

“Marx Is Muss” congress: Germany’s pseudo-left discusses war policy and austerity

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This year’s “Marx Is Muss” (Marx is [a] must) congress began in Berlin on May 14. It is organized by the Marx 21 network, a pseudo-left grouping inside the Left Party with close connections to the state capitalist International Socialist Tendency (IST). Among the congress sponsors are the daily newspapers *Neues Deutschland* and *Junge Welt*, which are close to the Left Party, and *taz*, the main organ of the Green Party.

A WSWs article on the Marx Is Muss congress two years ago called it “one of a number of well-organized and well-financed events that enable bourgeois politicians, young careerists and academic cynics to ‘network’ and prepare their next political manoeuvres.”

“These forces have nothing in common with genuine socialist politics and the political and social struggles of the working class,” we wrote. The congress was a “shabby operation organised by the Marx 21 group aimed at promoting right-wing and imperialist policy under a pseudo-left garb.”

This assessment has been thoroughly confirmed. The class character of the pseudo-left and its right-wing political agenda has become very clear in the past two years with their support for the counterrevolutionary putsch in Egypt in 2013, their collaboration with fascist forces in Ukraine, their propaganda for German militarism and their campaign for an more aggressive foreign policy on the part of the West directed against Russia and China.

Their support for war also finds an expression in their support for attacks on the working class. Marx 21 supports the Syriza government in Greece, which—in spite of its election promises—has provided undiminished support for the austerity policies of the troika, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission (EC). Marx 21 campaigns for similar attacks on the working class in Germany by a future coalition government of the Green Party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and Left Party.

All of the above is under discussion at the congress. Its main task consists of clothing such policies in “left” phrases so that the petty bourgeois cynics in the audience can applaud with a clear conscience. The majority of the estimated 600 attendees are students, academics, journalists and employees of numerous NGOs, politically sponsored foundations and think tanks.

The following is an incomplete, but revealing overview of the program of events:

A panel discussion with leading Syriza member Stathis Kouvelakis will discuss whether the party is “Greece’s last hope”

and whether it is possible for “a Syriza government to stop the austerity policies.”

In reality, the question was answered long ago. Syriza took less than a month after its election in January to abandon its campaign promises and capitulate all down the line. Since then, it has brutally implemented the austerity policies of the troika. On Monday, Greece transferred €750 billion to the IMF. In order to satisfy the demands of the lenders, Syriza is plundering the state retirement fund, continuing to carry out privatizations and promising deep structural reforms just like its predecessor.

The title of the opening panel on Thursday was “Between Syriza and the National Front: The polarization of Europe.” The program claimed it would discuss “with what political strategy the left [can] counter the right wing.” Rather than counter the right, the pseudo-lefts are actually preparing its path. Greece is the most instructive example of this. Syriza’s austerity policies not only play into the hands of right-wing and fascist forces, Syriza is also working with them directly. It rules in a coalition with the “Independent Greeks” (ANEL), an extreme right-wing, anti-Semitic and xenophobic party.

Independently of whether Bernd Riexinger, the president of the Left Party, admits this at the congress podium, this is the actual orientation of sections of the Left Party. In the past year, leading members of the Left Party have worked together with extreme-right forces in the so-called “Vigils for Peace” and “Peace Winter.” Last month, Left Party founding member Oskar Lafontaine praised the extreme right-winger Peter Gauweiler (Christian Social Union, CSU).

In the face of a deepening crisis of capitalism and growing class tensions, the pseudo-lefts are fusing with forces on the extreme right and transforming themselves into the “new right.”

Originally, former president of the French Left Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon—who, in his most recent book *The Era of the People*, announced the death of the left—was scheduled to take part in the opening panel discussion.

Another announced guest, who has openly lobbied for collaboration with the fascists, is Ilja Budraitskis, member of the Russian Socialist Movement. On the same day as the putsch in Kiev, Marx 21 published an interview with Budraitskis in which he openly praised the fascists as the “boldest and literally aggressive part of the movement.” “Maybe work together,” he said in answer to the question whether he wanted to “have discussion with Nazis.”

The sharp turn to the right by the pseudo-lefts goes along with their direct integration into the capitalist policies of the government. Under the title “Red-red-green in the states: Perspective for a change of policy,” Janine Wissler and Rico Gebhardt discussed Left Party participation in the government. Gebhardt is the president of the Left Party fraction in the Saxon state parliament. Both are more or less personifications of “left-wing” austerity politics.

As the main candidate of the Left Party in the state parliamentary elections in Hesse, Wissler carried out exploratory talks with the SPD and the Greens (who implemented Hartz IV), and made her own suggestions for cuts. Gebhardt had already voted for the introduction of the debt limit, as the representative of the Left Party in the Saxon state Senate at the beginning of 2013. The debt limit forbids associations, states and communities from taking on new debts starting in 2020 and requires cuts to social programs, layoffs and privatizations instead.

The class character of the pseudo-left is at its clearest, however, with regard to foreign policy. Significantly, an event with Christine Buchholz and Gerry Woop is titled “The world spinning out of control—what foreign policy does the left need?”

The description reads, “Whether Central Africa, poison gas destruction in the Mediterranean or the support for the Kurds: the party's categorical no for any foreign intervention has again and again been challenged by those who want to prepare [the party] for a coalition.” Behind this is “another fundamental question: how do we approach wars that break out in other countries? What are our standards of evaluation in international politics? Is there even anything such as a left foreign policy?”

To ask the question is to answer it. The Left Party has a foreign policy, but it is definitely not “left.” Instead, the Left Party is playing a decisive role in organizing the revival of German militarism.

In her role as the spokesperson of the Left Party in the defence committee in parliament, Christine Buchholz visited German troops in Central Africa along with Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) at the beginning of last year. In April, Left Party representatives in parliament voted for the first time for a foreign deployment of the armed forces in order to destroy Syrian chemical weapons. In the summer, representatives of the Left Party were the first ones demanding a German intervention in Iraq.

The joint appearance of Buchholz and Woop makes it clear that there are no fundamental differences between the pseudo-left and the openly right-wing factions of the Left Party. While Woop and his colleague Stefan Liebich of the Forum for Democratic Socialism call openly for war operations “according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter” in foreign policy papers, pseudo-lefts like Buchholz counsel (at least at the moment) more caution in military adventures. She recently proposed in a speech to the DGAP (German Council on Foreign Relations) that Russia be worn down from inside in order to pursue Germany's imperialist interests.

Other events on the topic of “Imperialism and the new world order” underscore the pro-imperialist orientation of the congress. At one meeting the question “What is imperialism?” is to be answered on the basis of “current events in the Pacific area, in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe.” You do not have to be a

prophet to predict what will be discussed. The spokesman of the meeting, Stefan Zieffle, has already written an article under the title “Putin's student”, which pushes for an imperialist intervention in Syria in order to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The pseudo-lefts reject a Marxist analysis of imperialism and an independent political struggle of the working class against the war policies of the imperialist powers. Instead, they apply the word “imperialism” as a means of defaming countries such as Russia and China in order to mobilize support for war.

For example, the text of an announcement to one meeting makes use of and addresses itself to those who “do not believe in coincidences and think that the US is ultimately behind every new war.” He complains that “in the past few years, a direction of thought has become stronger” that offers “an alternative to the integration of every opponent of Washington in a diplomatic solution—for example, to the Assad regime in Syria, Putin's Russia or the leadership in Beijing.” Alex Callinicos, the theoretical head of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), had already supported the aggressive orientation of the West from the beginning of the Ukraine conflict.

Under the rubric of “discovering Marx anew,” anti-Marxist theories are propagated on the basis of a pseudo-left policy of war and social cuts. One event asks “what socialists and Marxists can learn” from the concepts of Judith Butler, “one of the most important voices in post-structuralist theory and queer theory.” Under “race, gender and class” there will be a discussion of what “Marxism can learn from other critical theories.”

In reality, their task is not to “learn,” but to combat classical Marxism. Among the speakers are professional anti-Marxists such as Elmar Altvater and Michael Heinrich. Altvater was a member of Rudi Dutschke's SDS in 1968 and later a co-founder of the Greens, who pushes for “concrete utopias” and “the perspective of green socialism” today.

Heinrich is an adherent of critical theory and Althusser's structuralism and an outspoken opponent of what he calls “worldview Marxism.” The anti-Marxism of the pseudo-lefts is perhaps clearest when they mention Leon Trotsky. A meeting on the “heritage of Trotskyism” is supposed to answer, among other things, “where perhaps Trotsky was wrong and to what extent ‘Trotskyism’ has anything relevant to offer today at all.”

At the end of the article on the Marx 21 congress two years ago, we wrote: “Workers seeking to oppose the relentless attacks on their living standards and the threat of new imperialist war must treat the politics and philosophy of Marx 21 with contempt. The education of a new generation of revolutionary Marxists requires a relentless struggle against the type of politics and philosophy advanced at this weekend's congress.”

Nothing needs to be added to this assessment in 2015.



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