

German Left Party congress carries out further shift to the right

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Signal left, turn right has been the Left Party's operating principle for some time. This strategy was practiced in an especially vulgar form last weekend at its party congress in Magdeburg. Behind a barrage of left phrases and the election of "left" demagogues to the party executive, the Left Party set its course for participation in a right-wing capitalist government.

The congress took place under conditions of a growing radicalisation of the European working class. The strikes in France against the hated labour law of the Hollande government have expanded over the past week, in spite of the stepping up of the state of emergency. Belgium is also being gripped by a strike wave. The intensification of the class struggle is a global development.

The reawakening of the class struggle has thrown the Left Party into a deep political crisis. Since its emergence as the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) out of the remnants of the Stalinist state party in East Germany twenty five years ago, and its alliance with the WASG (Election Alternative-Work and Social Justice) in the west a decade ago, the Left Party has consistently directed its efforts to suppressing the class struggle. To this end it has collaborated closely with the trade unions and relied on pseudo-left groups who have, almost without exception, integrated themselves into the organisation.

The growing rebellion of workers and young people has broken through this suppression of the class struggle. It is directed against the Social Democrats, trade unions and Left Party. Due to the lack of a left alternative, many voices of protest are coalescing around right-wing populists like the Alternative for Germany (AfD). At the state elections in March, the Left Party lost around 100,000 votes, two thirds of which went to the AfD.

When they began planning their party congress in Magdeburg, the capital of Saxony-Anhalt, last year, the Left Party's leadership expected to gain votes and hoped the party's state leader, Wulf Gallert, would open the

congress at least as a state minister, if not state premier. Instead, the Left Party registered a decline in its vote by 7.4 percent, finishing with just 16.3 percent, well behind the AfD, which in its first election secured 24.3 percent. The Social Democrats (SPD) saw their support halved to 10.6 percent.

In France, workers' anger is also directed against the social democrats, who hold the presidency and make up the government, as well as the Left Party's allies in the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, which has largely broken apart. Only there this has assumed the form of an open class struggle against the government. The Left Party is responding to this intensification of the class struggle with a sharp shift to the right.

Regardless of the usual trite phrases about more social justice, the Left Party set its course towards participation in government at the federal level, where it would not only be willing to collaborate with the SPD and Greens, but also the conservative CDU/CSU if necessary.

Immediately after the loss of votes in March, former parliamentary fraction leader Gregor Gysi urged the party to open up to the right and consider the possibility of cooperation with the CDU. Gysi said at the time, "The CDU does not have to take this course now, but it and the Left Party have to consider that they will have to take it one day." The emergence of right-wing populists in Germany required "that everyone stand up. From the Union to the Left Party." If this trend was not jointly combatted, "then we are committing a serious historical error," he said.

Immediately prior to the congress Gysi repeated this position. He described the party to the media as "anaemic and lacking energy.". The voters were dismissing the Left Party's creative power because at the federal level it was giving the impression that it did not want to be in government.

Without stating this explicitly, Gysi was urging the Left

Party to prepare for Greek-style conditions. There, in the face of mounting opposition to the austerity dictates of the European Union, Syriza, the Left Party's sister party, assumed power and is now imposing austerity with brutal force.

Gysi was not present at the congress in Magdeburg, but his call for participation in government was at the heart of the debates. The reelected party chairwoman Katja Kipping said the Left Party intends to open up to the prospect of an SPD-Left Party-Green alliance at the federal level and focus more on points of agreement between the parties rather than what divides them.

The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which reported the remarks, welcomed them with the justification, "Even though the chance of such an alliance in 2017 [is] low," everyone who no longer wanted a grand coalition or a government led by the CDU had to support the work to that end.

The offensive for "Left creative power" and participation in government is bound up with an explicitly nationalist orientation. The leading representative of this reactionary nationalist position is Sahra Wagenknecht, who leads the parliamentary party together with Dietmar Bartsch.

Wagenknecht used the refugee crisis at the beginning of the year to publicise her right-wing, nationalist slogans. She supported the anti-refugee deportation policy of the federal government and urged a stricter handling of immigrants convicted of criminal offences, because, as Wagenknecht herself put it, "Whoever abuses their rights as a guest has given up their right to be a guest."

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She subsequently received praise from the AfD. "Mrs. Wagenknecht very nicely summed up the situation," stated the deputy chair of the right-wing extremist party, Alexander Gauland.

Wagenknecht's xenophobic position met with criticism within the Left Party. But this was silenced when, shortly after the beginning of the congress, a representative of an anarchist tendency threw a chocolate cake in her face in front of live cameras. She was subsequently overwhelmed with declarations of solidarity.

In her latest book, *Wealth without Greed*, Wagenknecht expounded her nationalist, pro-capitalist standpoint. She advocates an economic order "which does not eliminate markets," but rather "saves from capitalism." "We need," she went on to write, "what the neoliberals like to inscribe on their banner, but have in reality destroyed: freedom,

self-initiative, competition, just pay according to ability, protection of individually earned wealth."

Such an economic order, according to Wagenknecht, demands a strong national state. She cynically justified this reactionary perspective with reference to "democracy."

This met with applause from the ruling elite. The conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* welcomed the book enthusiastically. After a few sentences about the disgusting "genre of the politician's book," the house organ of the German financial aristocracy wrote, "None of this applies to the new book from Sahra Wagenknecht. Her 300 probably self-written and very readable pages, filled with clever observations and arguments, is a welcome, rare exception for a politician's book: rich in ideas, solidly researched and inspiring."

She posed the correct questions, the FAZ stated: "Wagenknecht's proposals surprise above all because of the emphasis on national-state solutions." Her critique of the European Union and the single currency was correct and well-founded, because, "State support for pensioners and the unemployed, social and environmental standards, all of this can be much better organised within the national state, while Europeanisation and globalisation always only play into the hands of the concerns, who profit at the expense of employees due to competition for cheaper wages and social costs (in plain language: location advantage)."

With her opposition to the EU and the common currency, Wagenknecht was drawing close to the AfD, the FAZ wrote and concluded, "If this is what 'communism' means, then we can talk." One could hardly better summarise the rightward shift of the Left Party carried out in Magdeburg.



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