



# Austria: The LINKS campaign in Vienna city elections

Interview with Heidi Rieder, Neue Internationale 250, Berlin, October 2020 Tue, 06/10/2020 - 08:30

Interview with Heidi Rieder, Neue Internationale 250, Berlin, October 2020

The Arbeiter\*innenstandpunkt, the Austrian section of the League for the Fifth International, is calling for a vote for the LINKS list in the Vienna municipal elections. Individual comrades are standing on their list. Heidi Rieder is a candidate in Vienna Ottakring (16th district) and active in the Arbeiter\*innenstandpunkt.

New International (NI): What is the significance of the elections in Vienna in terms of national politics?

HR: Vienna is the largest and economically most important state in Austria. It has always been a thorn in the side of the conservative ÖVP, the current governing party, as the last significant stronghold of the social democratic party, SPÖ. Under Sebastian Kurz, this conflict has only intensified. But here it is not primarily because the SPÖ stands for radical, pro-working class radical policies. Rather, it is because one of the most important centres of power in the republic is outside the reach of the ÖVP.

That is why there are repeated conflicts between the Vienna provincial government and the federal government, whether it is the question of minimum income, the admission of children from the refugee camp on Moria or the Corona pandemic. During the last municipal elections in 2015, many people were very afraid that the FPÖ, the Right populist party, could pose a serious threat to the SPÖ. At that time, with over 30 percent in the polls, the FPÖ, was less than ten percentage points behind the SPÖ. This time, however, the FPÖ has split and the ÖVP is clearly behind the SPÖ in the polls so there is hardly any threat to the SPÖ's hold on the city government.

Essential for our work with LINKS is that it clearly distinguishes itself positively from the politics of the SPÖ. After all, it is not about how capitalism can be better or more humanely administered, the need is to abolish capitalism as such. At the same time, radical demands such as voting rights for all, the expropriation of vacant properties and taking the most environmentally harmful corporations (such as OMV) under the control of their employees, make it clear in which areas the SPÖ does not offer adequate answers.

NI: What are the central issues in the election campaign? What is the significance of the Covid-19 danger, crisis and racism? What role does the threat of mass redundancies and unemployment play?

HR: The pandemic situation is a central issue in the Vienna election campaign, as it is everywhere at present. Especially the ÖVP tries to use the massively increasing number of cases in Vienna during recent weeks to discredit the SPÖ. The other issues; economic crisis, unemployment and mass dismissals, however, tend to play a subordinate role. This has changed somewhat in recent weeks as a number of large companies have made mass redundancies, for example, 2,300 at MAN.

For the Greens, the current situation in Moria is a critical point. While they are trying to present themselves well at local level, they are tailing the ÖVP because they are in the national coalition government with them. This will certainly cost them some votes in Vienna. The issue of racism is brought to the fore primarily by the FPÖ, but also by Heinz-Christian Strache, the former leader of the FPÖ, who has changed the name of his group from Alternative for Austria to Team HC Strache. Anti-racist politics, on the other hand, are hardly present in the election campaign. Especially the SPÖ is trying to keep silent on this topic. It plays virtually no role in its election programme.

NI: What are the key policies of the openly bourgeois parties and the SPÖ? What is the position of the trades unions?

HR: The FPÖ, having been kicked out of the government again, just like the HC Strache team, has returned to its old tune of the "Social Homeland Party". In this, the racist idea of the "homeland" is much more pronounced than the "social" part. This can be seen on the deeply racist election posters, which in Germany could probably also be from the NPD. The ÖVP is relying mainly on a flashy media campaign, with content taking a back seat. For example, its election programme was published several weeks after all the other parties. Where there is content, it is either racist (the refusal to accept even a single person from Moria) or business friendly.

The Greens are caught in a quandary and try to distance themselves from the ÖVP in Vienna, at least rhetorically. But they have no real solutions for the problems of our time. It is similar with the SPÖ. They campaign more or less aggressively for a reduction in working hours, but the employees of the City of Vienna, for whom it would be very easy for them to implement this, have seen nothing of this.

NI: Why do you support LINKS in the election campaign? How do you characterise LINKS? Which political and programmatic orientation do you represent?

HR: What we need is a workers' party. In other words, a party that recognises the need to overthrow this system and which understands that the central force for this is the working class. Such a force does not exist in Austria at present. The SPÖ still has a relatively close connection to the working class through the trade unions - but as a bourgeois workers' party it has not represented their objective interest in overthrowing this system for a long time. It regularly betrays the workers. LINKS is not a workers' party. But it is a project that brings together a significant number of people in the Viennese Left. It is a project which, in contrast to the established parties, is still capable of development and also offers its members room for discussion and co-determination.

We, as ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt, can openly stand for our policies and work to ensure that the policies of LINKS go in the right direction. LINKS has the potential to develop into a workers' party if the right policies are pursued in the coming months. Another important factor is that LINKS as an organisation intends to remain active and activist even after the election and does not want to limit itself to working within various campaigns. With LINKS, a project with anti-capitalist aspirations that actually manages to reach people and gain influence is running for election. Therefore, we think it is necessary to cooperate and support this party in the elections. Within LINKS we try to initiate discussions and promote a clear class-conscious line.

NI: What is the importance of the election campaign in building a movement against crisis and racism? What steps do you propose to take to build it?

HR: I think that LINKS, if it does not lose momentum after the election, can be central to such a movement. Apart from its relatively wide reach, it is also able to unite people from different organisations and movements under one roof. This is extremely helpful for building an anti-crisis movement, because it makes it much easier to build a large anti-crisis alliance. It would be central for this movement to get the trade unions on board, at the moment, although LINKS has quite good contacts to different people in trade unions, the dominance of the SPÖ in this area is unbroken. However, as I said, the SPÖ is currently in opposition at the federal level and therefore its interest in keeping the trade unions on a short leash is much less pronounced than if it were in government itself.

Therefore, in order to build an anti-crisis movement, we need an alliance of workers' organisations and organisations of people who are oppressed, for example because of their origin, religion, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation or age. The struggle must be fought on the streets, but also in companies, schools and universities. Strike action is a central means of doing so. Finally, we must also recognise that this crisis is a global one and that the response must therefore be an international one. We therefore attach great importance to networking with anti-crisis alliances in other countries.

NI: Thank you very much for the interview. Good luck in the fight for an anti-crisis movement and a Workers' Party.