



Germany: Vote DIE LINKE, but organise the resistance!

Martin Suchanek Thu, 24/09/2009 - 19:57

Martin Suchanek



Martin Suchanek reports on the German elections where the economic crisis is the main issue of debate

After the elections, the cuts will come. Whether we will see a continuation of the Grand Coalition between the conservative CDU/CSU and the social-democratic SPD or a CDU/CSU-FDP-government, the ruling class will try to make the workers and the poor pay for the crisis of German capitalism.

Like in all other countries, the German government spent billions to bail out the banks ? €100 billion alone for the Bavarian investment bank Hypo Real Estate.

It resorted to rescuing the industrial monopolies ? or, in the case of OPEL, to take advantage of the situation to strike against a major symbol of US imperialism, General Motors.

It seems the German government has a lot of money to help failing banks and industries. So why are they, like nearly every other European government, talking about spending cuts in the public service?

What is to come?

The current paltry concessions to the trade unions, on issues like short time working, will not continue beyond the elections. The bosses are out for full scale cuts. And from their point of view they have to. Not only did GDP decline by about 5 per cent in the first quarter, exports collapsed even much more ? 28 per cent in the same period. Plan utilisation is down to 60 or 70 per cent in most industries. This certainly will not improve much, even if the economy ?grows? like in the second quarter of 2009 by 0.3 percent.

It is clear that a major attack on jobs is on the way, even if the GDP does show slight growth. IG Metall ? the large metal workers union ? estimates that about a quarter to one third of all manufacturing jobs might be slashed in a wave of ?restructuring? by German capital in the next one or two years.

Moreover, the state budget deficit will increase by at least €100 billion this year ? and this will have to be paid at some point. All the major, ?traditional? parties in parliaments, be it the traditional conservative mainstream CDU, the overt neo-liberals from the FDP, the not so overt Green neo-liberals or the ?social? cutters from the SPD agree that this can only be ?harsh measures?. This means cuts in the social services, health, education, pensions, unemployed benefits, a further wave of privatisations in the rail, post and public transport.

All this amounts to a generalised attack, compared to which the previous chancellor Schröders' Agenda 2010 can be described as only the opening shots.

A dull election campaign ? but?

This explains why the election campaign has been so dull this time. In 2005, the CDU thought it could win with a more ?honest?, i.e. overtly neo-liberal campaign. This time, only the FDP has this line ? and it now enjoys growing success in the polls, since it represents the urgent desire of a growing section of the ruling class, but also of the better off petit-

bourgeoisie and the middle strata to attack the workers, scrap the remains of social-partnership on a national, political level - and therefore break the strength of the organised working class and the labour bureaucracy.

All the bosses organisations in Germany favour a shift to a coalition of the open bourgeois parties and an end to the 'Grand Coalition' between the SPD and CDU.

This seems surprising at first sight, given the anti-working class policies carried out by the SPD over the last decade, coupled with the proven record of the trade union leaders to sell out or derail emerging resistance by their members against the social cuts. Surely this is the moment when the German capitalists want the workers representatives in parliament in order to suppress resistance?

But the bosses associations, along with the vast majority of the ruling class, have now turned against a system which includes a certain need of class collaboration with the unions or the main workers party, the SPD, along with the rounds of negotiations, bribery and time consuming legal requirements to get their plans through.

This framework ultimately reflects a balance of class forces and their institutionalisation steaming from the post war area. Whilst social and political weight coming from the post war area it has been weakened significantly ? the framework has not been destroyed altogether.

This ? we have identified as a strategic problem for the goals set by German imperialism which will have repercussions for several decade now. The world historic crisis and the sharpening of international competition, the need to overcome the crisis of the EU-project, the need to play a larger international role as an imperialist power in all spheres ? all this requires a strategic attack on the working class as a whole, including the labour aristocracy and even the political influence of the bureaucracy itself.

Time lost already

For all this, the ruling class favours a coalition of attack and class war. Whilst it might not get what it wants, even a re-elected Grand Coalition would not just be a repetition of what came before. It would be a quite different, more overtly anti-working class government, but it would be a more fragile one.

Why? Because eleven years in government have turned the SPD into a much weaker, smaller and crisis ridden party. It is prepared for further decline if it stays in government. But this has also led to significant weakening of its hold on the trade unions, where its monopoly as ?the? political force, which it established in 1953 in West Germany, has come under extreme challenge with the emergence of DIE LINKE ? a party which made real inroads into the trade union movement in the West. This reflects the political shift of the most conscious and political active workers away from the SPD and of a significant minority of the trade union and works council bureaucracy.

For all this, the bourgeoisie is quite aware that the SPDs capacity to contain unrest in the face of the massive attack his clearly declined. Moreover, the utter passivity and political emptiness of the trade union leaders has also encouraged the ruling class, to see the time ripe for a frontal attack.

The meaning of the votes for DIE LINKE

In this context, the working class and unemployed vote will turn to DIE LINKE. At the last general elections (where it campaigned as the PDS with support from the WASG), it scored 8.7 percent. It is almost certain that it will secure more than 10 per cent on 27th September, polls indicate a possible turn out of around 10 and 14 per cent on election day.

Whatever, the exact outcome of DIE LINKE will be, it will mean that there is an increasing section of the working class, who rejects the politics of the government, who wants to stand up against further attack and ? at the very least - defend jobs, wages, conditions, extension and improvement of public services, employment.

DIE LINKE is the only mass party in these elections standing against the attacks on the class and against the

occupation in Afghanistan. Even though it ultimately wants to rescue ? or ?regulate? ? capitalism rather than destroy it and replace it with a socialist system, a vote for DIE LINKE will be seen as a resounding 'NO' to the continuation of anti-working class policies. Therefore, the more workers, youth, unemployed that vote for it, the better.

Of course, this must not confuse us about what DIE LINKE is. In Berlin it has introduced neo-liberal policies whilst in local government just as any other party has. In Saarland, it is quite likely that it will do the same, if the Green Party supports the SPD/LINKE-coalition there.

It opposes the Afghan war on an pacifist basis, not on an anti-imperialist one. It does not side with the resistance, but presents the UN as an alternative to the US/NATO. The occupation troops having blue UN helmets will not improve the situation for Afghan civilians.

Moreover, whilst DIE LINKE has been involved in the anti-crisis-movement, one of its main roles has been to try and contain the movements actions and demands, acting as a more conservative break on the struggles.

This is also reflected by the fact that DIE LINKE is far from being an activist party like the NPA in France. In the unions or workplaces, it does not appeal to the rank and file, but puts sees the bureaucratic leaders as its ?partners? and those whom it wants to work in a friendly relationship..

All these factors explain why many of those who support DIE LINKE in the elections are not joining it, why the electoral successes in the West have not been matched by a similar increase in members. So it grew by 6,000 members since 2006, with around 75,000 members by the end of 2008 (when the last memberships figures were made available).

However, a massive turn to DIE LINKE in the elections reflects a real change of mood and consciousness of a mass, vanguard section of the class. Its result will be one (whilst certainly not the only) measure for a change of mood, consciousness and the balance of forces in the working class and society.

A strong vote for DIE LINKE can and must be used to strengthen the resistance. But how?

It would be a foolish self-delusion to expect that this will be done automatically. It can be done by demanding action from them in a common militant struggle with mass demonstrations, mass strike and occupations against the crisis. The larger the vote for DIE LINKE, the stronger the pressure for action can be made, since it makes it more difficult for the party-leadership to oppose action, arguing that the workers, or ?the population? would not be willing yet, claiming that the situation or the political mood is not ripe.

This is also needed, since the party?s strategy does not put action to the forefront, but instead prioritises the introduction of a set of ?reform policies?, ultimately carried out by an ?anti-neoliberal reform government?. Whilst it is unlikely in the extreme that this will be established nationally after the elections, it reflects that DIE LINKE has a false understanding of the crisis, its roots and what is needed to fight it.

For DIE LINKE, the crisis is not rooted in the capitalist system itself and does not pose the need to challenge the system. Instead they argue that it is caused by a false policy ? neo-liberalism. This, they claim, has to be stopped by the implementation of a different policy of the existing, bourgeois state. They want a return to state interventionist policies like in the 70s, which would re-distribute wealth and which shall encourage industrial production, rather than finance capital.

This policy failed in the 70s and early 80s. It would fail today as well, if it ever got a government formed trying to implement it. The crisis of capitalism cannot be reformed away.

For that matter, we argue to vote for DIE LINKE, to use the momentum of the elections to organise the resistance ? but at the same time, we warn against their strategy, since ultimately, the working class needs a revolutionary answer to the crisis of capitalism, not another social-democratic would-be cure to a doomed system.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/vote-die-linke-organise-resistance>