

# Austrian General Election: Critical support for KPÖ PLUS!

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The National Council elections on 15 October mark a turning point for the Austrian capitalist class on the one hand and the working class on the other. If the current election polls are not completely wrong, the "new" Austrian People's Party, ÖVP, under Sebastian Kurz will emerge as the biggest party. In fact, there is nothing new about the party at all, but it has rebranded itself as new and young.

A continuation of the existing, but much weakened, "Grand Coalition" between the ÖVP and the Social Democratic Party, SPÖ, is virtually impossible and so a coalition between the ÖVP and the right wing Freedom Party, FPÖ, now looks inevitable. From the parties' colours, this is known as the "Black-Blue" coalition. The danger of such a government is not to be underestimated: a coalition of Kurz and Strache, the leader of the FPÖ, means cuts in welfare, even deeper racist divisions, the expansion of state surveillance and repression, and profound attacks on the achievements and institutions of the workers' movement.

## Black-Blue threat

The Austrian capitalist class has lost patience with the government of "social partnership", that is, the institutionalised class collaboration between the workers' movement, led by the Social Democrats, and the Austrian bourgeoisie. This is despite the efforts of the Social Democrats to strengthen Austrian business and industry as well as drastic measures against refugees such as the annual cap on the number of asylum applicants.

Since the global economic crisis, the SPÖ has aided big business by restraining the trade unions while the government shifted the cost of paying for the crisis onto the working class. Now, the rich and powerful are feeling relatively secure and want to "clean up", by improving the conditions of exploitation in Austria so that they can strengthen their position in the still precarious global economic situation. With Kurz in the leadership of the ÖVP, they feel the time has come to go on the offensive.

Typical of this mood amongst the capitalists is Stefan Pierer, boss of the motorcycle manufacturer KTM, with his much-publicised large-scale donation to the ÖVP and declaration as a fan of the Black-Blue regional government in Upper Austria. Kurz and Strache have already outlined their plans: they both want to lower taxation, Kurz by 14 billion euros, Strache by as much as 16 billion. This would not mean a bonus for workers' take home pay but, rather, immediate cuts in the social system.

The same is true of the objectives of a zero deficit and reduction of national debt to 60 percent of GDP. The imposition of austerity and the smashing of the welfare system for the working class, is also to be enforced by the adoption of a "balanced budget" amendment to the Austrian constitution. What is referred to as "appropriate harmonisation" between "workers" and "employees", two distinct categories in the

Austrian labour laws, will actually mean a 'levelling down' for employees who currently have more rights and better conditions than workers. A Black-Blue coalition will also implement the planned criminal law reform by Justice Minister Brandstetter to monitor Internet communications.

The racist, anti-Muslim course against refugees will be continued, if not exacerbated. Kurz wants asylum seekers excluded from the guaranteed minimum income 'because one should only get something if one has already paid into the Austrian social system'. The FPÖ talks of an equality of interests between workers and capitalists but, since they not only oppose a tax on wealth, inheritance and machinery but also want to halve the corporation tax, it is quite clear on whose side Strache really stands. Via tax separation, the FPÖ also wants to strengthen the bourgeois family structure and reintroduce the man as the undisputed patriarch.

Furthermore, it wants to abolish compulsory membership in the Austrian Chamber system, which provides a channel of separate representation for workers and capitalists, or, alternatively, reduce contributions, which would drain the financial resources of the Workers' Chamber. The list of reactionary 'reforms' could be easily extended, but it should be clear that Kurz and Strache form a menacing mixture of racism and social regression.

Is the SPÖ an alternative?

The onslaught to be expected from a Black-Blue coalition is recognised by many people who remember the first such government in 2000; privatisations, pension cuts, rearmament and corruption. The SPÖ at that time was pushed onto the opposition benches and only returned to government in 2007 but then, instead of breaking with the ÖVP and pursuing consistent politics in the interests of the working class, it committed one betrayal of the working class after another just to remain in power.

It has paralysed the trade unions and passed the costs of the crisis to the working class. It has participated in the right-wing onslaught in Austria and turned the Austrian working class against refugees. It even limited the freedom of assembly and advanced the surveillance state. Now, it is making improvement of Austrian business and industry one of its prime objectives, thereby subordinating the interests of the workers to those of the capitalists. At every stage, it has accommodated to the right wing parties and the capitalists, and weakened the workers' movement.

Although there are still many people who believe the promises made by Christian Kern, the SPÖ leader, the record of the party in office shows that it will not bring any improvements for the working class. In contrast to previous elections, there is hardly anyone who thinks the Social Democrats can prevent the right-wing FPÖ being part of the next government. In fact, in recent years, they have even moved towards a coalition government with the FPÖ themselves and have formed a regional coalition government with them in Burgenland.

Rather than fighting the FPÖ, some parts of the SPÖ are fostering the idea that it would be easier to implement progressive social reforms through a coalition with it. Worse still, the trade union wing hopes to preserve its position by accepting racist politics. In such a SPÖ-FPÖ coalition, the right wing in the party would be strengthened, and the social-chauvinist policy would be spread further into the working class. The SPÖ is therefore no alternative for the working class, a coalition with the FPÖ might prevent a Black-Blue government but it would be only a marginally lesser evil, and bought at far too high a price.

No green illusions

The Green Party is also no alternative to the Black-Blue threat. It is not a party that would organise or

mobilise the workers for their own interests. It is a capitalist, liberal party which might present itself as eco-friendly and with a left-wing attitude, but its different regional coalitions with the ÖVP, show that its objective is to be a viable partner for the wealthy and capitalists. Its uncritical hype of the imperialist European Union, which serves the corporations, the reduction of the guaranteed minimum income in Tyrol, and its concessions regarding Kurz's closure of the Balkan route for refugees, show its true face.

The exclusion of the Young Greens also shows that left criticism in the party is not tolerated. The open conflict, the resignation of the party leader Eva Glawischnig and the egoist split of Peter Pilz have pushed the party into a deep crisis from which it will not recover quickly. There is no reason to mourn this development. The working class needs a party with a clear class standpoint, which organises the workers for the class struggle and not another "left" party that limits itself exclusively to purely parliamentary politics. The same is true of the list of Peter Pilz, which does not even have a programme.

Critical support for KPÖ PLUS!

After the Young Greens split from the Green party, they moved further to the left. In June, the traditional left reformist Communist Party of Austria, KPÖ, announced that it would form an alliance with them called "KPÖ PLUS". This could be a significant development for the future of the Left in Austria. The Communist Party has not been represented in parliament for decades and is only influential in the working class in the region of Styria but the decision to form such an alliance, together with some independents, for the upcoming elections, could form a pole of attraction nationally.

It is for this reason that ArbeiterInnenStandpunkt, the Austrian section of the League for the Fifth International, will call for critical support for KPÖ PLUS. This is despite, rather than because of, its programme, which is entirely reformist, although we do welcome its open anti-racist stance, especially in comparison to the SPÖ in this election campaign.

We see in critical support for KPÖ PLUS the best starting point for the class struggle in the post-election period. This is primarily because of the opening up of the KPÖ to young forces moving to the left, such as the Young Greens, whose declared goal is to build a "new social force". Mirko Messner, the leading candidate of the Communist Party, has also called for the development of a "pole of social and cultural resistance to the left of the Social Democrats and the Greens who are loyal to the system". Whether the KPÖ and its new partners will actually be able to take some serious steps in this direction remains questionable but, at the present time, their initiative does offer possibilities.

We therefore call on the KPÖ PLUS to use the election campaign as a preparatory stage in the construction of a new left party, in which we would participate and which we would argue should be based on a revolutionary socialist programme. In addition, we are calling for Messner's "pole of resistance" to be seriously implemented in order to challenge the coming government on the streets, in the educational institutions and in the enterprises.

We propose the organisation of a conference of resistance against racism and cuts in social services as a starting point for a protest campaign against the new government. The conference must create a united front including, for example, Aufbruch, a left wing campaign and regroupment project, the antifascist alliance "Offensive gegen Rechts", leftist and anti-racist initiatives, social democrats and trade unionists. This should be based on an agreed political platform with common goals and joint actions to achieve them.

In comprehensive, open structures such as action committees, activists can discuss the necessities of our resistance, organise mobilisations and draw in new activists. This could develop a dynamic basis for a new

working class party. We also call upon all left and progressive activists to take up these proposals, to support them and to fight together with us for their implementation!

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