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Germany

General elections: Vote for Die Linke, but ...

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There will be once again elections for the Bundestag on 24 September. Have we only the possibility of choosing “which assassins will give us orders, what thieves will do over our pockets?” as Ton Steine Scherben sings? [1] If voting was for something, would not it be forbidden? Has that not already happened? On what criteria can a leftist know whether they should “make their small cross”, and if so, where?

In fact we should start from the most obvious: What is there in the programme of a party?

In mid-June, Die Linke held a congress on the electoral programme. There are a few curiosities to remember. For example, the decision not to demand the abolition of the concordat established with the two main Christian cults. This will not really encourage those who are fighting for the separation of the Churches and the state to vote for Die Linke.

But if not in this programme of more than a hundred pages, there are plenty of good and just demands. Unfortunately they remain vague: how to impose all these lovely demands, and more importantly, who will do it? Perhaps the famous “civil society”? In July, the International Civil Society Summit ([C20](#)) was only able to stroke the Mrs. Merkel’s feathers with these words: “The federal government is paying close attention to the demands of civil society.”

Or maybe even the good old “working class”? The views of some of the leaders of Die Linke give the impression, however, that anything that would resemble “classes” has disappeared. Or would it be enough, then, that “our people”, in parliaments and governments, should implement a skilful policy?

Many tend to give too much importance to (electoral) programmes. Anyone who characterizes a party by referring first to its programme can quickly make a serious mistake. This has always been the case.

The Gotha program of the SAPD (Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany, that was the name of the Social Democracy at that time) of 1875 was bad, and yet at that time August Bebel’s party was a real organization of class struggle. 16 years later the Erfurt program was better, more “Marxist”, and yet the SPD was already fully engaged on the path of “national union” with the ruling class.

Does the social composition of the members or voters of a party say more about it? Obviously - a “workers’ party” is better than a “party of pharmacists”. But this criterion should not be overemphasized. Currently in France the National Front of Marine Le Pen is, at least among the voters, the first “workers’ party”. And Rüttgers was right, after his election victory in 2005, to assert that the CDU was the “new workers’ party” in North Rhine-Westphalia. Conversely, in the last provincial elections in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, only 9% of the industrial workers voted for Die Linke.

Others, many too, say that the programme is only an empty shell – what counts is (governmental) action. There the picture is particularly bleak. Almost all the leading figures of almost all the left parties of almost all the time have sat on the principles of their party when one went to the serious things: power, money and privileges.

A particularly awful and overwhelming example was given only a week before Die Linke’s programme conference by its representatives in the Bundesrat of the Länder of Berlin, Brandenburg and Thuringia (where they are in government or lead). They voted for a change in the constitutional law that opens the door to the privatization of German motorways (among other things).

A real disaster, because to a very broad audience, Die Linke is associated above all with three axes: No social regression + no privatizations + no German participation in wars. An essential pillar of its political identity, one of those which differentiates Die Linke from all the other parties, has thus been severely damaged. Worse still: on the eve of the Bundestag, the MPs of Die Linke made fiery speeches and the parliamentary group voted unanimously against privatization.

In the eyes of the people (at least those who are still interested in politics) Die Linke dishonored itself like all the other parties of this unanimist black-red-green-yellow stew. On Sunday we preach against and on Monday we vote for. ISO is fighting alongside other truly anti-capitalist forces within Die Linke so that the programme and founding principles of the party are respected by everyone – and thus also by parliamentarians and ministers.

But perhaps this is only short-term reasoning, a prisoner of politics on a day-to-day basis, when in fact the fundamental character of a party is shown?

ISO considers itself a revolutionary organization. We want to contribute to the overthrow of capitalism and the bourgeois classes. This is not what Die Linke wants according to its own statements - but this should not be a reason not to vote for it.

Die Linke seeks to make capitalism more bearable and to push back the brutal neo-liberal “reforms” of the past 30-40 years. Marxists criticize this, not because they would not find it positive, but because they think that this strategy has little chance of success.

There will be no return to the “golden” period of social democracy of the 1970s. The compromise between the classes of yore was not abandoned by “those from below” but by “those at the top”, by “social democratic” leaders like Schröder and Blair. Moreover, we live in “non-revolutionary” times, and it would be almost a political miracle that Die Linke be revolutionary “as it should be”.

For small groups like us, a little modesty is becoming. It is not the ISO but Die Linke who gets up to 10% in the polls.

We are obviously always and everywhere against the neoliberal creed “TINA” (there is no alternative). So we have to take a look at the other possible anti-capitalist votes. DKP, MLPD and PSG [\[2\]](#) hardly reach the threshold where voters notice their existence, around 0.1%. This is not enough reason not to call for voting for them. What separates us from these parties is substantive differences. This type of candidate does not allow either the labour movement or the left in Germany to advance by a millimetre.

And why not a blank vote, or a boycott? In some historical situations, this may be a suitable means of expressing protest against the established order. Under the present conditions, the blank ballots will be considered by the bourgeois media as falling under the general “fed up with politics” and thus attributed to right-wing populists.

This brings us to a particularity of this election to the Bundestag and an important reason to vote for Die Linke on 24 September: the rise of the AfD (Alternative for Germany, extreme right). What a nasty joke: this anti-labour, anti-union, pro-capitalist formation, aggressively neoliberal to complete the picture, is supposed to be “the party that expresses the protest” of the exploited and excluded. Let us show that the protest, against this system which has only contempt for human beings, comes from the left and not from the right!

Electurally, this is only possible if Die Linke has as many deputies as possible in the next Bundestag – accordingly: voting Linke is a red card for the AfD and also for the other neoliberal parties, CDU / CSU (Christian Democratic

Union / Christian Social Union), SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), Grüne (The Greens) and FDP (Liberal Democratic Party)!

Naturally, a left-wing vote must not only be “useful”, it must as much as possible allow each and every one to express their fundamental positions. The scandal of the motorways mentioned above shows once again what the essential problem for Die Linke is to be in fact “two parties in one”. In the East, it is above all the party of those who “have made it”, who have found their place in united capitalist Germany. As soon as they are in government, they take their unscrupulous share in social restrictions and privatizations, and can hardly be differentiated from normal bourgeois parties. Hence the indifference and even the declared hatred of those who live with low wages and Hartz allowances. In the West, Die Linke is above all an honest reformist left-wing formation (not a small thing in today’s context). In some Länder there is a clearly influential anti-capitalist wing (as in North Rhine-Westphalia). Here Die Linke is rightly regarded as a defender of wage-earners and the “precarious”.

So what do we do now? Doubts about Die Linke’s ability to hold its positions if it engages in government coalitions (which can not be ruled out either in the Western Länder or at the federal level) are more than justified.

When we consider the overall political offer, we must retain what is not present anywhere else: there is no other party in Germany (at least none that has a chance of having deputies) who demands suppression of the Hartz IV law as well as the law enforcement apparatus and the right to a minimum income of 1050 €, without conditions.

Unrealistic? That is what we thought a few years ago when we were talking about minimum wages. The mere fact that Die Linke is represented in Parliament has helped make it a reality.

For these federal elections, ISO therefore also calls on and especially those who least support its focus on parliamentary institutions (in the East and West) to vote for Die Linke. It is time for the radical left in Germany to be honest with itself. For we do not know anyone, no matter how virulent their criticisms, who on the evening of the vote sat in front of their TV, jumping for joy in their chair at the announcement of bad results for Die Linke and running to the fridge to open a bottle of champagne. In other words, a defeat of Die Linke would also be a defeat for all the left, for the entire German working class and for the social movements.

It is rare that elections to bourgeois parliaments function like concerts where the public chooses the programme. For those who live in the East, for those whose stomach turns just imagining how participation in regional governments is going to lead to adaptation to the course of business, it is a matter of asking oneself as honestly as possible the question whether Die Linke not reaching the threshold of 5% of votes would be a good or a bad thing for the conditions of work and struggle of the left as a whole, the social movements, the trade unions.

Consequently: a cross for Die Linke, but above all, not to give up one’s own voice, because it will have to be heard!

The dull and grey “masters of the summits” [3] know that they have nothing to fear from some secretaries of state and ministers of the left, these ladies and gentlemen do not begin to agitate until we begin to take our own business in hand. Let us act by ourselves, organize ourselves in workplaces, high schools, universities, neighbourhoods ... Only if we get things to really move in these places will things really begin to change in the country.

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This article was first published on the ISO website: <http://intersoz.org/die-linke-waehlen-aber/>. Translated by IVP from the Inprecor translation to French from German by Gérard Torquet and Pierre Vandevoorde.

PS:

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[1] Alternative rock band of the years 1970-1980, still popular.

[2] The DKP (German Communist Party) is what remains of the former pro-GDR party of the west, the MLPD (Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany) a Mao-Stalinist party with a small presence in big companies , the PSG (Party for Social Equality, which changed its name in February 2017 to become Socialist Equality Party, SGP) a Trotskyist micro-group of "Healyist", very sectarian, origin.

[3] Referring to the meeting of the powerful at the recent G20 summit in Hamburg and similar conferences.