

# Election platform of the “European Left”: Pious wishes and right-wing policies

Lucas Adler, Peter Schwarz  
6 June 2009

The wave of corporate bankruptcies of recent months has dealt a shattering blow to the free market ideological nostrums of the bourgeoisie. Even conservative European politicians are paying lip service to the need for “social responsibility” and state regulation, in order to maintain some sort of credibility with their electorates.

Under these conditions, it now appears likely that the main losers in the European Union parliamentary elections to be completed this weekend will be Europe’s social democratic parties. This is bound up with the fact that the previous government in Germany, headed by Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Gerhard Schröder, the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and the Socialist Party government of José Zapatero in Spain have all been trailblazers for deregulation of financial markets and the destruction of social welfare programmes. They all claimed that such free market policies would ensure future economic prosperity.

Millions in Germany have suffered the consequences of the Hartz IV anti-welfare laws and other social democratic “reforms.” The results have been similar in the rest of Europe.

There are many indications that the election result at the weekend will, in particular, be the death sentence—or at least a huge nail in the coffin—for the British Labour government.

Seeking to fill the political vacuum left by these parties is the “European Left—a combination of parties that describe themselves as “socialist” or “communist” and currently have 41 deputies in the European parliament.

The main organisations in the group include the German Left Party, the Communist Party of France, the Italian Refounded Communism (PRC) and the Greek Synaspismos. The chairman of the European Left is Lothar Bisky, a leader of the German Left Party alongside Oskar Lafontaine. Bisky replaced Fausto Bertinotti (PRC) as head of the European Left in November 2007.

The European Left has published a joint platform for the European election. The declaration resembles a large department store with a huge variety of products under a single roof. It contains a series of lofty promises on every conceivable topic: enduring economic development and social justice, peace and cooperation, equal rights for women, democratic participation and solidarity, anti-fascism, anti-racism, civil freedoms, human rights, etc.

The programme states: “The European Left demands that this Europe be a peaceful and civil Europe, whose economies are

socially and ecologically sustainable, that it be feminist and develop on the basis of democracy and solidarity.” It then spells out at great length how such a Europe should look.

However, as is clear from the experience with Woolworths, Hertie and Karstadt, big department stores also confront bankruptcy. Despite their varied display of goods, they lack any solid foundation.

The same applies to the platform of the European Left, which evades tackling crucial issues. The whole edifice of pious wishes is aimed at masking current social reality: The irreconcilable class divide between the interests of the broad mass of the population and the ruling elites.

Is the financial and economic crisis rooted in the contradictions of the capitalist system, or is it merely the result of an incorrect policy? Is it possible to renew the existing institutions and organisations—the European Union, national parliaments, the social democratic parties and trade unions—in the interest of workers, or must the working class organise itself independently and develop its own social and political alternative?

These questions are left unanswered by the European Left. The entire political activity of the European Left centres on preventing workers from drawing revolutionary conclusions from the crisis and adopting a genuine socialist perspective.

The European Left resembles a man who decides to put up colourful wallpaper and slap a coat of paint on a house with rotten foundations, collapsing walls and an infrastructure in an advanced state of disintegration. As any architect knows, on this basis it is possible to sell a house, but that will not prevent its eventual collapse.

Behind its bombastic language, the European Left is offering its assistance to the European ruling classes to save the European Union and its institutions. The group has considerable experience in such matters. Nearly all of its member organisations have already participated in bourgeois governments.

The French CP shared power in a series of Socialist Party-led governments since 1981 that implemented social welfare cuts, although the CP had promised to defend and expand social gains. The Italian PRC has supported right-wing governments in parliament since the early 1990s, and from 2006 to 2008 took part in the Romano Prodi government, whose programme of budget cuts prepared the way for the return to power of the right wing led by Silvio Berlusconi. In Germany, the Left Party is part of a coalition with the SPD in the Berlin Senate that has implemented

drastic cuts to balance the city's budget.

If one carefully reads the statements put forward by the European Left, the right-wing character of the grouping becomes evident.

In its founding manifesto of May 2004, the European Left made clear that it did not seek to oppose capitalism. Rather, it sought to encourage illusions in social reformism in order to head off the growth of class conflict.

In the manifesto, it celebrates the "original character of the European social model" as well as its political and cultural roots. The manifesto expressly dissociates itself from "the traditional path which in the 20th century brought great achievements but also great defeats and tragedies to the forces with a revolutionary inspiration." Instead, the European Left strives for an "alternative radical, ecological and feminist left" to reform society.

The European Left platform for the current election does not oppose capitalism as a social system, but merely opposes capitalism in its "neoliberal, globalised" form. What has failed is "neoliberal globalisation, which serves to maximise the profits of the main players on the world-wide financial markets, and which evades any control or possibility of intervention by states." As if there could be a capitalism without the maximisation of profit!

The platform calls for a reform of the European Union and its institutions, but not for their abolition. It does not call for a socialist Europe, but rather for a "democratic and social Europe"—a formulation to be found in any social democratic programme. Another section of the platform refers to a "Europe of the peoples"—a concession to regionalist movements that seek to split the European working class.

At an election meeting of the European Left on May 9 in Paris, Chairman Bisky once again made clear the limited perspective of the European Left and its acceptance of the framework of capitalism. "The European Left," he said, "seeks a re-regulation of the financial markets, a social-ecological change in the economy, a European central bank under democratic control, the replacement of the stability and growth pact by a pact for growth, full employment, social security and environmental protection."

The right-wing content of the election platform is most evident in the section dealing with foreign policy. While paying lip service to anti-militarism, the European Left openly embraces the most important aims of European imperialism.

Thus, the platform expressly declares its support for the further expansion of the European Union. It states: "The European Left stands for the further enlargement of the European Union and for a stable all-European structure to overcome still existing political and economic divisions in Europe." The document pays tribute to the favoured foreign policy project of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, which it calls the "ambitious political project of the Mediterranean Union."

The platform responds to the increasing conflicts between Europe and the US with the demand for the dissolution of NATO. It does so from the standpoint of sections of the European bourgeoisie, stressing the "negative political and not only military role that NATO plays in line with US interests in Europe." Instead, the European Left calls for "an alternative security concept" for the European Union, which is aligned to "peace, dialog and

international cooperation."

On this point the platform states: "More than ever, security in Europe must be based on the principles of peace and security, disarmament and structural assault incapacity, conflict resolution by political and civil means within the OSCE system, conforming to international law and to the principles of a reformed and democratised UN system. Such a collective and cooperative European system must guarantee security and unconditioned access to energy supplies, environment, human rights issues, etc."

This single paragraph, however, contains a number of political code words. The demand for a "reformed and democratised UN system" is entirely compatible with the attempts by the European ruling powers—so far unsuccessful—to increase their authority inside the UN. And since September 11, 2001, the term "security" is synonymous with attacks on democratic rights and with military interventions.

In particular, the call for "unconditioned access to energy" has long served as a justification for wars of aggression. This was one of the main arguments used to justify the re-militarisation of German foreign policy following reunification in 1990.

When carefully considered, the essence of the European Left platform is to promote the illusion that it is possible to achieve a more socially balanced and just European Union. Based on this appeal, the European Left hopes to win a greater acceptance for capitalist institutions in the European population as a whole.

In the coming class struggles, this grouping will undoubtedly line up with the powers that be and do everything in its power to defend capitalism against a revolutionary movement of the working class.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**