

The “European Left” calls on European powers to intervene in Lebanon

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The Party of the European Left (EL) has appealed to the heads of the European Union (EU) and European governments to play a more active role in the present conflict in the Middle East.

In a statement adopted August 1 by the EL executive committee, the organisation says it is bewildered by “the weak, irresponsible position of the EU and European governments with seats on the UN Security Council, faced with the necessity to exert maximum pressure on all parties to the conflict to agree to an immediate, lasting peace that opens the way for a political solution to the complex, interwoven conflicts in the Middle East.”

The chairman of Germany’s Left Party-Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), Lothar Bisky, immediately forwarded the statement to Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party—SPD).

The EL statement calls upon EU institutions and the European governments to press for an immediate ceasefire and a programme of humanitarian aid under the auspices of the UN. The statement concludes with a call for the “establishment of a UN-controlled buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon,” the “deployment of an international peacekeeping force with a UN mandate” and “an international conference to restart the peace process in the Middle East.” Furthermore, according to the statement, the European governments should assist the Lebanese government in disarming Hezbollah and press for the recognition of the Shebaa farms region as Lebanese territory.

The statement underscores the role played by the Left Party-PDS and their 14 sister parties in the European Left: they are not a left-wing alternative to the established parties but instead strive to provide a “left” fig leaf for the latter’s politics.

On the one hand, they give verbal support to the increasing opposition to the war in the Middle East and the constant series of welfare cuts at home. On the other hand, they do everything to deflect this opposition and steer it back within the framework of official politics and prevent it from developing into a really independent movement. Representatives of some of these parties, like Italy’s Communist Refoundation (*Rifondazione Comunista*), sit in the cabinet.

The idea that the European powers could play a role as

peacemakers in the Middle East is completely erroneous. The historical roots of the present conflict and its underlying forces show unmistakably that Europe is not a part of the solution, but is one of the causes of the problem.

The present bombardment of Lebanon by the Israeli army—supplied with the latest military hardware by the US—can only be understood in the context of the decades of colonial subjugation of the entire region, whose oil wealth has always made it of central strategic importance for the imperialist powers. At first, it was Britain and France that played the leading role; in the middle of the last century, their place was taken by the US, whose rapacious ambitions have reached a qualitatively new level with the conquest of Iraq.

The Iraq invasion was launched on the basis of lies and was aimed at securing the supremacy of the US in the region. The occupation has become a debacle, and the Bush administration has reacted by preparing for further aggression against Iran and Syria. To this end, it unleashed its Israeli guard dog against Lebanon. The destruction of Lebanon’s infrastructure and the terrorising of the Shiite population are aimed at transforming the small nation into a pliant instrument of the imperialist powers and suppressing all potential opposition to American aggression.

The present war has been planned and prepared for a long time. It has taken place with the full agreement and support of the US and Britain. The abduction of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah, which was seeking to exchange them for several thousand prisoners held illegally in Israel, merely supplied the welcome pretext.

Stripped of its rhetoric about peace, the statement by the EL essentially underscores the need for European imperialism to defend its own interests in the Middle East, and to exert influence on the US and Israel without genuinely opposing them.

The call for an international peacekeeping force clearly underscores this. Under the present circumstances, such a force—which the US, the EU and Israel all favour—would have the task of consolidating the territory gained by the Israeli aggression. Such a force would be stationed in southern Lebanon to prevent the re-emergence of opposition to Israel and the US. It would free up the US to launch further

provocations against Syria and Iran. Its mission could be compared to that of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in Afghanistan, who keep the puppet regime of Hamid Karzai in power, meanwhile freeing up the US for its military deployment in Iraq.

A basic condition for any peace in the Middle East is the withdrawal of all imperialist troops from the region, and above all the removal of American forces from Iraq. Rather than calling for such a withdrawal, however, the European lefts are demanding the dispatch of additional troops.

The Left Party-PDS support for the EL statement also shows what should be made of its claim to reject all international military missions by Germany's armed forces. From the call for an international peacekeeping force, it is just a small step to supporting the deployment of German soldiers in Lebanon, about which there are already heated debates in the media. The Left Party-PDS would find it difficult to reject German participation in a military operation they had previously been noisily urging in the Bundestag (parliament).

They are quite conscious of the true character of such military operations. On the occasion of Bush's visit to Stralsund, Tobias Pflüger, a Left Party-PDS deputy in the European parliament, explained recently: "In the shadow of the USA's imperial policies, the EU is also seeking to become an imperial world military power. The EU is copying the errors of American policy. In the meantime, 19 so-called EU Battle Groups, the elite combat troops of the European Union, will stand ready from January 1, 2007, for deployment worldwide. In addition, there is an EU strike force of 60,000 soldiers. The EU is stepping up its military capacity and we are paying the price, in the truest sense of the word."

The Left Party-PDS pins its hopes on the European governments being able to put pressure on the US to change its course. A statement by its Bundestag faction says, "Above all, it is a matter of urging the US administration to use its influence on the government of Israel to break off military operations and take up negotiations."

Oskar Lafontaine, who leads the Bundestag faction of the Left Party together with Gregor Gysi, expresses the same sentiments. In an interview with the *Deutsch Welle* radio station, Lafontaine praised the German government's foreign policy, merely accusing it of standing too close to Washington. "Naturally, the government strives to make its contribution to defuse the conflict," he claimed, "but it is always in danger—and this is our criticism—of relying too strongly on American policy."

And this in a situation in which the European governments, and above all, Berlin, display on a daily basis their subordination to the aggressive military policy of the US and Israel in the Middle East! While France and Germany discreetly opposed the invasion of Iraq, there is not a serious word of criticism about the Israeli attack on Lebanon to be heard from either Paris or Berlin.

France, which as a former colonial power in Lebanon has substantial economic interests, has long been co-operating with the US to eliminate Syria's influence over the country. It regards the present war as an opportunity to gain a foothold in the region by placing its own troops there. Germany works as a "mediator" to overcome the resistance of the Lebanese government to an American-French UN resolution that would virtually turn the country into a protectorate of the great powers.

The aggressive actions in the region being undertaken by Washington and Tel Aviv make it unmistakably clear that they will not be deflected from their political goals, either by international agreements or by pressure from the other powers. They regard the deployment of large-scale military might as a legitimate means of pursuing their political interests. The European governments have reacted to developments with a policy of appeasement, uncritically accepting all the lies used to justify the war in Lebanon, and unreservedly lined up behind the US. By accepting and even justifying the open break with international law, the European governments have demonstrated that the latter no longer has any significance in their eyes either.

Only an independent movement of the international working class on the basis of a socialist perspective offers a progressive way out of the crisis in the Middle East. There exists no other political force in the world that can fulfill this task.

The fight against war is inseparably linked to the defence of social gains and democratic rights. The internal contradictions of capitalism, and above all the contradiction between world economy and the nation-state system, have removed the basis for a policy of social reformism and are intensifying international tensions, once again confronting mankind with the barbarism of imperialist war.

The great powers are no more prepared to accept international agreements and treaties when their imperialist interests are at stake than they are the welfare-state provisions established after World War II to guarantee the social peace and which today are under attack everywhere.

In this context, the Left Party-PDS is seeking to prevent the growth of an independent movement of the working class at any price. Within Germany, it endeavours to encourage new illusions in social reformism and direct the mounting protest into harmless channels. In foreign policy, its only answer to the crisis in the Middle East is to direct its appeals and demands towards the European governments.



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