bourgeois workers' party precisely because of this deeply bourgeois policy, structures and leadership but, at the same time, because of its close ties to the trade unions and the workers' movement. Its reformist, paralysing dominance remains the greatest obstacle to revolutionary politics in the workers' movement, which seeks a consistent break with the capitalists. Therefore, all honest and class-conscious leftists must find ways to separate the

workers' movement from reformism.

Interestingly, the role of the Socialist Youth in the party has been strengthened in recent months, with its leader, Julia Herr, running for 7th place on the federal list. As a self-proclaimed socialist, we must demand from her the consistent rejection of all policies against the interests of the working class, women, migrants and youth, and support for the mobilisation of the left and the workers' movement. From the SPÖ as a whole we demand the rejection of any coalition with the bourgeois parties and instead an orientation towards the extra-parliamentary resistance against the coming attacks of Kurz and Co. Especially to the left forces within the social democracy, who share such an approach, we offer our practical cooperation. In order to strengthen the struggle for such concerns, we will call for critical support for the SPÖ on 29 September. At the same time, we have to be clear that the real struggle will only begin after the elections and therefore the discussion about the practical resistance against the planned attacks needs to begin now in the workers' movement.

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