

Germany: The Left Party's new programme

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The Executive Committee of the Left Party has submitted a draft programme for adoption at its congress in Erfurt in October.

The party, founded in the summer of 2007, did not previously have a formal programme, but only “programmatically cornerstones”. Agreement of a programme was postponed for a long time for political reasons. This programmatic vagueness has enabled the Left Party to unite various political tendencies within its ranks.

The Left Party brought together the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), the descendants of the Stalinist state party of the former East Germany, with dissident West German social democrats and union functionaries of the WASG (Election Alternative Labour and Social Justice). It included many former members of petty-bourgeois “left” and radical organizations. The party displayed various colours. Alongside conservative politicians who have held power in local and state governments, it also contained currents proclaiming (in words) revolution and communism.

In the meantime, the Left Party has become an integral part of the bourgeois order. It sits in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and in 13 of the 16 state parliaments; it forms the state government in Berlin and Brandenburg together with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and in the most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia, it props up the state government of the SPD and the Greens. At a municipal level, the Left Party works closely with the SPD, the Greens and, in some cases, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Government involvement at federal level is no longer excluded.

Under these circumstances, the pressure is growing on the Left Party to clearly define itself politically. It is doing this with its new programme. Obscured by a welter of criticism of capitalism, promises of reforms, and demands for a better society, the 80-page document is fully committed to the existing order, to its laws and institutions.

The preamble to the draft programme calls for “a different economic and social system: democratic socialism”, for an economy and politics centred on “the vital needs and interests of the majority of the people”, and even for “a change of system, because capitalism, based on inequality, exploitation, expansion and competition, is incompatible with these goals.”

Leafing further through the document, however, it defends all the pillars of capitalism—the bourgeois constitution, capitalist property and even international institutions like the European Union and the UN.

Under the headline “Left Reform Projects - steps towards societal transformation”, it declares its commitment to the constitution and state. “The Federal Republic of Germany should

be a democratic and a social constitutional state,” it says. There is no mention of a socialist state.

The experts from the former East Germany, who sat in the programme committee, know the importance of this terminological difference very well. The democratic constitutional state is a bourgeois state, which defends the interests of the capitalists and the legal relationships on which they are based against the overwhelming majority of the people. A socialist state, however, defends the interests of the working class against the claims of capital and overturns capitalist property.

Further down, the draft programme states, that “a crisis-free, social, environmental and peaceful capitalism is not possible”. It calls for the “overcoming of capitalism.” But this is to be achieved by gradual reforms within the existing social order. “The result of social and political struggles and changes in power relations” will create the “initial conditions for further democratic-socialist transformations”, the programme says.

This is no different from the reformist programmes of social democracy. In this respect, the draft programme is like a flea market. There is no reformist concept that is too worn-out or outdated to be found here—from “economic democracy”, to “employee ownership” and “workers co-management”.

In practice, such social-democratic promises of reform have always given way to the dictates of the financial markets and the export industry. This has gone so far that the term “reform” is no longer taken to mean social progress, but social retrogression—as in the Hartz IV reforms, labour market deregulation, and the raising of the retirement age.

This also applies to the Left Party. In ten years of rule in the Berlin Senate (state government), the Left Party has done the opposite of what it now promises in the draft programme: it has rescued the speculators with handouts worth billions, imposed job and wage cuts in the public sector, cut funds for universities, schools and day care centres and sold off public housing and water companies to financial sharks.

Elsewhere, the draft programme explicitly defends capitalist property. In an “economy based on solidarity,” there should be room for different forms of ownership - “state and municipal, private and social, cooperative and other forms of property”. The draft presents these different forms of ownership as the basis of “democratic socialism” - supposedly in contrast to capitalism.

In fact, there have always been such different forms of ownership under capitalism. The state took certain sectors of the economy under its wing if they were indispensable for the functioning of the capitalist economy as a whole, or if they required long-term investments, or—as was the case in the recent

financial crisis with the Hypo Real Estate (HRE)—if their losses threatened the profits of other banks.

This sort of nationalisation of losses has nothing to do with socialism. Capitalist nationalizations do not change the subordination of economic life to the laws of the market and the profit demands of the capitalists. On the contrary, they help to secure the claims to profit.

The draft programme even defends social inequality. “Social inequality in income and wealth are only justified when they are based on differing levels of performance or are necessary as incentives for the management of social tasks,” it states. Such a statement could also be found in the programme of the free-market Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Besides the commitment to the bourgeois state and constitution, the draft programme contains numerous formulations indicating the reliability of the Left Party for the ruling class in foreign policy and military issues. Up to now, the Left Party’s rejections of NATO, its opposition to foreign military missions and criticism of Israel’s policy towards the Palestinians have been the main obstacle for the party’s acceptance into the federal government.

Now, the draft programme explicitly acknowledges the existence of Israel and commits the party to defending it. There had been clashes over these questions, after some party members were involved in the aid flotilla to Gaza and they were accused of anti-Semitism by various media. Party leader Gregor Gysi finally prevailed in ensuring that party members no longer participate in such activities that are critical of Israel and ensured that support of the Israeli state is enshrined in the programme.

The demand for the dissolution of NATO is still in the draft programme, but it also calls for its replacement by a new “collective security system involving Russia.” From this fundamental affirmation of a “collective security system” (a euphemism for a military alliance) to the recognition of NATO, which already cooperates in many fields with Russia, is then only a small step.

Given the growing tensions within the NATO alliance, the pro-Russian attitude of the Left Party could also soon find support in other parties. The many threads that still connect the Left Party—due to its East German origins—with Russia could then play an important role.

An entire paragraph of the draft is devoted to the “reform and strengthening of the United Nations.” This thieves’ kitchen of the great powers is called “the most important institution for the peaceful understanding between states and societies in the world.”

Because the UN increasingly legitimises imperialist wars under the guise of the “Responsibility to Protect”, as recently in Libya, for the Left Party it is also only a short step from here to supporting military operations. On their journey from being a pacifist party to a party of war, the first step of the Greens was as well to support “peace operations” by forces under UN command.

The Left Party does not call for the dissolution of the German army. A few months ago, the party’s defence policy spokesman, Jan van Aken, stressed that the Left Party stands for the *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) being a non-aggressive force. The war in Afghanistan, which has officially been defined as a “peace and reconstruction mission” since 2001, is easily compatible with this

stance of the Left Party.

Other long passages of the draft programme are devoted to feminist and environmental issues. Here, the Left Party is clearly trying to pander to those petty bourgeois layers who, under the political influence of the Greens, are moving to the right.

The new party programme will most likely be adopted in Erfurt after the usual heated debates over secondary issues. It marks a further shift to the right by the Left Party.

From the beginning, the organisation’s name has been a deceit. Apart from the name, there is nothing left-wing about this party. Its predecessor, the PDS, played an important role in 1989/90, directing the protests against the East German regime into the path of capitalist restoration and reunification. Afterwards, it sought to keep the revolt against the economic and social decline in eastern Germany under control.

The WASG was created by veteran SPD and trade union officials, who feared that the SPD would lose its ability to control the working class because of the Hartz “reforms”.

Now, in the face of the deepest crisis of capitalism in seven decades and massive attacks on the working class throughout Europe, the party and its programme are committed to the bourgeois state and its constitution, and are adapting themselves to official German foreign policy.

Undoubtedly, the Socialist Alternative (SAV), Marx 21, the Communist Platform and other pseudo-left currents that are active inside the ranks of the Left Party will support this manoeuvre. They will point to this or that “radical” formulation to distract from the right-wing positions of the programme and the right-wing character of the Left Party.

To really fight against war, social degradation, exploitation and capitalism, it is necessary to break with the Left Party and its petty bourgeois appendages. The working class needs to build a revolutionary, i.e. independent, international and socialist party. The Socialist Equality Party, as a section of the Fourth International, is such a party.



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