

German Left Party backs Schäuble and European austerity policies

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The Left Party voted overwhelmingly in favour of extending the so-called aid programme for Greece until the end of June. In the parliamentary vote, 41 members of the Left Party fraction voted yes, 10 abstained and only 3 voted no. All together, 542 members of parliament agreed, 32 voted no and 13 abstained.

The class character of the Left Party—at its core, it is a right-wing bourgeois party—has seldom been so apparent. By agreeing to “Greek aid,” the Left Party is backing the German government, the European Union (EU), the banks and their brutal austerity policies in Greece and Europe as a whole. It is openly providing its blessing to a policy it previously pretended to reject.

Two years ago, Gregor Gysi, chair of the Left fraction in parliament, gave a speech to parliament, in which he said: “The rescue packages are not for the Greeks, but exclusively for the banks, investors and hedge funds. They and no one else are receiving this money.”

He called the austerity measures attached to the package “so antisocial that it more than astonished me.” Then he warned of the consequences: “the minimum wage in Greece must be cut from 751 to 586 euros a month. Wages must be cut by 22 percent. Fifteen thousand public sector workers must be laid off this year and 150,000 must be laid off by 2014. Pensions will have to be reduced by 14 billion euros in the next three years.”

As recently as December of last year, the deputy fraction president of the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch, declared, “We do not want to let ourselves be ensnared by this strategy. This is not our policy.... Furthermore, this course is wrong because it will provide a breeding ground for resentments and hostility to foreigners. We reject it because it is essentially a Christmas bonus for the speculators. You will never see us participating in this.”

So much for the “never” of the Left Party! Though there has been no change of course in Greece—besides the fact that austerity is now being carried out by Syriza, the Left Party’s Greek affiliates, in coalition with the right-wing Independent Greeks—Gysi announced to the enthusiastic approval of the parties in government on Friday, “a large majority of us agree to Greece’s request for an extension of the aid programme by four months.”

To justify this course, Gysi fell back on the same propaganda lies frequently peddled by Greek minister president Tsipras and his finance minister, Varoufakis. “The left government in Greece is now breaking with the failed policies of cuts. This is changing Greece. It is changing Europe and us as well,” Gysi declared. Syriza’s programme is “the end of the dictatorship of the Troika,” he said, and “a clear declaration of war on the failed policies of neo-liberalism.”

In reality, the opposite is the case. After the capitulation of the Tsipras government to Schäuble and the EU a week ago on Friday, Varoufakis sent a list of proposals for new austerity measures to Brussels on Monday.

Gysi and the Left Party are just as conscious of the right-wing character of the programme for which they voted as their Greek affiliate, which worked it out. This point is underscored by a revealing document published by the Left Party-linked *Junge Welt* newspaper on Saturday. Two leaders of Syriza, Dimitris Belantis and Stathis Kouvelakis, “inform” the German Left Party members of parliament about the right-wing programme of their party in order to demand that they vote against the extension of the aid programme.

The letter reveals the cynicism and hostility to workers of the entire petty bourgeois milieu on which pseudo-left parties such as Syriza and the German Left

Party base themselves.

The letter begins: “We want to inform you and your parties about the content of the provisional agreement between the Greek government and the leadership of the euro zone on February 20 2015—or at least how we understand it. At the same time we want to give you a brief assessment of the content of the reform list sent by our Finance Minister Gianis Varoufakis to the Eurogroup. *Neither text corresponds to the main points of Syriza’s electoral programme. What is even worse, they make it impossible to implement the main points of that programme* ” (emphasis added).

The letter goes into “a few examples”: “Increasing the minimum wage to 750 euros [that is, its 2009 level] cannot be in the short-term decided ‘unilaterally’ by our Parliament. It can only be a long-term perspective, subject to the condition that it doesn’t harm the country’s ‘competitiveness’. The privatisations that are already completed will be left untouched. For those that are still underway, the process should be completed ‘respecting their legality’. No objection of principle to privatisations is to be found at any point in the text.”

Later, it says: “Almost no bill may pass in Parliament without prior consent of the Troika, which has now been renamed the ‘Institutions’, and it can’t be introduced without measures compensating its financial cost. This means that even the measures for the solution of the humanitarian crisis should be designed so as to entail no net budgetary impact.”

It even admits, “We wish to stress that the extension of the financing agreement of 2012 for four months without complying to the Memoranda, and to all their legal implications, is politically and legally impossible. To separate the financing agreement from the Memoranda is simply impossible. This means that, in violation of Syriza’s central commitment to the Greek people, the Memoranda and the set of laws enforcing them will remain substantially in place.”

And then comes the climax: “For us, it is clear that the ratification of this agreement by the European parliaments, with the consent of the parties of the radical Left, goes against the interest of the Greek workers and of the Greek people.... In our opinion, a ‘no’ vote will help the Greek Left and in particular Syriza to realise its programme. Conversely, a ‘yes’ can only create illusions and future disappointments.”

Anyone still maintaining “false illusions” in the

supposed “left” politics of Syriza or the Left Party should read the lines that conclude the letter. After these two leading Syriza members have declared that the right-wing programme of their party “goes against the interest of the Greek workers and of the Greek people,” they implore the Left Party to vote against it, so that they can “realise” it better!

The fact that the Left party voted in favour of the so-called aid programme by a large majority must serve as a warning to the working class. Amid a rapid intensification of the crisis of capitalism in Europe, the German Left Party is ready to take on the responsibility of leading the federal government in order to carry out austerity policies in Germany and all over Europe.

The ruling elites heard the message loud and clear. A comment in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* declared, “Gysi’s people have accomplished a shift and—with a clear majority for the first time—agreed to an EU aid package. They are doing what has always been asked of them: instead of warming themselves with the dogma that Europe only stands for the power of the banks, they have ventured out into the frost of political realism for the good of Syriza. One should congratulate the Left Party on its self discipline.”



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