

# The SPD party congress and the Left Party

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The party congress of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Leipzig, which began on Thursday and concluded on Saturday, provided the disgusting spectacle of a right-wing state party preparing massive social attacks and the undermining of democratic rights. The congress' main tasks were to commit the SPD to a "grand coalition" with the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and to integrate the Left Party into its plans.

Important issues affecting the lives of millions of workers, pensioners and youth across Europe played no visible part in the debates at the congress. There was no mention of the European-wide recession, the increase in lay-offs and social attacks, the growth of far-right and fascist organisations, or the mass protests in France or Greece.

As the congress began, European Union (EU) statistics agency Eurostat presented shocking figures on the extent of the social crisis in Europe. Economic output is stagnant or declining sharply. In the 28 EU member states, almost 27 million people are without a job. In Italy and Spain, youth unemployment is 40 percent and 60 percent, respectively. Entire regions are sinking into poverty.

This failed to make any impression on the 600 SPD delegates, who almost without exception hold well-paying jobs in government, the state or the trade union apparatus. They debated the necessity of a grand coalition to continue and intensify the policies which have led to social and political catastrophe in Europe.

The SPD's right-wing, pro-business policies led to its second-worst electoral result in its history in September. In his speech to the congress, SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel stated that the reason for the result was that the party had focused too strongly on the issue of taxes. The electorate had not understood the complexity of this matter, he said.

In its election rhetoric, the SPD had promised more

justice in the tax system and higher taxes for the rich. In the coalition talks with the CDU/CSU, this demand now plays no role. Gabriel declared before the congress that the coalition talks would not fail due to any insistence on the part of his party on tax increases.

During the election campaign, SPD leading candidate Peer Steinbrück appeared as a lackey of the wealthy and met with widespread rejection. In a cynical speech at the congress, he warned against a left turn in the party. With the remark that the party had lost the election but not its wits, he concluded his temporary role as Chancellor candidate; he will return to his place in the salons and clubs of the super-rich. The delegates gave him a standing ovation lasting several minutes and a large bunch of red roses.

The SPD made important overtures towards the Left Party at the congress. On the first day, a central motion of the party executive, allowing future coalitions with the Left Party, was passed with only one vote against. Until now, the SPD leadership had categorically excluded governing in a coalition with the Left Party at the federal level. The motion only opposed cooperation with right-wing populists and the far right.

The resolution referred to cooperation with all democratic parties in order to achieve a stable government majority. Above all, this required a binding coalition agreement. In addition, the SPD demanded that "a responsible European and foreign policy must be guaranteed, in the framework of our international obligations."

This was directed at the Left Party in particular, as the SPD has justified its former opposition to cooperation by pointing to the Left Party's foreign policy positions. The Left Party was an unreliable partner on the issues of operations by the German army and the funding of bailouts for European states, and this did not represent a responsible foreign policy, the SPD claimed.

Both party General Secretary Andrea Nahles and

Gabriel made clear that they expected a clear signal from the Left Party acknowledging the interests of German imperialism. Gabriel told a press conference, “The decision over future collaboration does not reside in the SPD headquarters, but in Karl Liebknecht House”—the headquarters of the Left Party.

Left Party head Gregor Gysi responded immediately. He welcomed the SPD’s decision and valued it as a “step towards political and European normality.” As always with the SPD, the decision had come late, “almost too late,” he added. He called on the SPD to hold detailed talks immediately.

The Left Party has been working for this outcome for some time. In the election campaign, it repeatedly offered its services as a partner to the Greens and SPD to implement their right-wing programme. Now they are going a step further and supporting the SPD as it enters a grand coalition.

It is no accident that the Left Party has redefined its position on war in recent weeks. This summer, Gysi wrote the foreword to a collection of essays titled “Left foreign policy: perspectives for reform,” in which leading Left Party politicians openly argued for German military interventions, the defence of imperialist alliances and agreements, close transatlantic cooperation with the United States, and a greater role for Germany.

The Left Party claims that it is supporting the SPD to include as many social-democratic values in the coalition agreement with the CDU/CSU as possible. In fact this list of social democratic values include vicious attacks on incomes and social rights, such as the Hartz IV anti-welfare laws, the Agenda 2010 program, retirement at 67, bank bailouts, and drastic social attacks across Europe.

The coming together of the Left Party and the SPD amid talks over a grand coalition is aimed less at the preparation of an alternative coalition of the Greens, Left Party and SPD, than at integrating the Left Party into preparations for the grand coalition. The Left Party will be desperately needed to protect and defend the government against the growing opposition of broad layers of the population.

The Left Party is working closely with the trade unions, which are the most important advocates of a grand coalition along with the business associations. The outgoing head of the German Confederation of

trade unions (DGB), Michael Sommer, spoke at the congress to urge immediate support for a grand coalition.

In the face of the intensification of the global capitalist crisis and the coming social struggles, the entire political establishment is moving ever closer together and participating in the preparation of a government dedicated to major attacks on the population.



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