

'Die Linke needs to focus on its core topics, namely social justice and peace'

Jamshid Ahmadi talks to Left MP **SEVIM DAGDELEN** about the disastrous showing for the party in the German federal elections in September and what lessons can be drawn

THE results of the parliamentary elections in Germany in late September surprised many observers and political commentators. Were these results unexpected by the left forces in Germany, and by Die Linke in particular?

This drop is a brutal and bitter disappointment for the Left Party. Yet at the same time, the signs were there.

The neglect of social issues, social justice matters and a strong welfare state by the former party leadership over the past eight years lost us the trust of low- and average-income workers, the unemployed, and pensioners. We have to acknowledge the huge collapse in the social competence previously ascribed to us.

What were the main factors that helped the Social Democrats (SPD) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) at the polls and improved their share of the power in the German political system?

The election results reflect the progressive neoliberal zeitgeist. A majority of citizens voted for parties – the SPD, the Greens and the FDP – that may promise modernisation, but which in reality are going to exacerbate the social division between the super-rich few and the increasingly poor majority.

Here, the Left Party did not provide any discernable counter-force. Although the reasons for our defeat have deeper roots, the truth is that it was fatal to give the impression that the Left Party was willing to enter government unconditionally.

Instead of upholding our red lines, refusing to agree to the dismantling of the welfare state, refusing to consent to war, many within the party preferred to busy themselves putting together potential exploratory teams for coalition negotiations.

This was policy straight out of cloud cuckoo land – both the Greens and the SPD made it quite clear that they did not want to enter government with the Left Party. Yet nevertheless, the apparent need to run a faction-based campaign was felt.

There is no hiding from the fact that Die Linke and the left forces in Germany suffered a significant setback in this election. Was this due to attractive or pragmatic policies from the centre

right or were key mistakes made in the campaign and policies offered by Die Linke?

The "Stop Armin Laschet" campaign against the conservative (Christian Democratic Union) candidate for chancellor without any criticism of the challengers Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens) ultimately led to many of our voters opting for the SPD and the Greens directly, or joining the ranks of those who do not vote.

The deeper underlying causes, however, include a move away from workers and the unemployed that has been orchestrated over the past eight years.

The impression was given that the Left Party does not represent these groups' interests nor speak their language.

This development is absolutely fatal. We're paying the price for thinking that we could address issues increasingly in terms of identity politics instead of class.

This led to the impression being created among a large part of our core clientele that the party was neither talking their language nor representing their interests.

We were too concerned with ourselves, as evidenced by the attacks from within the party against our most popular politician, Sahra Wagenknecht.

This led to lofty debates being held. We need to listen more to people again instead of attempting to school them.

The Green Party has been successful in this election. Did they offer any radical policies regarding the climate crisis and increasing international tensions – especially by debating these issues as part of capitalism's political economy and Germany's role in global capitalism? And, what was Die Linke's position in the election campaign regarding these issues?

The Greens' climate protection strategy relies on symbolic policies which allow corporations to get off scot-free, but which add to the burden of low-income workers in the form of devastating price hikes.

The Left Party failed to make our rejection of the Greens' perfidious price-increase policy sufficiently clear. Voters were given the impression that the Left Party wanted to be greener than the Greens, that our aim was to withdraw from coal

Pic: Die Linke Nordrhein-Westfalen / Creative Commons



even faster and to phase out combustion engines – without any plausible scenarios being provided as to how this was to be realised, or how it would not come at the expense of the workers, the citizens.

The Greens' true position on climate protection is evident from their talks with the FDP regarding a coalition government with the SPD.

Both parties advocate the break-up and privatisation of the Deutsche Bahn rail company, more or less following the British model.

You don't need to be a prophet to predict where that will lead. Less climate protection, higher ticket prices, poorer service, less security but greater profits for private corporations and better investment opportunities for oligarchs.

Like most other major capitalist countries, Germany was generally unsuccessful and poorly equipped in managing the Covid-19 pandemic with terrible consequences for its people. Was this, along with the other

consequences of the prevailing neoliberal economic policies in Germany, a major issue in the election?

Unfortunately not. The Covid crisis did make the dramatic consequences of privatisation in the healthcare sector and other essential public services strikingly clear.

Yet during the crisis the number of intensive care beds was reduced and conditions for care workers were not improved.

Over 300,000 fully qualified staff currently work in other sectors because the wages for care work are too precarious and the conditions too poor.

Over half of these workers would be willing to return to the care sector if wages were improved and the strain was reduced.

At the same time, attempts are made to distract from this responsibility for the desperate state of the healthcare system by means of public campaigns trying to blame those who have yet to get vaccinated for the

government's own healthcare policy failures.

A new neoliberal authoritarianism is emerging, which looks to cover up the organised failures of capitalism with a witch-hunt against those who think differently, or who are perceived to.

Has Die Linke drawn any lesson from these results and does it intend to fundamentally revise or even overhaul its policies?

The discussion about the causes for this historically bad result and the necessary conclusions to be drawn from it are the topic of much debate.

The urgency with which the Left Party needs to focus on its core topics, namely social justice and peace, is demonstrated by how the current exploratory talks are unfolding.

It is becoming evident that the Greens and the FDP will form a common bloc. More than ever, this eco-neoliberal alliance calls for a socially oriented opposition that remains committed to

peace, and once more becomes a party of social protest, a party of the common person.

It would also be disastrous to water down the Left Party's positions on peace, as has been proposed by some within the party.

A commitment to peace, diplomacy and disarmament is in our DNA. In light of the growing threat of war through the aggressive geopolitics of Nato, we cannot move away from our clear stance and must continue to promote a peaceful foreign policy.

In the history of communist and left-wing parties in Europe, abandoning positions on peace has usually been accompanied by abandoning social policy.

Once a party starts agreeing to arms build-up and military operations, it's only a matter of time before its social policy demands also crumble. This has to be avoided.

Jamshid Ahmadi is the assistant general secretary of Codir, the Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights (codir.net).