

German Left Party leader votes in favour of military intervention in Libya

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On Thursday, the UN Security Council approved a resolution paving the way for the US and other major imperialist powers to conduct a direct military intervention in Libya, under the pretense of a “humanitarian” mission. The resolution, which goes far beyond earlier proposals for a no-fly zone, was sponsored by the US, France, Britain and Lebanon. Germany and Russia were among those abstaining in the vote.

The European Parliament has been aggressively pushing for military intervention in Libya. On March 10, it passed a resolution by 584 in favour and 18 against, with 18 abstentions, calling for official recognition of the National Transitional Council in Benghazi and supporting a military intervention by the European Union.

Article 10 of the resolution stresses that “none of the measures provided for in the options of the UN Charter can be ruled out,” and called upon the EU External Representative Catherine Ashton, to make “arrangements for a possible decision in the UN Security Council for further action, such as the establishment of a no-fly zone”.

The resolution was supported by all factions of the European Parliament from the conservative right to the Socialists and Greens, and even won the support of leading members of the so-called Party of the European Left (EL).

The adoption of the resolution by the European Parliament was a direct preparation for more aggressive action against Libya. EU foreign ministers subsequently intensified sanctions against the Libyan regime and NATO defence ministers strengthened military surveillance of the Libyan coast.

On March 11, the heads of state and government of the 27 EU countries demanded the immediate

resignation of Col. Muammar Gaddafi and stepped up the military threats. All of these measures are aimed at installing a government in Tripoli sympathetic to the interests of the international oil companies and the European powers.

The resolution was supported by leading members of the European Left Party, Lothar Bisky (Left Party, Germany), Marie-Christine Vergiat (Front de Gauche, France) and Miguel Portas (Bloco de Esquerda, Portugal). Bisky is the chairman of the Joint Group of the European Left Party and the European United Left–Nordic Green Left in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL). Up until May of last year Bisky was also joint chairman of the German Left Party alongside Oskar Lafontaine, and until December, chairman of the Party of European Left. Marie-Christine Vergiat is treasurer of the GUE / NGL and the head of French delegation.

In supporting the all-party resolution, Bisky, Vergiat and Portas opposed a previously prepared resolution put forward by their own group. This resolution explicitly opposed “any foreign military intervention to resolve the crisis in Libya”. Bisky and company then undertook a delicate balancing act by first voting against article ten of the resolution, only to vote shortly afterwards for the entire resolution, including article ten.

The newspaper *Junge Welt* reported that originally the three members of parliament intended to sign the resolution on behalf of the entire Group. That plan was then dropped after protests from other EL members. In addition to Bisky, Vergiat and Portas, eight other members of the GUE/NGL group voted in favour of the parliamentary resolution—including the chairman of the French Left Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Another nine abstained, while just 15 of the 35-strong group voted

against a military intervention in Libya.

After the vote Bisky issued a press statement, with five other EU members of the Left Party, which cynically declared: “We also oppose any military intervention. We believe that the compromise contained in the resolution of the European Parliament calling for a no-fly zone to be false, even if it takes up demands from sections of the Libyan opposition and states belonging to the Arab League and the African Union. A no-fly zone always poses the risk that it must be enforced militarily. This would involve EU member states into a military confrontation. This will certainly not strengthen democracy movements from Morocco to Yemen.”

The glaring contradiction between Bisky’s support for the all-party EU resolution and the official line of his party reveals the hollow character of the Left Party’s left rhetoric. Up to this point, representatives of the party still had the luxury of voting no when their vote made no difference anyway. But now the leadership of the Left Party has concluded that it is necessary to send a clear signal of support to the ruling elite. Bisky continues to play an important role in the party, and one can assume that he is in close contact with party leaders in Berlin concerning his work in the European Parliament.

So far, the leadership of the Left Party has been remarkably reticent in responding to Bisky’s initiative. If the party took its official stance of anti-militarism seriously it would have immediately called for Bisky’s expulsion from the party or at least his resignation from his leading posts. However, no one in the entire party has uttered a word of criticism and the party executive has refrained from any official comment. Instead party members have sought rationalisations for Bisky’s action.

Thomas Handel, one of two speakers of the German delegation in the GUE/NGL group, told the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* on Saturday he saw no conflict in the delegation, there was only “need for discussion”.

Handel justified Bisky’s support for the parliamentary resolution by saying that “it did not restrict itself to the issue of no-fly zones”. It also raised demands for the isolation of the Gaddafi regime. “These are key elements that you can and must support. And they are points that we now have to work out in more depth in our continued work in the European

parliament.”

Handel’s justification reveals more than he intended. Both he and the Left Party faction in the EU parliament are in fundamental accord with all other parties regarding punitive measures against Libya designed to safeguard European interests in the oil-rich country and to stifle revolution throughout the Arab world.

The leadership of Libya’s National Transitional Council consists of former ministers of Gaddafi, who turned their back on him at the last minute and immediately guaranteed the country’s contracts with international oil companies. They have as little to offer the impoverished masses of Libya as Gaddafi in Tripoli.

Handel objects to the only logical conclusion of the entire political line of the EU resolution, i.e. military intervention, but Bisky has already gone a step farther.

Bisky’s vote to support military intervention in Libya is an important lesson for all those seeking to oppose militarism and social attacks in North Africa and Europe. When the interests of the ruling class are seriously threatened, it can rely on Bisky and the Left Party. These pseudo-left forces will play the same role in the near future in Europe as social resistance develops.



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