

Red-red-green coalition in Germany emerges as staunch defender of European Union

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Representatives from the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and Left Party published a pamphlet Friday titled “Europe can also work in solidarity—a polemic for a different European Union.” According to its authors, the pamphlet aims to defend the EU by initiating a reform of its institutions.

The authors include politicians, trade unionists and academics who have publicly advocated a red-red-green federal government. These include Gesine Schwan, former presidential candidate for the SPD and current chair of the SPD’s commission of basic values; Axel Troost, finance spokesman for the Left Party parliamentary group; Harald Wolf, former economy senator in the SPD-Left Party Berlin state government; Frank Bsirske, head of the Verdi trade union and Green Party member; economics professor and European political adviser to Verdi Klaus Busch (SPD); and others.

The authors and editors of the statement are responding to the threatened break-up of the European Union (EU) in the wake of the Brexit vote in Britain. Like all of the parties of the ruling class in Europe, the authors see Brexit as the result of widespread opposition to the EU bureaucracy in Brussels. Millions of workers experience the EU as an instrument of the major concerns, banks and financial speculators intent on destroying their living standards.

The EU’s brutal austerity policies—imposed for years by the German government and its finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble—have led to a devastating social decline in Greece and many other countries and have placed revolutionary struggles on the order of the day.

This fear is shared by the authors of the pro-EU document. They begin with a long list of the sins of the EU, while complaining in the introductory chapter about “re-nationalisation tendencies,” “social crises”

and “the failure of the EU in the refugee crisis.”

Then comes a selection of hackneyed phrases from earlier resolutions on how to improve the EU. The authors draw on “reform proposals” made by the EU Commission in 2011, the so-called blueprint for “deepening the economic and monetary union.” These include a more expansive monetary policy, an “equalisation union,” to regulate balance of payment imbalances, and a “joint debt policy contributing to eurobonds and a fund to pay off state debt.”

Two of the authors, Klaus Busch (SPD) and Axel Troost (Left Party), complained in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “The hopeful reform proposals from the European Commission in 2011 ... got bogged down.” By contrast, austerity policies were “the wrong means.” Their “polemic” called for the stricter regulation of the financial markets and a “democratically elected and controlled European economic government” as well as a “social union.” The latter meant a “joint employment policy, joint wage and income policy and a joint policy for social security systems.” Concretely, the paper appeals for a European unemployment insurance system.

The proposals, concealed behind a salvo of words about democracy and solidarity, are neither new nor left. But the authors seek to sell them as part of a struggle against nationalism. The world needs “less nation state and more international cooperation as well as international organisations, like the EU, to manage these tasks,” Busch and Troost write. The left must “struggle for the retention of the European project of unity and stand up to the neoliberal and right-wing populist destroyers of Europe!”

The trick employed by cynics like Klaus Busch and Axel Troost is familiar. They claim that any opposition to the EU is nationalist and reactionary. Therefore,

despite its “errors in construction,” it is necessary to defend the EU and transform it into an instrument for international cooperation and the unification of Europe’s peoples.

Both assertions are false. The mounting anger and opposition to the EU is entirely justified, but must be linked to a struggle against capitalism. This means that the struggle against the EU must be conducted by mobilising workers in every country on the basis of a socialist programme. Precisely because the SPD, Left Party and trade unions refuse to oppose the EU, they leave the opposition open to the right-wing populists and nationalists. Their defence of the European Union strengthens the right.

The second claim, that the EU can be reformed and made to serve the interests of the people, has been repeatedly disproved. The representatives of the SPD, Left Party and trade unions know full well that the EU cannot be reformed by “clear and critical words” or “radical demands.” It is not a neutral body, which can be controlled and influenced democratically. It serves as an organising centre for the major powers, corporations and banks to launch their assaults on social and democratic rights, strengthen the state apparatus and militarism.

The EU was never an “international organisation” that strived to equalise the standard of living or overcome the nation states within Europe. It always serves the interests of the corporations and banks. German business profited above all from this.

Confronted with a deepening political crisis in the US and growing conflicts within Europe, the German ruling elite is seeking to advance to the position of Europe’s leading power. The EU is increasingly being expanded from an economic union into a military alliance. This is the real reform of the EU currently underway. The demand for a European army, led by the German government, makes this clear.

The SPD, Left Party and Greens are not defending the EU because they hold illusions in its reformability, but because they share the same political interests. They are offering their services as a governing coalition to support the EU’s social attacks, the strengthening of the state, the construction of European police units and military rearmament.

The demand for a joint “social policy,” which occupies considerable space in the pamphlet, means the

exact opposite of what Busch, Troost, Bsirske and Co. claim. It means an intensification of the offensive against the working class throughout Europe and the creation of authoritarian political structures. It was no accident that the French government drew on the assistance of Peter Hartz, whose name was given to the hated welfare reforms in Germany, to impose stricter labour laws. This is the only kind of “European unemployment insurance” and “social union” that the German bourgeoisie will tolerate.

The recently published EU pamphlet is therefore not a programme for a “more social” Europe, but rather a signal from the Left Party that it will defend the EU at all costs if it joins a red-red-green coalition. One week earlier, party chairman Bernd Riexinger raised the prospect of an agreement by the party to the Hartz 2010 welfare reforms and foreign interventions by the German army.

There is only one way for the workers of Europe to defend their democratic and social rights: they must combine their opposition to the EU with a struggle against the capitalist system, including its right-wing and left defenders in the Left Party. The unification of Europe is not possible on a capitalist, but only on a socialist basis.



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