

German Left Party defends the European Union at party conference

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The Left Party's party conference on Europe held in Hamburg last weekend sent a clear signal to the German and European ruling elite. The party gave its firm backing to the European Union (EU) and signaled its readiness to defend it against growing popular opposition.

The conference underscored the fact that all the various factions and tendencies in the Left Party are in agreement on this question. The delegates adopted a draft programme that left no doubt about its support for the EU, and chose candidates who openly stand for cooperation with the EU.

With 76.5 percent of the delegate's vote, Gabi Zimmer, the current chairwoman of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left fraction in the European Parliament and former national chair of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, the successor organisation to the Stalinist state party in East Germany), was elected as leading candidate in the European elections. The names who followed on the list, Thomas Händel, Cornelia Ernst and Helmut Scholz, are all long-time members of the European Parliament.

In her speech, Zimmer spoke out against presenting a gloomy picture of the European Union, "which no-one wants to have anything to do with any more." The Left Party had to "fight for this European Union," because "the loss of trust between the citizens and the political institutions of the EU and its member states has never been so great as it is now."

Left Party chairman Gregor Gysi noted that on the question of defending the EU, all factions of the Left Party were united. All of the conflicts in the run up to the conference had been clarified, he said. In reality, it had not been about a dispute over content; "rather there were unfortunate formulations, which we have overcome."

Gysi was referring to the conflict over a passage in the introduction to the original draft programme, which described the EU as a "neoliberal, militaristic and extremely undemocratic power." Initially, the party executive removed the formulation, before presenting a complete redraft of the introduction prior to the party conference. The text adopted contains no critical formulations on the EU, calling instead for "developing the European Union into a real community of solidarity." The EU had "lost sight of its goal of creating and maintaining peace, including social peace."

These statements speak volumes about the cynical, right-wing character of the Left Party. The EU has not "lost sight of" the interests of the population, but is rather diametrically opposed to them. The EU is the instrument through which the ruling class in Europe is destroying all the democratic and social rights fought for by the working class. The EU is synonymous with mass unemployment, neo-colonial wars and the deaths of thousands of migrants who drown trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

The pro-EU programme was also supported by the supposedly anti-EU faction of the party. The deputy chairwoman, Sarah Wagenknecht, gave her backing to the new draft and praised the "balanced list of candidates." In an interview in Monday's edition of the daily *Junge Welt*, which is close to the Left Party, she stated that she had never sought the abolition of the euro. Executive committee members Wolfgang Gehrcke and Diether Dehm, who proposed the anti-EU draft, officially withdrew it before a vote.

The stance of the so-called EU critics, who have been falsely described as the left of the party, shows that the original draft program had nothing to do with a principled opposition to the EU. It merely reflected the

fears of a section of the party that overt support for the EU could limit their ability to control growing popular opposition.

The speeches delivered by leading party members made clear that the Left Party supports the EU because of, rather than in spite of, its undemocratic, anti-social and militarist policies. In common with all other parties in the German parliament, the Left Party defends the interests of German imperialism, which uses the EU to pursue its economic and geopolitical interests.

Gysi urged, “The original idea of European integration as a left and humanist idea must be defended by criticising its false friends. That is also our task. However, Europe also includes Eastern Europe, it also includes Russia. We want the whole of Europe.”

At the same time, he warned that the collapse of the euro would be a step backwards for European integration, which “we particularly don’t want.” The reintroduction of national currencies would make speculation easier and “sharply accelerate social collapse,” and “Germany’s export economy would have to reckon with severe difficulties. Therefore I say to you: no, we also have to save the euro.”

In a typically disgusting and cynical manner, he made clear that the Left Party would also speak out in favour of military methods to defend German and European interests. “I am absolutely in favour of unusual suggestions. Once someone said to me: what do you think of a small EU army to protect the EU, if all national forces and nuclear weapons were eliminated? That sounds very nice. That is something that can be discussed.”

Party chairwoman Katja Kipping went a step further. She backed new defence minister Ursula von der Leyen, who is pressing a resurgence of German militarism in Africa and other regions.

When von der Leyen was named as the country’s first female defence minister, “there was a wave of criticism which we did not take part in for good reason,” Kipping said. “One doesn’t have to have served to do good work in this position. This is also true for a woman. And I admit, the idea that the militarist masculine generals now have a woman as their commander-in-chief made me chuckle.”

Kipping’s statements reveal the reactionary nature of identity politics represented by the Left Party and their pseudo-left hangers-on. The Left Party is using the fact

that a woman is leading the defence ministry for the first time to support German militarism. As if it makes the slightest difference to millions of workers in Germany and internationally whether a man or a woman organises the return of German imperialism to the global stage.

The European party conference marks a further sharp shift to the right by the Left Party. In the explosive political and social situation in Germany and Europe, the Left Party is preparing to take over the responsibility of government and step up the bourgeoisie’s unpopular policies of war and austerity. In the past, unconditional support for the EU and the advocacy of foreign military interventions by the German army were hurdles to the participation of the Left Party in a coalition on the federal level. The Left Party has swallowed its criticisms almost entirely, earning praise from the ruling elite.

Zeit Online described the party conference as a “step in the direction of government participation.” Social Democratic Party (SPD) deputy chairman Ralf Stegner, in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, spoke in favour of “regular contact for discussion at the leadership level” with the Left Party. The SPD should enter the election campaign in 2017 with the goal, “Angela Merkel must go.” The Left Party was a “potential partner, if we don’t make them taboo.” Discussions with trustworthy partners like Gysi or Dietmar Bartsch had to begin quickly, he added.



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