

Senior Left Party politician calls for participation in government

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Despite efforts by party leaders to present a united front, the Left Party conference, which took place in the city of Magdeburg over the weekend, was characterised by profound conflicts. Last Thursday, Gregor Gysi, the public face of the party and its former fraction leader in parliament, described the party as “anaemic and lacking energy.” Voters were dismissing the Left Party’s power to organise anything, because at the federal level it gave the impression of not wanting to join the government, Gysi said in his criticism.

On Friday, the party’s co-chairs, Sahra Wagenknecht and Dietmar Bartsch, rejected the criticism. Wagenknecht said, “Constant sniping from the sidelines does not help anyone.” Bartsch declared in the *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung* that the party was “not anaemic and lacking in energy” and was most certainly working towards participating in government.

Gysi’s unusually sharp criticism is a reaction to events in France. He views the growing strike movement against the Hollande government’s hated labour market law as a threat. He fears that the struggle of French workers, which has already spread to Belgium, could reach Germany and other European countries. Confronted with a mounting threat to bourgeois rule, he is demanding that the party leadership focus on participation in government.

Already two years ago in its campaign for the European elections, the Left Party used posters plastered with the slogan: “Revolution—no thanks,” thereby signalling to the ruling class that it requires the Left Party in government to prevent revolution. Faced with the strikes in France, Gysi is reiterating this standpoint.

The governing Socialist Party in Paris has cooperated closely with Germany’s Social Democrats (SPD). Minister for Economic Affairs Sigmar Gabriel has been

trying for some time to expand to France the “Agenda 2010,” by which drastic social cuts were realised in Germany in 2013. Two years ago, the architect of the Hartz laws, Peter Hartz, after whom they were named, was sent to Paris to advise the PS government on matters of social welfare cuts.

The strike wave against the El Khomri law is thus also aimed at the SPD. Gysi is demanding not to cave into this pressure, but rather to support the SPD and strive for a government coalition together with it and the Greens.

But the SPD is in rapid decline. In the latest Forza poll, the SPD registered just 19 percent support—an historic low. In March’s regional elections, the SPD struggled to surpass the 10 percent mark in two states, Baden-Württemberg and Saxony-Anhalt, finishing behind the far-right, racist Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The SPD has to date played a key role in stabilising the capitalist order in Germany. It used its influence among workers and close ties to the trade unions to suppress the class struggle. The strikes in France usher in the end of this period. The return of the class struggle is taking the form of a rebellion against the SPD and trade unions, which is also affecting the Left Party. It is not able to stem the decline of the SPD and is also losing support itself.

In Saxony-Anhalt, the Left Party’s support dropped from 23.7 percent in the election five years ago to 16.3 percent this time. The AfD replaced it as the second-largest party. In Baden-Württemberg and Rheinland-Palatinate, the Left Party failed by a wide margin to win the entry into parliament it had been striving for.

Gysi said on Thursday that the Left Party had to increasingly fear competition from the AfD in eastern Germany. “We are no longer the protest party we once

were in eastern Germany,” he said, before adding, “It shocks me that the poor, those left behind and workers, vote for the AfD.”

What is above all discomfiting for Gysi about the rise of the AfD is the high percentage of protest voters. Because the Left Party is pursuing out-and-out pro-capitalist policies and is striving to establish a coalition with the parties of Hartz IV and war, the SPD and Greens, the growing opposition to the grand coalition’s policies is partially being expressed in a growth in support for the AfD.

Gysi is responding to this development with a further shift to the right.

After its catastrophic results in the March elections, Gysi demanded that the Left Party open itself up to the right and consider collaboration with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). He said at the time, “The CDU does not yet have to take this course, but it and the Left Party must consider the fact that they may have to take it one day.” The success of right-wing populist parties in Europe and in Germany required “that everyone stand up. From the CDU/CSU to the Left Party.” If one did not combat this trend, “we will be committing a serious historical error,” said Gysi.

Gysi fears the growing radicalisation expressed in the rise of the AfD. By contrast, he has no concern about its right-wing, nationalist policies. This is shown by the experience of Greece, where the Left Party’s sister party, Syriza, concluded a coalition with the Independent Greeks (Anel), which are equally as right-wing as the AfD, after its election victory early last year. Since then, the government of Alexis Tsipras has rushed through one austerity programme after another and assumed the role of border and prison guard on behalf of the EU to keep out thousands of refugees. This has not stopped the Left Party from continuing to work closely with Syriza.

Faced with strikes in France and growing opposition to brutal austerity policies, Gysi is calling on the Left Party to prepare to participate in government and play the role of Syriza in Germany.



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