

German Left Party student association moves further to the right

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Last weekend, the student association of Germany's Left Party (SDS) held a congress titled "Capitalism vs. Democracy" in Cologne. The congress marked a sharp shift to the right by the Left Party and its middle-class appendages, as class conflicts and the capitalist crisis intensify.

Pseudo-left groups such Marx 21 and Socialist Alternative (SAV) play a significant role in the SDS and account for a significant portion of its membership. Marx21 is the German affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the US International Socialist Organisation (ISO); SAV is attached to the International Militant Tendency. In recent years, these organisations have provided a "left" guise for the Left Party's right-wing policies. Amid growing attacks on social rights across Europe, however, they are moving further to the right.

At the congress itself, there was barely any mention of socialism or any genuine critique of capitalism. Instead, those present, including virtually the entire leadership of the Left Party, paraded their statesmanlike qualities and readiness to go into government.

In an interview with the newspaper *Junge Welt* on Monday, the political director of the SDS, Paula Rauch, summed up the congress. She pointed out that many of the participants did not regard themselves as socialists. "But this is not necessarily bad," she said, "because it does not really have much significance for our concrete political practice." Rauch added that she sees no value in "abstract utopias", but wanted to clarify "concrete, immediate alternatives".

In fact, discussion at the congress concentrated largely on how attacks on workers in Germany and Europe and preparations for Middle East wars could be enforced by forces claiming to represent an alternative to Germany's current conservative government.

The head of the Left Party, Katja Kipping, laid down the roadmap for the congress on its opening evening. At the main meeting on Friday, she defended her party's turn to traditional supporters of the Green Party (see article: "German Left Party moves further to the right," December 3, 2012) and its preparation for participation in government. The main problem of capitalism, she explained, was not just the pursuit of profit but also the "pressure for more and more [economic] growth".

The Greens repeatedly resort to similar reactionary arguments to justify cutting jobs and wages. This is particularly the case now, as the euro zone enters a deep recession and auto makers prepare to eliminate millions of jobs. With its "green turn," the Left Party is preparing to suppress worker's resistance to the attacks ahead.

This was underlined by the sociologist and Left Party ideologue Christoph Butterwegge, who appeared on the platform alongside Kipping. When a young woman in the audience spoke up in favour of an "anti-capitalist perspective," he grabbed the microphone to rule out any anti-capitalist stance. "The issue here is not who has the reddest flag", he retorted. Instead of talking about capitalism, one must formulate concrete demands for a minimum wage. Similar proposals can be found in the programmes of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens.

Discussion on Saturday continued along the same lines, in around 50 separate events. One of the meetings with the largest attendance featured a podium discussion between Gregor Gysi, chairman of the Left in the Bundestag, and Joachim Paul, chairman of the Pirate Party faction in the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia. The representative of the Pirate Party used the opportunity to defend his party's right-wing programme, while Gysi defended the disastrous record of his party in its decade-long coalition with the SPD in Berlin.

Until now, Left Party representatives tried to avoid discussing the coalition that led the Berlin Senate from 2001 until 2011—a period in which the Left Party enforced unprecedented social cuts. Almost every aspect of social spending was slashed to compensate for the losses of the bankrupt Berlin Banking Company.

The SPD-Left Party Senate withdrew from the local government employers' association in order to cut public sector wages and eliminate tens of thousands of jobs. It privatised water works, hospitals, and state-run housing associations, and cut large numbers of jobs and student places at universities while starving the education system of funds.

Speaking to the congress, Gysi sought to present this balance sheet in the most favourable light and condition the party for participation in government and implementing new social attacks.

There was not a single challenge to his presentation from the 150-strong audience.

The issue of government involvement and the necessity for a specific government policy was discussed at many of the forums. In particular, representatives of SAV and Marx21 spoke out in favour of Left Party participation in government. Rather than completely rejecting such a step, they stressed the importance of developing a concrete programme for a government involving the Left Party.

Amid the intensification of the class struggle in Europe, these tendencies are moving to the right and closing ranks with the ruling elite. They are preparing to impose social attacks on workers, and support a government that does so. They regard even a verbal reference to socialism or social issues as a disruptive diversion. Kipping had recently announced that the Left Party no longer proposed putting up posters in the coming elections against the anti-welfare Hartz 4 laws. This had been one of her party's main slogans in the past.

These organisations' readiness to support the German state was underlined by the discussions on foreign policy at the congress. Leading politicians shamelessly defended the reactionary positions of German and American imperialism. At one meeting, the leader of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Alex Callinicos, openly supported the election of the Egyptian president, Mohammed Mursi.

His party colleague, Christine Buchholz, a Left Party deputy in the Bundestag and member of its Defence Committee, praised the Egyptian head of state and declared that workers in Egypt were able to openly articulate their social concerns under his rule. Mursi was working, she said, to overthrow the old security apparatus. Buchholz went on to report on how proud she was to meet with representatives of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood in a recent trip she made to Egypt. She went on to praise its social work as a model for the European left.

This is under conditions where Mursi has not only emerged as the new prop for US foreign policy in the region but is also brutally suppressing strikes and demonstrations by political opponents.

Left Party defence spokesman Wolfgang Gehrcke appeared on a platform with Rim Farha, a member of the executive of the Syrian Democratic Forum (SDF), to discuss the Left Party's policy on Syria. Though Gehrcke cynically spoke in general terms against foreign intervention, he declared that he maintained links with all the main opposition groups that are fighting the imperialist proxy war in Syria, which he supported unreservedly.

All the groups he mentioned, including the SDF, support the Free Syrian Army mercenaries, which, in alliance with the US and its allies, are fighting to overthrow Syrian president Assad and set up a puppet regime. Gehrcke repeatedly stressed the good relations

he maintained with Germany's secret service, the BND.

At other meetings, there was an overwhelming consensus that the Left Party and its fraternal organisations across Europe should defend the European Union (EU) and its institutions. On Friday, Kipping had already stressed that she sought to maintain the EU. She appeared on a platform with an advisor to the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), Theodoros Paraskevopoulos, who added that it was essential to preserve the euro as Europe's currency.

SYRIZA currently plays a key role in permitting the Greek government to enforce brutal social attacks on the population dictated by the EU. At the same time, it is preparing to take over the reins of power if the current government proves incapable of implementing EU austerity policies. Paraskevopoulos justified this position, stressing that no other policy was possible under the current circumstances.

No opposition or even critical questions came from the audience in the many forums and plenums. Gysi's defence of the Left Party-SPD coalition in Berlin won almost unanimous support, as did Gehrcke's war policy and Kipping's hostility to economic growth. However superficial, contradictory and reactionary the contributions were, the audience greeted them with applause.

The congress highlights the widening class gulf between layers of the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. Delegates were more interested in how they could secure their own involvement in the world of bourgeois politics than in urgent social and political issues. They are completely hostile to the needs and interests of working people.

The contempt by these forces for the working class was summed up in a comment made by Paula Rauch, who was impressed by the important role SYRIZA now plays in Greek politics. After one report by a SYRIZA representative, blithely ignoring the massive and painful cuts devastating Greek society, she declared: "When one hears this, one gets quite envious of Greece."



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