

Germany: The Left Party defends the EU

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On Sunday, the Party of the European Left (PEL) held an event in Berlin in preparation for this year's European Parliament elections.

Beforehand, the leaders of Germany's Left Party laid red carnations and a wreath at the memorial for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who were murdered on 15 January 1919. They were observing an annual ritual that goes back to the Weimar Republic and the former East Germany. Whereas in the past, it was the leaders of the East German Stalinists, Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, who made a pilgrimage to the memorial for the two murdered revolutionaries, today it was Left Party leaders Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping and Oskar Lafontaine.

However, none of these figures has anything in common with the two people they were supposedly honoring. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were revolutionary socialists who chose to go to jail for their beliefs rather than submit to the pressure of their political opponents. Ulbricht and Honecker were Stalinist lackeys, and their successors in the Left Party are bourgeois politicians who have long been part of Berlin's apparatus of power.

The PEL meeting at the Berlin Volksbühne was characterized by the same deception as at the Luxemburg-Liebknecht rally. Although speakers criticized the European Union, some quite fiercely, they did so only in order to defend the EU.

This event was preceded by a public debate on the draft European election program of the Left Party. Party leader Gysi and other representatives of the party's right wing had publicly distanced themselves from a passage in the draft program describing the EU as "neoliberal, militarist and a widely undemocratic power" and condemning the "depredations of the big banks, the bureaucracy and the insatiability of the defense companies." This paragraph can be traced to the so-called "left" wing of the party around Sahra

Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine.

At the event at the Volksbühne, the same speakers—including Lafontaine and Wagenknecht—declared their support for the EU. Their criticism was not aimed at the abolition of the EU, but only at changing its policies, they proclaimed.

Gysi pledged that the Left Party wanted to "fight to ensure that the European idea is attractive again." They did not want to abolish the EU, but to "fundamentally change it, making it more democratic, more peaceful and more social."

Lafontaine said it was absurd to accuse the Left Party of hostility towards Europe. "We are the true Europeans; the others are against the spirit of Europe," he said. "And it is in this sense that we will conduct the campaign."

Party Chair Bernd Riexinger assured the *Berliner Zeitung*: "The EU is for us, in a positive sense, a space in which to develop politically, which we want to make better, more social and equitable."

Wagenknecht declared that those who wanted to counteract anti-European sentiments had to stand up for different European treaties and another form of European integration.

The national secretary of the French Communist Party and chair of the Party of the European Left, Pierre Laurent, announced, "The hour of the left has come." He promised a "new era of social, democratic and ecological achievements of the peoples of Europe" and called for the all forces to gather behind Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), who is running for the presidency of the European Commission. Tsipras, who was originally to have spoken in Berlin, defends Greece's membership in the EU, even though its austerity diktats mean unemployment and abject poverty for millions of Greeks.

The meeting at the Volksbühne has clearly shown

why the Left Party criticizes the EU. It is not because it wants to abolish this undemocratic tool of European economic, financial and great power interests, but to defend it against the growing opposition of broad social layers. To this end, it encourages the illusion that the EU can be turned into a vehicle for social progress.

There is a division of labour between the various wings of the party. While Lafontaine and Wagenknecht place criticism of the EU in the foreground, Gysi assures the ruling circles in Brussels and Berlin of the unconditional loyalty of the party. They all have the same goal: the defense of the EU and its institutions against mounting social opposition.

A paper on the electoral strategy of the Left Party, which the party leadership wants to discuss next weekend, expresses this unequivocally. The daily *Neues Deutschland* cites the strategy paper, which says that in many of its member states the EU has been “thrown into a deep crisis of legitimacy.” Many of the Left Party’s voters are also plagued by this skepticism. In these circumstances, “the Left are called upon to take up the fight for the European Union throughout Europe.”

In this battle for the European Union, more radical phrases are quite appropriate, it says. Since “the desire for alternatives and criticism of the EU are tangible,” it is necessary to fight it out “with the ruling [class].” The Left Party wants to employ a “clear language in the election campaign” and even “calmly express some more radical demands.”

These are the words of unscrupulous political cynics. The representatives of the Left Party know very well that the EU can neither be changed by “clear language” nor by “some more radical demands.” It is not a value-neutral authority that can be democratically controlled and influenced. It serves the major European powers, corporations and banks as a control center for their attacks on social and democratic rights, stepping up state powers and militarism.

The Left Party does not defend the EU because it has illusions in its ability to be reformed, but because it represents the same social interests as the EU. It is a right-wing, bourgeois party, which merely utilizes left phrases to confuse the growing opposition to the EU and suffocate it.

The only way to oppose the EU is the concerted mobilization of the European working class on the

basis of a socialist program. In their joint statement for the European elections, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Germany) and the Socialist Equality Party (Britain) oppose the EU and call for the United Socialist States of Europe. The Left Party vehemently rejects this.



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