

- 1) What is the political scenery like, three weeks before the elections of the 26th of September?

It looks surprising. Only six months ago, the election outcome seemed certain. The Greens were leading in the polls and a coalition with the Christian Democrats was considered likely. The SPD candidate for chancellor, Olaf Scholz, on the other hand, found himself on a mission impossible, as influential media put it. There was no majority for a red-red-green coalition in the polls. This picture has changed completely a few weeks before the election. The SPD are ahead in the polls. Their candidate Olaf Scholz has outpaced Annalena Baerbock of the Greens and Armin Laschet of the CDU in popularity. The Greens are slipping behind and the CDU/CSU have reached an all-time low. As of now, different post-election coalitions are conceivable. Even a left-wing alliance of SPD, Greens and Die Linke would be mathematically possible. Olaf Scholz, however, is counting more on a coalition with the Greens and the resurgent Liberals of the FDP. Only two alliances are considered impossible: the formation of a government with the help of the radical right-wing AfD and another "grand coalition" of CDU and SPD. That is why things will continue to be exciting after the elections.

- 2) How do you interpret the polls? Do you think we can draw any safe conclusions, and if so which ones?

First of all: nothing is certain! Many voters have yet to make up their minds. It is also likely that people will vote tactically. That's why I still think the election outcome is relatively open. One serious political mistake by any of the parties and the situation will once again look different. This has to do with the fact that these are the first elections since Chancellor Angela Merkel. If Merkel had run again, things would be different. The majority of Germans regard her as a serious, competent crisis manager. She enjoys a good reputation far into the left-liberal spectrum. What is forgotten is that she has often just glossed over the problems. Take the example of climate change. During Merkel's chancellorship, climate-damaging emissions in Germany temporarily rose again; the 2020 climate targets were only achieved because of the Corona crisis and the economic slump. This is degrowth by disaster. In general, however, it can be said that no political strategy can ever be founded on opinion polls. Die Linke, who for long have been far too defensive about participation in government, must also take this to heart.

- 3) What is the reason for the recent rise of the SPD in the polls, as well as the stagnation of the Greens?

Surely this has to do with their candidate – Olaf Scholz – who presents himself as Angela Merkel's real political heir. Annalena Baerbock (Greens) made serious mistakes during the election campaign; the same goes for Armin Laschet (CDU). Both are, in the opinion of the electorate, unsuitable for the chancellorship. Olaf Scholz is benefiting from this because the election campaign is extremely personalized. But that is not all. The electorate is gradually becoming aware that the urgently needed turnaround towards ecological and social sustainability cannot be put off. The coal phase-out and the transition to e-mobility, but also the flood disaster in the Ahr valley, the failure of the West in Afghanistan and, last but not least, the Corona pandemic make it clear that major changes are occurring. Many people suspect that the new challenges cannot be mastered without a state that is also active in economic policy. A Green Deal requires investment in social and environmentally sustainable

infrastructure. This comeback of the state is currently embodied most credibly by the SPD and Olaf Scholz – despite everything. People trust the SPD to tackle climate change without losing sight of the social question. This is also helped by the fact that the party has broken away, albeit quietly and contradictorily, from the policy of the "Hartz laws". The party is also clearly to the left of its leader.

- 4) Why can't Die Linke gain more momentum in the run-up to the elections? What are the problems they are facing?

The party is divided and the outside world can see this. In a much acclaimed book, Sarah Wagenknecht has provided a distorted picture of Die Linke during the election campaign. She attacks supporters of the climate movements as lifestyle leftists. Her approach of combining social policy with criticism of migration is similar to the trajectory of Danish social democracy. For those in and outside Die Linke who are involved in anti-racist movements, women's initiatives, the ecological spectrum, but also in the trade unions, this is a no-go. The internal division of the party has meant that it has not pushed hard enough for a red-red-green alliance. This is another reason why structural problems are hitting home. In eastern Germany, the electorate is structurally over-aged; the gains among young people in large cities cannot currently compensate for the losses. This would change if the party succeeded in pushing as a socialist force for a social and ecological sustainability revolution, as called for by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In opposition to conditions that accelerate climate change and increase inequality, it would have to visibly support every positive step towards change. At the moment, it is not succeeding in achieving this balance. Take Kabul, for instance. Die Linke were the only political party to oppose the military deployment, for which the SPD and the Greens were initially responsible. There has never been an evaluation of this military deployment. Actually, Die Linke could now challenge all the other parties on this and raise fundamental questions. The problem: they abstained in parliament on a robust mandate allowing German troops to defend the airlift. This was a serious political mistake that now dominates the discourse. It is forgotten that the incumbent government parties, including the SPD's Scholz, are responsible for the fact that the evacuation of people whose lives are threatened by the Taliban was started far too late. This is just one example which shows once again that basic political questions have not been clarified within Die Linke. As a socialist rallying movement the party has – unfortunately – failed. Instead of working together as a mosaic left in which many cooperating currents have their place, to the outside world it sometimes looks like a collection of quarrelling sects, each in sole possession of eternal truths. In times of great change this does not help their credibility.

- 5) To what extent is it possible to form a progressive government after the elections? And what does a progressive government mean for Germany today?

Despite this unsatisfactory state of Die Linke, as well as of the social left as a whole, a red-red-green coalition after the September elections is within the realm of possibility. Die Linke have – finally – made it clear in an emergency programme that they can envisage constructive participation in a government. Programmatically, the manifestos of the SPD, the Greens and Die Linke have much in common. A progressive Green Deal would be possible. Thus, trade unionist Dierk Hirschel (Ver.di) promotes in his book "a broad social alliance" that should strive for a social-ecological transformation. "Trade unions, environmental and social associations, social movements, social democracy, B 90/The Greens and the Left are united by more than divides them. None

of these actors alone has the resources to implement a socio-ecological transformation. That is why they are all well advised to work together," adds former Ver.di chair Frank Bsirske. This is true. Higher minimum wages, public infrastructure investments, a definitive departure from the debt brake and the "Schwarze Null" regime, redistribution in favor of the weak, climate justice, sustainable restructuring of the economy and a solidarity-based migration and European policy – all this would be feasible. Such a political turnaround could be a signal for the entire European Union. None of this is possible with the market fundamentalists of the FDP. Olaf Scholz will realise this if he gets himself elected chancellor with their help. Political failure would then be inevitable, and it would then be up to a perhaps reinvigorated left to resolutely promote a Green Deal based on solidarity.

Translated by Adrian Wilding