

The German Left Party defends Syriza's betrayal

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In the weeks following the July 5 referendum in Greece—in which an overwhelming majority of the population rejected European Union-dictated austerity measures—the Syriza-led government has signed on to an even more brutal regime.

The actions of the “Coalition of the Radical Left” (Syriza) have laid bare the thoroughly anti-working-class and pro-imperialist character of its international political partners—including Podemos in Spain, the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and the Left Party in Germany.

In Germany, the Left Party has done what it can to cover for Syriza's betrayals, while also advising the ruling class in Germany on the best way to advance its interest in Europe and beyond.

In debate in the German Bundestag on Friday, the head of the Left Party parliamentary fraction, Gregor Gysi, declared that if he were in Athens he would also have voted in favor of the austerity program. He stated: “If I were a deputy in the Greek parliament last Wednesday, I would have voted ‘yes’, despite severe misgivings.” Gysi said he remains in “solidarity with the Greek government.”

This statement is of far-reaching significance. Gysi expressed his support for Syriza's subordination to the austerity measures agreed in Brussels. Largely dictated by the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, they effectively transform Greece into a de facto protectorate of the most powerful financial interests in Germany and Europe.

The austerity measures agreed to by Syriza and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras will mean destitution for millions of Greeks, unemployment and even death. Among other measures, the retirement age is to be increased to 67, state property worth a total of €50 billion will be sold off by a commercial agency, mass layoffs are being prepared and the right to strike will be restricted.

With his statement, Gysi gave a signal to the German government that the decision of the Left Party to vote “no” in the Bundestag to the agreement with Greece was of a purely tactical nature. In reality, the party backs German imperialism, and indeed in February gave its consent to the

last austerity program for Greece.

It was left to Stefan Liebich, the chairman of the Left Party in the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Bundestag, to defend most bluntly the reactionary policy of the party. Together with Richard Pitterle, the Left Party spokesman on fiscal policies, Liebich broke fraction discipline and abstained in the vote. In a personal statement he explained his action as follows: “Tsipras' government is ready for compromises that are painful for it and for many on the left in Europe because it does not know any other way out anymore. I cannot reject that.”

Against a background of applause from his fraction, Liebich said that he wished “that the Tsipras government would not fail, but get a chance to break with the policies of its predecessors.” This path is “difficult and rocky” and “paved with unpleasant decisions.” However, he wants the government “to be able to come to him.” Therefore, he could “not say ‘no’ to the first step.”

With these words, Liebich is declaring that the Left Party stands entirely behind the austerity demands accepted by Syriza and would carry out similar measures in Germany if it were called upon to do so in government.

The claim that Syriza did not have “another way out” (Liebich), because a “knife is held to its throat” (Ernst) is a lie. If Tsipras' government had actually intended to oppose the austerity demands of the Troika, it would have had to seize the banks and major corporations, prevent capital flight abroad and discontinue payments to the troika. It would have had to mobilize the Greek working class and call on the European working class for joint action.

Such measures would have been met with powerful support all over Europe, where the working class is faced with similar attacks. It would also have deeply shaken the European Union, the euro, and every other political institution and mechanism on which European capitalism and the dominance of finance capital is based.

Syriza, however, was absolutely opposed to such a course. It never considered an alternative to austerity because this would have threatened the assets and privileges of the upper-

middle class layers out of which the leadership and a large proportion of its members are recruited. Syriza's goal was never the overthrow of capitalism, but rather—in the words of former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis—“to rescue it from itself.” It is, in short, a bourgeois party.

Therefore, it went in the opposite direction. It engaged in negotiations with Brussels and Berlin. It plundered retirement funds and the deposits of nationalised corporations in order to satisfy the creditors. In this way, the government made itself more and more susceptible to extortion. In the end, Syriza declared its readiness to enforce an austerity program that goes beyond anything its conservative and social democratic predecessors had tried to implement.

For Syriza and the Left Party there is no alternative to the murderous demands of Schäuble because they categorically reject the only realistic perspective for fighting against them: the independent mobilization of the working class and a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system.

Two considerations lie behind the decision of the majority of the Left Party to nevertheless vote “no” on the agreement. First, the party is keen to give the appearance of opposition under conditions of growing political and social tensions. Just one day before the vote in the Bundestag, EU Council President Donald Tusk warned in the *Financial Times* that growing social and political discontent could have revolutionary implications. He said: “I can feel, maybe not a revolutionary mood, but something like widespread impatience. When impatience becomes not an individual but a social experience or feeling, this is the introduction for revolutions.”

Second, the Left Party, in common with the Greens and sections of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), fear that the aggressive bravado of the federal government could isolate Germany in Europe and weaken it in its global struggle for new markets and spheres of influence.

In his speech, Gysi expressed regret that “the other European governments and all the leading European media outlets” are discussing Germany instead of Greece. “Italian Minister President Renzi told him, Mr. Schäuble: enough is enough. The French president applied the emergency brake.” He quoted the British *Telegraph*, which recalled that “Great Britain has fought against Germany in two world wars in order to prevent the dominance of Germany,” and concluded “now Germany has achieved that without a single shot.”

Gysi accused Schäuble of destroying the “good reputation” of Germany. Furthermore, the breakdown of the euro would be catastrophic for the German economy. As “vice world champion in exports,” Germany needs the euro “more urgently than Greece.” The head of the Left Party fraction ended his speech with the warning: “Whoever

cannot stop being victorious will lose later even more clearly.” He hoped that “the defeat is not so great that there can no longer be a European Germany, because we need this urgently.”

Twenty-five years ago Gysi and the forerunners of the Left Party helped pave the way for the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany, and thus lay the foundation for the revival of a new German foreign and great power policy. Today, the party is convinced that it is much more able than Schäuble to enforce the interests of export-hungry German imperialism worldwide with the selective use of a few “left-sounding” and “humanitarian” phrases.

On the same day that the Bundestag agreed to the latest austerity program for Greece, the foreign policy spokesperson of the Left Party, Wolfgang Gehrcke, gave an extensive interview to the Deutschlandfunk radio station, offering his services to German imperialism in Cuba, South America and other parts of the world, where the Left Party has close ties to so-called “leftist” nationalist regimes. Gehrcke praised the government's advances towards Cuba and Iran: “One can only welcome that. That is the role that Germany should play in the world,” he said.

Gehrcke said that for a number of reasons he has always told German corporations: “Go to Cuba!” Good relations with Cuba open “the gate to better relations to other left and left oriented countries in Latin America,” said Gehrcke. He added, “So whoever wants to be firmly anchored in Brazil is well advised to have been in Cuba previously. This definitely applies to Venezuela, and to others also.”

The global imperialist strategy of the Left Party is therefore no less warlike than Schäuble's plan for turning Germany into the disciplinarian of Europe once again. When asked about possible collaboration with the Cuban military, Gehrcke answered, “The military plays a role everywhere. And the Cuban military is no real threat. So I am in favor of making agreements with the firms that are there.”



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