

German Left Party strives to govern at federal level

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11 June 2015

The congress of the Left Party last weekend in Bielefeld has confirmed the analysis of the WSWs that this organisation is “on course for war and joining a government.”

Even a quick glance through the titles of the speeches at the party congress shows what the party is preparing. Mathias Höhn, the federal manager and campaign leader, addressed the delegates on the subject: “The course of the next federal election will be decided today.” The speech by Bodo Ramelow, the first Left Party state premier, was titled “Ruling must be a part of the political concept.” And Katja Kippling, the party president, spoke on the topic “We will win back the future for ourselves.”

It was left to the outgoing head of the Left Party fraction in parliament, Gregor Gysi, to express most clearly the reactionary programme behind these clichés. Gysi carefully staged his speech. He had already let it be known weeks before the congress that he would announce whether he would step down as head of the parliamentary fraction or hold on to his influential post into next year.

His speech was then placed at the end of the congress so that the question whether Gysi was staying or going would hang in the air throughout the congress and dominate all of the media reporting. Finally, he announced with great melodrama, to the applause and tears of the delegates, that he would pass the responsibility “to younger hands.” In the rest of his speech, he called on the party to pursue explicitly right-wing policies.

Anyone who remains in doubt about the pro-capitalist orientation of the Left Party should carefully review what Gysi said: “Capitalism can bring forth a highly efficient and productive economy. There is almost never a shortage of goods and services. Certainly profit is behind all of them.... If we do not just want to talk about restricting the power of the big banks and corporations, but actually achieve it, we need an alliance with the middle class.”

Somewhat further on, Gysi emphasised, “On the other hand, capitalism brings forth excellent achievements in the areas of research, economy, art and culture.... The final aim

of politics must be more culture.”

The flip side of this absurd glorification of capitalism is extreme anti-communism. At one point, Gysi reminisced proudly how the German author Gerhard Zwerenz called himself “an anti-communist at one of our party congresses.” He said he wanted to “congratulate him once again” in the name of the entire party.

The anti-communism Gysi displayed is not simply a personal eccentricity, but resides in the historical DNA of the party. Gysi also expressed his appreciation for Hans Modrow, who had engaged in “highly complicated and very responsible activities as the second to last minister president of the GDR” (former Stalinist East Germany) and “who is too little and far too infrequently appreciated by us.” Modrow’s “responsible activity”—in which Gysi himself as president of the SED/PDS played an important role—consisted in reintroducing capitalism to East Germany.

At the center of Gysi’s speech was the call to follow a course of “shared responsibility for ruling in an alliance.” Gysi said he could do this “completely freely now,” because he “would definitely not belong to such a negotiating delegation” and does not “have the slightest intention of becoming a minister.” He claimed that he could completely understand those in the party who did not want “government responsibility.... Shared responsibility for NATO, the armed forces or even the European Union is a horror for them.”

Last week, in an interview with the newspaper *taz*, he hinted his desire to become defence minister. Nevertheless, with or without him, he can hardly wait for his party to play a role in government crafting the war and austerity policies of NATO, the armed forces and the EU.

“We can and should want to rule on the federal level and with confidence, with compromises, but without making false concessions,” Gysi emphasised to the delegates. He then added cynically, “actually one should never say for what compromises one might be ready, because that does not make future negotiations easier, but more difficult. I make the mistake this time, however, in order to heighten the readiness of our party.”

The Left Party has already surrendered completely to any “compromise” demanded by its prospective right-wing partners to maintain German imperialism and its state machine. Gysi expressed his desire to rule even if “we don’t get every soldier in the armed forces brought back from abroad” and don’t manage to make it so that “there are no more weapons exports.” He affirmed that “of course we will not get the European Union to change its ways completely,” and “of course there would also be intelligence agencies and the NSA if we took part in government.”

While Gysi openly announces the reactionary programme of the Left Party, representatives of the wing of the party that is supposedly “critical of the government” sought to maintain at least a certain semblance of opposition. For example, Sahra Wagenknecht—who, along with Dietmar Bartsch, is being treated as a potential successor to Gysi as head of the fraction—used her speech for a few sideswipes at the grand coalition.

Among other things, Wagenknecht said that her party was “definitely not founded in order to swim along in this muddy water.” Actually, the Left Party not only swims in muddy water, but has wallowed in the mud for a long time. It poses as the “leader of the opposition” in parliament. In reality, however, the Left Party, along with the Greens, is an established part of a grand coalition of all bourgeois parties, which agree on all essential political questions.

Then Wagenknecht left no more room for doubt that she would rather carry out government policies in the fleshpots of power in future than to remain in opposition. “One can change more in the government than one can from the opposition,” she told the delegates, “when one has partners who at least want to go in the same direction as oneself.”

The so-called reformers in the party see Wagenknecht’s candidacy for parliamentary fraction president as an opportunity to bring the whole party behind their war course and efforts to take part in the federal government. It would be “helpful if the wing that is critical of the government could be brought into line with the head of the party behind Ms. Wagenknecht and if she were responsible for discussions with the SPD and the Greens,” declared the head of the right-wing Forum for Democratic Socialism, Stefan Liebich. “Ms. Wagenknecht would then play another role.”

Anyone who wants to understand what “role” Liebich has in mind should take a look at his own work. He participated in the drafting of the official strategy paper, “New Power, New Responsibility,” the blueprint for the revival of German militarism. In addition, he regularly holds discussions with leading representatives of the SPD and the Greens on the possibility of a Social Democratic (SPD)-Left Party-Green (red-red-green) government and war policy.

A red-red-green government would continue and intensify

the policies of the grand coalition. Its foremost task would be to stifle and divert the growing opposition to war and social cuts. Much as the “pacifist” Greens were integrated into the government 17 years ago in order to make possible the mobilisation of German troops for the first time since the Second World War, the Left Party would take on the task of carrying forward the return of Germany to an aggressive foreign and great power policy and of clothing this effort in “humanitarian” phrases.

In the main proposal, the Left Party calls itself “*the* party of peace” and complains “that the federal government and the president are campaigning for Germany to take on ‘more responsibility’ and give up ‘the culture of military restraint.’” But only a few lines further, it reads: “Yes, Germany must exercise more responsibility in the world—civil and in terms of peace policy, but by no means militarily.”

When one considers that the armed forces have cultivated close connections with the unions and declared themselves “a part of the peace movement,” the difference between “peace policy” and “military” engagements dissolves into thin air. What remains is the taking on of “more responsibility in the world,” a metaphor for imperialist great power politics.

Bodo Ramelow, who was celebrated as the first Left Party state premier at the congress, declared openly in an interview with the *Rheinischen Post* only a few day earlier that pacifism is not a “concept for action for a country like Germany” and that “the anti-Hitler-coalition as an eternal world security system” must be replaced with a new world order in which Germany once again sets the tone.



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