

The Egyptian revolution and the German Left Party

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The dynamics and speed of the revolutionary events, first in Tunisia and now in Egypt, have surprised and rattled all of Germany's political parties. The profound social roots of the movement and the role of the working class as its driving force have shocked them in particular.

This assessment also applies to the German Left Party. The revolutionary storm in the Middle East literally took the breath away of Left Party functionaries based at the Karl Liebknecht House in Berlin. It took an entire week, until the end of January, for the executive committee to issue a brief statement calling upon the German government, "to renounce their double standards towards Arab states." What is now required, according to party chair Gesine Löttsch, is for "European states and their allies to assist in democratic change."

Oskar Lafontaine—who gave up the party chairmanship last year for health reasons, but still plays an important role in the party—was also stuck for words when he addressed a few supporters at a trade union meeting in Stuttgart on February 4. He merely urged the government to take the events in Egypt seriously and distanced himself from previous speakers who had criticized Israeli policies.

Lafontaine declared that the Left Party unconditionally supported the Israeli state's right to existence, thereby repeating the formula at the heart of official German foreign policy. Just a week ago, Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Jerusalem precisely to stress this position to the Israeli government.

In general, the Left Party has reacted to the development of revolution in the Middle East by closing ranks with the government and offering its support. Wolfgang Gehrcke, the party's foreign policy spokesman, plays a key role in this process. This past Monday, Gehrcke called a special session of the Foreign Committee of the Bundestag. The only item on the agenda: the current situation in the Middle East.

Gehrcke informed the committee members from other parties that he had just returned from a two-week tour of several Middle East countries. "I was in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Palestine," he said in a subsequent

interview with the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, adding, "The region resembles a volcano about to erupt".

Gehrcke told committee members that the government's current Middle East policy had failed and that many political leaders were aware of this. However, it was very difficult for them to admit this, speak out and enforce a change. According to a Left Party press release: "This dilemma is the reason for the helpless indecision with which Merkel, Westerwelle & Co. respond to developments in Egypt." This expressed "the judgment of Wolfgang Gehrcke following the special meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee held today at the initiative of Die Linke [Left Party]".

Gehrcke offered the government concrete advice. It must finally "jump over its shadow and call for the immediate resignation of the president of Egypt", he said. This was the only way to prevent a further expansion of the demonstrations and strikes and stabilize the situation. At the same time, German exports of weapons to Egypt should be cancelled and not just frozen, and German cooperation in police and military training should be reviewed.

Such measures alone, however, were insufficient and represented merely the beginning of a new Middle East policy based on fresh political forces, Gehrcke said. He reported on a number of "very serious discussions" he had conducted with political groups and individuals in the region.

Despite considerable effort, he had been unable to meet in Cairo with Mohammed ElBaradei, who had been put under house arrest at the time by the Egyptian authorities. But there were civic elements interested in cooperating with Berlin and Brussels, Gehrcke said. He had no doubt about this. Communist and socialist groups and parties were also cooperative and prepared to enter discussions, he said.

In order to prevent a power vacuum and regain credibility sacrificed by decades of cooperation with the corrupt Mubarak regime, Gehrcke said, governments would be well advised to apologize to the Egyptian people for their past mistakes.

The almost 70-year-old Gehrcke is an old and wily

Stalinist apparatchik who has played an important role in many critical periods for West German politics.

At the age of 18 he joined the then-outlawed Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and was among the founding members of the Socialist German Workers Youth (SDAJ), presiding as chairman over the party for many years. At the height of the student protest movement in 1968, he was a founding member of the German Communist Party (DKP), which had been allowed to legally establish itself following the ban on the West German Communist Party by the Constitutional Court in 1956. For many years, Gehrcke headed the DKP in Hamburg. Immediately after the reunification of Germany in 1990 he joined the Party of Democratic Socialism, formed from the remnants of the East German state Stalinist party. He rose up in the ranks of the PDS to become its general secretary and four years ago was active in the formation of the Left Party, for which he now sits in parliament.

Gehrcke knows that the German government, in common with other European governments and the US, is highly isolated in Egypt and the Middle East. Due to the fact that the Mubarak regime suppressed all opposition, these foreign governments have no contacts with other political movements upon which they can rely. The Left Party is now offering its services as a bridge builder for their imperialist policy. This has been recognized and appreciated in Berlin.

To put it bluntly: the emerging uprising of the working class in the Middle East is directed against imperialism. President Mubarak is hated because he is an agent of US imperialism, and also has the active support of all European governments. This means that support for the working class in the Middle East requires the mobilization of European and American workers against their own governments on the basis of an international socialist program.

The Left Party is doing just the opposite. It offers its services to the government as an arbitrator in order to maintain and strengthen imperialist influence and control in the Middle East.

A principal aim of Gehrcke's Middle East tour was to revive and reactivate the old Stalinist organizations—or what is left of them. This explains why he and other Left Party officials are distributing a statement by the “Egyptian Communist Party.” Left Party MP Annette Groth read the full text of this statement at the above mentioned rally in Stuttgart addressed by Lafontaine.

In the statement, the Egyptian CP calls for a transitional regime in order to curb the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses and maintain the rule and influence of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and imperialist powers. It calls for “agreement between the various opposition parties to set up a welfare committee” on the basis of the “demands of the masses”. It

goes on to propose that Mubarak be replaced by a “Presidential Council for a temporary period”, “the formation of a coalition government which assumes the leadership of the country for a transitional period,” and the convening of a Constituent Assembly.

The Left Party is hoping that no one is familiar with the criminal role played by the Stalinist CP in Egypt, which now advocates this policy.

Created in the early 1920s, the Egyptian Communist Party rapidly came under the growing influence of Stalin and his adaptation to the national bourgeoisie. The Egyptian party supported Stalin's “two-stage theory”, which declared that in colonial and semi-colonial countries such as Egypt, the struggle for socialism must first pass through a stage of “democratic capitalism”. On the basis of this theory the Stalinists rigorously suppressed the revolutionary aspirations of the masses for socialist measures.

It was also on this basis that the Communist Party supported the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, describing his policy as “Arab socialism”. Even when Nasser's policy collapsed miserably and power was assumed by his deputy, Anwar Sadat, leading Stalinists such as Fuad Mursi and Ismail Sabri Abd Allah participated in Sadat's government. This collaboration continued for many years until they resigned from the government in 1975, when Sadat openly adopted a neo-liberal economic program.

Attempts by Wolfgang Gehrcke and the Left Party to mobilize the remnants of the old Stalinist parties in order to lead the revolutionary movement into the dead end of a purportedly democratic capitalism are not only reactionary, but doomed to failure. Unlike the 1940s and 1950s, such parties are no longer able to rely on a powerful Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

The revolution in Egypt and the emergence of the working class has not only shocked the ruling elites, it has also exposed the true colors of all parties and political groupings. The real role of the German Left Party has been revealed as nothing less than a consultant and servant of the German government.



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