

Marx 21 Congress: Anti-Marxists meet in Berlin

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The “Marx Is Muss” [“Marx is a must”] congress taking place this weekend in Berlin is a shabby operation organised by the Marx 21 group aimed at promoting right-wing and imperialist policy under a pseudo-left garb. Marx 21 is a faction inside the German Left Party, with links to the International Socialist Tendency.

The congress is one of a number of well-organized and well-financed events that enable bourgeois politicians, young careerists and academic cynics to “network” and prepare their next political manoeuvres. These forces have nothing in common with genuine socialist politics and the political and social struggles of the working class.

A central focus of the congress is to mobilize support for the Left Party, and a Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Left Party-Green coalition government following the German parliamentary elections due in September. One discussion at the congress is entitled “Red-Red-Green—A vision for change?”

One of the main speakers at the gathering this weekend is Left Party chairman Bernd Riexinger, who has in advance of the election declared his readiness to back the SDP candidate for chancellor, Peer Steinbrück. Another attendee is Tom Strohshneider, editor of the Left Party’s journal *Neues Deutschland*, which regularly promotes so-called red-red-green alliances.

That Marx 21 is even prepared to discuss the possibility of a SPD-Left Party-Green government reveals its anti-working class character.

Such a government would not pose a “left” alternative to the current conservative government under Angela Merkel. Rather it would continue and intensify the attacks on the European and German working class.

When the SPD and Greens criticise the Merkel government they do so largely from the right. In regard to foreign policy, these parties criticise Merkel for not taking part in the imperialist war against Libya and complain she has not done enough to support the preparations for war

against Syria. At home, they complain that the government demands massive cuts in Europe while not doing enough to impose austerity measures in Germany.

The agenda for the congress makes clear that Marx 21 would actively support a red-red-green government precisely because of its right-wing policies.

The main speaker at a panel dedicated to the “debt ceiling” is Axel Troost, the financial expert of the Left Party. Troost is an outspoken advocate of the debt ceiling, which is one of the primary means of implementing social cuts, layoffs and privatisations in German federal, state and local administrations. Troost has described the recent approval of the debt ceiling by the Left Party in the state of Saxony as a “practical success” and “great progress”.

The conference participants will consider political and economic perspectives aimed at impoverishing the working class in Germany and throughout Europe. One meeting called “Does the left advocate the salvation of Europe?” deals with the dispute currently raging in the Left Party and its European allies as to whether the euro should be preserved or replaced by the old national currencies. From the standpoint of the working class, both variants would have devastating consequences and mean the continuation of austerity, merely through the medium of different currencies.

The overtly right-wing character of the congress is reflected in its support for imperialist intervention in Syria. Marx 21 is one of the most vocal supporters of the aggression organised by the great powers to topple the Assad regime and of preparations for war against Iran.

Coinciding with the Israeli bombing of Syrian territory and the stepping up of preparations by the US and the other powers for military invasion, Marx 21 is intensifying its propaganda for war.

At the Berlin congress this weekend, Marx 21 member Frank Renken is due to discuss the “progressive nature” of the Syrian opposition. By concealing the real character

of the Syrian rebels, consisting mainly of Islamist extremist terrorists, Marx 21 is helping to mobilize support for the rape of Syria. The financing and arming of the Syrian rebels by the US and reactionary Gulf monarchies do not go far enough for Renken. In a recent article, he lamented that “the rebels do not have tanks, helicopters or aircraft” and had received “very few portable infrared-guided anti-aircraft missiles”.

The list of international invitees at the congress also provides a glimpse into its class character. Alex Callinicos, professor of European Studies at King’s College London and a leading theorist of the International Socialist Tendency, personifies the transformation of former petty bourgeois radicals into stalwarts of imperialism.

Callinicos and his co-thinkers, in response to the revolutionary mass struggles in Egypt and Tunisia in early 2011, initially gave their support to the Egyptian military and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which then suppressed the working class. He is on record attacking opponents of a war against Syria for displaying “reflexive and unthinking anti-imperialism”.

Other speakers come from Greece’s Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which plays a key role in the massive social attacks being imposed on the Greek working class. In common with Germany’s Left Party, SYRIZA defends the European Union and the trade unions, which are decisive instruments of social counterrevolution in Europe.

Based on its hypocritical and shallow criticism of austerity measures, SYRIZA has emerged as the party with the second-highest level of electoral support in Greece. The organisation has used its increased influence to suppress any independent movement of the working class and reassure international investors that Greece would repay its sovereign debt.

SYRIZA, Marx 21 and the Left Party speak for affluent and complacent middle class layers who are moving sharply to the right as the crisis of capitalism escalates. Rather than regarding the offensive launched by big finance to wipe out social gains as an opportunity to fight for socialism, these elements regard the crisis of capitalism as an occasion to advance their own careers as bourgeois politicians. They expect to be handsomely rewarded for their increasingly open support for imperialist war and attacks on the working class.

Leading representatives of Marx 21 such as Christine Buchholz and Nicole Gohlke hold seats in the Bundestag [German parliament] for the Left Party and enjoy the high

salaries paid to parliamentary deputies. The German bourgeoisie is well aware of and acknowledges the services of such petty bourgeois ex-radicals. Notably, Buchholz is a member of the Bundestag’s Defence Committee. Not only is she well informed about Germany’s military-strategic planning, she has taken an active part in its development since joining the committee in 2007.

The class divide separating the well-heeled middle class from workers is also expressed in a theoretical rejection of Marxism. On its congress web site, Marx 21 contemptuously declares that “Marxism must not just consist of Marx, Engels and Lenin”, but that “revolutionary Marxists can also learn from the ideas of [Jean-Paul] Sartre, [Hannah] Arendt and other radical thinkers”.

Pseudo-left tendencies such as Marx 21 have now moved so far to the right they no longer conceal their hostility to the working class behind empty, pseudo-socialist phrases. They openly embrace philosophies and concepts such as Sartre’s existentialism and Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism, which reject Marxism and the independent and revolutionary role of the working class.

Workers seeking to oppose the relentless attacks on their living standards and the threat of new imperialist war must treat the politics and philosophy of Marx 21 with contempt. The education of a new generation of revolutionary Marxists requires a relentless struggle against the type of politics and philosophy advanced at this weekend’s congress.



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