

German Left Party consolidates itself as an establishment party

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The Fourth Annual Congress of the German Left Party took place last weekend in Berlin under conditions that were exceptional in several respects. Following two world wars and heinous crimes it committed in the last century, Germany is once again adopting an aggressive foreign policy. The gulf between the population, which rejects this course, and the political and media establishment, which supports it, is huge. A low voter turnout is expected for the European elections later this month along with a significant increase in votes for parties that reject the European Union.

Against this background, the Left Party is sending a clear message to the ruling class. It is a loyal opposition party, which agrees with the government on all essential points. Its occasional criticisms of the course adopted by the government are aimed solely at containing and defusing popular discontent. In the past, conferences of the party were characterized by the occasional dispute and polemic. Now, however, the Left Party has consolidated itself as an establishment party, ready to take over the reins of government at the federal level.

By a large majority, delegates reelected the party chairpersons, Bernd Riexinger (89 percent) and Katja Kipping (77 percent), who are both avid adherents of coalitions with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens. In her speech, Kipping praised the current coalition of the Left Party with the SPD in the state of Brandenburg as a “terrific product” that has the potential to become “an export hit.”

In Thuringia, the Left Party hopes that its leading member, Bodo Ramelow, will take over as state premier following the upcoming state election. This would be the first state prime minister in the history of the party. Riexinger boasted that the policies of the Left Party had already been adopted by the government parties. He gave as one example the minimum wage of 8.50 euros, which was recently agreed by the grand coalition in Berlin.

Delegates elected as joint deputy party chairs Caren Lay (55 percent), Janine Wissler (83 percent), Tobias Pflüger (54 percent) and Axel Troost (55 percent). The election of Lay, a member of the Forum of Democratic Socialism (FDS), and the high vote total for Wissler (a member of the state capitalist Marx21 group inside the Left Party) are indicative of the course of the Left Party. Both the FDS and Marx21 aggressively campaign for SPD-Green alliances and are staunch supporters of the foreign policy of the federal government.

The most prominent FDS member, Stefan Liebich, collaborated

in drawing up the strategy paper “New Power, New Responsibility—elements of German foreign and security policy for a changing world.” The document provides the template for the aggressive foreign policy announced by German President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) at the Munich Security Conference earlier this year. This policy has been put into practice in Ukraine in the form of German support for the fascist-led coup in Kiev and NATO provocations against Russia.

The Left Party actively supports the revival of German militarism and German big power politics. Under Liebich’s leadership, five deputies of the Left Party voted in April in favor of an overseas deployment of the German army, the first such vote by deputies in the party’s history. Another leading member of the Left Party and Marx21, Christine Buchholz, accompanied the German defence minister in February when she visited German troops in Africa. In recognition of her activities, Buchholz was reelected as part of the party leadership, receiving the second highest number of votes.

The Congress made clear that the Left Party plays a central role in the offensive of German imperialism in Eastern Europe. Party leader Gregor Gysi closed the conference with a keynote speech on German foreign policy. He then left immediately afterwards for discussions in Moscow.

In his speech, Gysi bowed down to the state by referring to historical representatives of German and American imperialism such as Willy Brandt and Henry Kissinger. He condemned Russia’s actions in Ukraine and backed NATO, thereby implicitly positioning himself behind the war-mongering against Russia.

“Taking Crimea was illegal under international law,” he said, “due in part to the fact that on the occasion of the transfer of nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia, the territorial integrity of Ukraine had been contractually confirmed—and that included Crimea.”

He could understand “the Polish and Baltic governments,” he continued. “They had their own experience with Russia... [They say] you have to come to us with planes, soldiers, and so on. And then we have to respond. We understand your need for security, but you are now a member of NATO. Should you ever be attacked, we will defend you. But we will not escalate now by transferring troops and aircraft closer to Russia. This can be explained.”

Then he added, “And by the way, with today’s military

technology, that is all just a matter of minutes.”

This is the line that the Left Party hypocritically seeks to sell as a policy of “entente,” or even a “peace policy.” To be clear: Gysi expressed his strong support for the right-wing governments in Eastern Europe that are banging the drums loudest for the military upgrading of NATO against Russia. In the same breath, he defended Article 5 of NATO, which requires a collective response by the alliance if a member is attacked.

Gysi’s thinly disguised war policy is hard to top for its sheer cynicism. Under conditions where it is possible to strike within minutes, using “today’s military technology,” it is not necessary to deploy troops and heavy military equipment in advance to Eastern Europe!

Gysi made clear in his speech that Left Party criticism of government and NATO policy is primarily geared to dealing with the massive popular opposition to war. He warned: “Although media opinion is pretty much uniform, although all the other parties are acting pretty much in the same manner, the majority of the population thinks otherwise. There are misgivings about this type of manipulation of opinion—by both the media and other political parties. And that means we now have a slightly greater impact than in the past, which we should not squander.”

The Left Party articulates the stance of influential sections of the German bourgeoisie that warn against an overly confrontational course toward Russia. In recent weeks, a number of leading representatives of German industry have spoken repeatedly against sanctions. In a situation in which the government’s aggressive policy towards Russia risks jeopardizing the economic interests of German capitalism, the Left Party publicly offers its services to big business.

Gysi praised the economic model of the European Union and called for “close economic ties” and “cooperation” between the EU and Eastern Europe. He then criticized the spying on business interests in Germany carried out by the American National Security Agency (NSA) and combined this with a direct appeal to the corporations: “Now I would say to the German business community: which party actually protects German business? The (conservative) union parties—forget it! The SPD—forget it! The Greens—forget it! Only the Left Party protects you. Because we say it is outrageous what is happening! It is outrageous!”

At the same time, Gysi made unmistakably clear that his criticism of the United States and the German government did not involve any criticism of their close transatlantic alliance. He cynically declared: “I would call Obama and would say: with all due respect, that’s going too far. We have to strike a deal that prohibits [such spying]. With just a few exceptions, which we have to agree on exactly. This is only way to proceed here.”

In other words, the massive spying operation on the population by the American and German intelligence services should not be terminated, but rather coordinated as between equal partners.

The hypocrisy of Gysi’s speech was characteristic of the entire Congress. A motion titled “For Ukraine the slogan also applies: International Solidarity” criticized the “playing down of the role of fascists in Ukraine.” In fact, the motion itself downplays their role by representing the fascist-led coup orchestrated by the West in Kiev as a democratic people’s movement.

The statement declares: “There were good reasons for the people in the Kiev Maidan to protest against the government of Viktor Yanukovich.” However, it was a “grave error by the democratic forces on the Maidan... to accept the participation of the fascist Svoboda party and the Right Sector.”

A party that describes collaboration with fascists as an “error,” supports German militarism and NATO, and defends the EU and German big business while striving to strike a deal with the US intelligence agencies can be described only as a reactionary bourgeois party.

The right-wing development of the Left Party flows logically from its history. Its predecessor parties, the East German Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), suppressed for decades any independent movement of the working class in former East Germany, and then, in close cooperation with West German politicians and big business, did the same during the period of capitalist restoration. Twenty-five years later, in the midst of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the Left Party stands ready to defend the interests of German imperialism worldwide and enforce law and order at home.

This was underlined by Hans Modrow, the last premier of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and current chairman of the Council of Elders of the Left Party. Addressing the Congress, Modrow declared: “Wherever we look today, whether in North Africa, Syria, Ukraine—everywhere there is violence. Those who believe that the absence of violence in the autumn of 1989 was a gift from God or merely the result of the ‘No violence’ slogan of the opposition are making a big mistake. When we made the first step towards the PDS in December 1989 we had one main goal: The country must remain governable and not be plunged into violent chaos.”



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