

Germany: First-ever Left Party state minister president

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The election of Bodo Ramelow to the post of state minister president in Thuringia is part of a deep-going political shift in Germany.

Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and less than a year after the announcement that the country's period of military restraint was over and that Germany would intervene militarily in conflict zones around the globe, the Left Party has taken over the leadership of an important state in a three-party coalition with the Social Democrats and Greens.

The decision was not taken in Erfurt, the state capital, but at the centre of political power in Berlin. The result of the state election, held in September, meant that a number of options were open regarding the new administration. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) had increased its support by more than 2 percent and emerged as the largest party with 33 percent. Together with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), it possessed exactly the same number of votes as the SPD, Greens and Left Party coalition.

Despite the fact that the SPD rules in a grand coalition with the CDU in Berlin, the SPD leadership in the party's headquarters decided on a different constellation in Thuringia. For its part, the CDU leadership made no effort to apply substantial pressure to prevent Chancellor Angela Merkel's party from being sent into opposition in the state, even after its election victory.

The reason for this is obvious: The Left Party's services are required. Even more so than before, the party is to be integrated into the programme of social attacks and the build-up of the military apparatus, in preparation for its participation in government at the federal level.

There are both domestic and foreign policy reasons behind this development.

Domestically, after 25 years of CDU rule in Thuringia, which has seen privatisations and major job losses for industrial workers, the Left Party is to implement drastic

cost savings under the guise of budget sustainability. In addition, the party must demonstrate its ability to cooperate closely with the state security and intelligence services, which in Thuringia in particular are dominated by a network of right-wing forces that had close ties to the far-right National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group.

The Left Party is also to be integrated further into foreign policy. The party is the only one in the German parliament whose predecessor originated in part of the Soviet bloc. The Left Party combines its critique of American militarism with praise for Germany's alleged commitment to peace, thereby playing an important role in the current re-emergence of German imperialist policy.

Left Party parliamentary fraction leader Gregor Gysi travelled in person to Erfurt last Friday to follow the election and congratulate Ramelow. He spoke of a "tremendous success," and revealingly added, "Now we're playing in the premier league. However I'm still not sure if everyone in my party knows what that means." The party had to be "more disciplined, and learn new virtues," Gysi explained.

Ramelow provided a foretaste of his government's policy in his first speech as state president. He utilised his acceptance speech "for the trust given to me" to explain two things. Firstly, he distanced himself unequivocally from the "rogue state of the GDR [East Germany]" and asserted that his government would devote its attention to "coming to terms with the rogue GDR." Secondly, he unreservedly praised the predecessor state governments led by the CDU. He explicitly thanked his predecessor, Christine Lieberknecht (CDU), who in her period in office had managed "to achieve new things."

The GDR was already described as a "dictatorship" and "rogue state" in the coalition agreement. Ramelow uses this expression in the same way as right-wing demagogues: as part of an anti-communist tirade. His

obsessive attacks on the GDR are not directed against the Stalinist suppression of the working class and the restrictions on democratic rights, but rather against the social concessions made by the bureaucracy in East Germany.

His attacks on the GDR come from the right. They focus on the high level of social equality that existed in the GDR due to the state control of key industries and limits imposed on personal enrichment.

Ramelow, a long-standing trade union bureaucrat, is a committed defender of the capitalist profit system. It would be difficult to surpass his servility and pronouncements of loyalty. Instead of blaming the ruling elite for the rapid decline in social conditions, rising unemployment and growing poverty, Ramelow reassured them that he was one of them and that his entire policy was aimed at achieving partnership and cooperation.

He presented his government with the motto, "reconciliation instead of division." The motto originated with former SPD federal president Johannes Rau, Ramelow said, and it had always impressed him deeply. He explained that this appeal for collaboration was not only directed towards his coalition partners, but also to the opposition.

The appeal for an all-party alliance is extremely revealing.

Both the attacks on social and democratic rights and the turn to militarism are deeply unpopular. At recent state elections, almost half of the electorate refused to participate, taking an explicitly hostile stance towards the entire political system.

In the face of this development, the ruling elite and its parties are closing ranks. They are circling their wagons against growing popular opposition. Ramelow's election in Thuringia makes clear that the Left Party is a key part of this conspiracy.



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