



Austria: Right wing coalition reveals its plans

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On December 18, Austria's new government, a coalition of the conservative People's Party, ÖVP, and the extremely right wing, Freedom Party, FPÖ, was inaugurated. Known in Austria as the "Black-Blue" government, from the parties' colours, it was already clear from the election campaign that such a government would be based on neoliberalism and racism. The new Chancellor, Sebastian Kurz of the ÖVP, and Vice-Chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache of the FPÖ, even chose to announce their agreed programme on the Kahlenberg Hill outside Vienna, where the (muslim) Turks were defeated in 1683.

??Economy??

The declared aim of the new government is to "strengthen the country as a location for business" because, they say, it has "lost the top spot in Europe". Although the economy has shown a small upturn recently, forecasts suggest this will not last beyond 2019 and many bosses believe it is "no longer competitive enough in comparison to neighbours". In addition, the risks concerning the global economy remain high and with them the danger of a recession.

When Kurz and Strache speak of "strengthening the country" what they mean is "improving" Austrian profitability by cutting business taxes, reducing social spending and dismantling protective legislation. Their aim is not just improved competitiveness but increased domination of Central and Eastern Europe.

??Relief - for some??

This "strengthening" is to be achieved primarily by tax cuts for companies, the rich and those on middle incomes. For the poorer population and the lower strata of the working class, the cuts will be proportionally much less, if there are any. Important measures are the reduction of corporation tax and of non-wage labour costs. The vast majority of the population will not only gain no benefit from these measures, but have to pay a larger share of the state budget as a result. To make the reduction of the overall tax rate more acceptable, Black-Blue proposes a reform of the income tax. Although it is not yet clear what shape it will take, talk of a "simplified" system could mean a cut in higher tax rates and a "flattening" of the tax bands so that the majority end up paying a greater proportion of the total.

??This "financial relief" will mean a decrease in government revenue, which will then be used to justify cuts in spending. In the medium term, the government wants a zero deficit and it plans to introduce a "balanced budget" amendment to the constitution. The new Minister of Finance wants to save a total of € 2.5 billion in all ministries in the first year. This means cuts in administration, personnel and subsidies. In all probability it will also mean a new, and worse, labour law for the public sector.??

Exploitation??

Central to the aim of "strengthening" the country is the deregulation of employment, health and safety laws and the reduction of the labour inspectorate from a supervisory body to a mere service institution. Maximum working hours are to be increased from 10 to 12 hours a day or 60 per week. For workers, this means more overtime, more often if their bosses demand it. Of course, 12 hour working is also an enormous mental and physical burden and will contribute to health hazards, including accidents at work.??

The unemployed, too, will face harsh attacks; the government is planning a "reform" of unemployment insurance. In the new system, the so-called "NEW Unemployment Benefit" will no longer be based solely on previous income, but also on the length of time over which contributions have been paid; the shorter that time is, the shorter the duration of

benefits.

In addition, emergency assistance, the last possible social security cash benefit, is to be abolished or "integrated" into the unemployment benefit. After a year of unemployment, you have to apply for guaranteed minimum income, but that is dependent on having no more than €4,000 in savings and only in certain circumstances may you even own a car. This means that the long term unemployed will be de facto expropriated.

These measures will have far-reaching consequences not only for the unemployed, but for the entire working class. People who cannot find a job in their own trade will be forced to take any job and accept bad working conditions. This pressure is all the greater for the poorer strata of the working class. At the same time, pressure on all workers will be increased, as they will be more easily replaceable despite unattractive working conditions and they will have to accept more restrictions to avoid dismissal. In summary, this measure aims to expand the low-wage sector in Austria.??

Youth??

The youth will also suffer under the Black-Blue government. Children from higher-income families will benefit from the "family bonus", a tax deduction not available for lower income groups. The selective school system, which was weakened by the New Middle School, is to be maintained and even strengthened again. One step in this process is compulsory grading in elementary schools to promote the idea of competitiveness and make a clearer distinction between "good" and "bad" pupils. Violations of educational law obligations are to be sanctioned by cutting or losing social benefits, which will primarily affect socially disadvantaged families. At the university, social selection is further aggravated by tuition fees and a "new access regulation management". In addition, Student Representation will probably be politically weakened.

Immigration

??It would not be a government of Kurz and Strache if it did not include an enormous deterioration in conditions for migrants, especially refugees. At the same time, where there is a demand for (qualified) manpower it should be easier for firms to recruit from abroad. So working in a new country is approved for a few people and the rest have to stay out. It will also be made even more difficult for the lucky few who have won the right to stay to also gain equal rights of citizenship.

Asylum seekers are treated worse than ever to discourage them from even entering the country. They will be deprived of their cash right at the beginning and only receive non-cash benefits. Also their cell phones must be made available, together with the private data stored on them, so that their identity and their route from their country of origin can be accessed.

Anyone who does receive an asylum entitlement but cannot find a job will in future only receive a further reduced guaranteed minimum income. This will not only degrade them to second-class people, but also force them into poverty and particularly unattractive jobs. The so-called integration is nothing more than forced ?adaptation? to the majority. This is done by linking financial services to German language and ?values? courses. At the same time, segregation from society is the actual result of these measures. Language courses will soon take place in the asylum hostels themselves and, instead of multilingual instruction or special promotion of German language skills in the classroom, German should be learned in your own time before attending normal classes, or in separate German classes, consisting solely of people whose German is ?not good enough?.

?Surveillance

??While the working class is going to be exploited more strongly than ever and the population is further divided into immigrants and foreigners, workers and unemployed and successful or unsuccessful young people in school, the state repressive apparatus is to be further expanded. There will not only be harsher sentences for sexual and violent offences, the latter of which, incidentally, is easily linkable to resistance to state violence, but new "aggravating circumstances" such as "religious fundamentalist motivated violence" are to be introduced.

The somewhat milder regulations governing punishment of young people under the age of 21 are to be dropped and

even in kindergarten children are to have the prevailing bourgeois ideology and authority drummed into them with a "commitment to the constitution, values and social order".

Another key project of the government is the expansion of electronic surveillance. Most likely, this will happen using the "Federal Trojan", a malicious software that can spy on smartphones. In addition, the government wants to relax laws on data retention, that is, the obligation of telecom companies to store data on suspected persons. In addition, the police will get 2,000 new recruits and the army will be strengthened.

??Conclusion??

With the Kurz-Strache government, we are dealing with a right-wing government that asserts the central concerns of the Austrian capitalist class against the interests of the working population. Resistance to this is urgently needed but there is no strong working class force at present. The Socialist Party, SPÖ, in opposition, together with the unions, prefers to oppose the attacks with words rather than actions. A strong alliance of leftist, progressive, anti-racist and union forces is therefore a necessary condition to fight this government.

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