

GERMANY'S LEFTWARD LEAN

Rainer Zitelmann examines the left's impact on Merkel

AS ANGELA Merkel's junior coalition partner, the Social Democrats (SPD) have been governing Germany since 2013. Now they are lurching ever more sharply to the left.

Kevin Kuhnert, chairman of the SPD's youth organisation (the Jusos or Young Socialists), recently called for major companies, including BMW, to be brought under collective ownership. He also insisted that the private rental housing market should be abolished. Unsurprisingly, his demands have triggered a heated discussion in Germany.

"Is this GDR-light or full-on GDR?" tweeted Oliver Luksic of Germany's free-market FDP party.

"Without collectivisation, there is no conceivable way we can overcome capitalism," Kuhnert recently said.

"I'm not interested in whether the sign above BMW's doorbell says 'state-owned automobile company' or 'cooperative automobile company'. Or even whether the collective decides it doesn't need a company like BMW at all," he continued.

Kuhnert's main concern is that com-



pany profits should be distributed democratically: "That would rule out any chance of the business remaining under capitalist ownership."

He also said that the rental housing market should have only one landlord: the state.

"I don't think making a fortune from providing housing to other people is in any way a legitimate business model."

The politician continued: "The logical conclusion is that each person should

own at most their own dwelling."

So why is the SPD lunging towards the far-left? Well, the SPD, which took 40.9 per cent of the vote in the 1998 general elections, has shared the fate of almost all European Social Democrats and had its share of the vote decline ever since.

At the last general election in 2017, the SPD won just 20.5 per cent of the vote. And, according to recent surveys, the Social Democrats have lost even more ground and are now hovering

around the 15 to 17 per cent mark.

The SPD has been haemorrhaging votes to almost every other party. In addition to the SPD, Germany has two other left-wing parties. First there's the "Left Party" (Die Linke), East Germany's former ruling communist party, which has renamed itself twice since the collapse of communism.

Secondly, the Greens, a left-wing environmentalist party. In some German regions, these three left-wing parties have

already formed coalition state governments, including in Berlin.

The Social Democrats are now open to forming a tripartite alliance with the Greens and the Left Party – not just in local-level politics, but also at a federal level. The most recent opinion polls register Germany's three left-wing parties taking a combined share of between 45 and 46 per cent of the vote.

According to German electoral law, 48 per cent would be enough to win a majority of seats in Germany's parliament and thus form a government.

Kuhnert has also been enthusiastic about Jeremy Corbyn. Just last year, he said: "There are examples from which we can draw strength. Jeremy Corbyn might not be the best role model in all fields of politics, but he has certainly succeeded in inspiring masses of young people with his social democratic values."

"In the last general election, Labour took more than 40 per cent of the vote. The collapse of social democracy is certainly not pre-ordained."

When I recently criticised Kuhnert for being an "admirer of Jeremy Corbyn", he contacted me to ask where I got this idea from. I sent him the above quote (and a second one) and asked him if he had changed his mind since then. Unfortunately, he didn't respond.

Dr Rainer Zitelmann is the author of 22 books. His two most recent books are *'The Power of Capitalism'* and *'The Wealth Elite'*.