German Left Party leader Gregor Gysi to head European Left

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To understand why right-wing parties have so far been able to benefit from growing social discontent, one has to look no further than the 5th Congress of the Party of the European Left (EL), held in Berlin December 16-18.

The 31 European pseudo-left parties assembled in the European Left alliance have refined the art of combining left-sounding phrases with right-wing politics to such an extent it provokes nausea. It is difficult to imagine anything more politically cynical and repulsive.

One of the key speakers at the recent congress was the Greek prime minister, Alexis Tsipras. Along with the German and French Left Parties, the French Communist Party and the Italian Rifondazione Comunista, Tsipras' Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) is one of the leading members of the alliance.

Tsipras, who governs Greece in a coalition with the right-wing nationalist Independent Greek Party, told congress participants it was necessary to "block the extreme right across Europe," raged against "the threatening rise of populist nationalism" and asserted, "It is us, the European Left, who need to take the political initiative for a progressive alternative to nationalism and the extreme right."

The same Tsipras who swept aside the overwhelming opposition of Greek voters to the austerity diktats of the European Union (EU) in the 2015 referendum, declared in Berlin: "We share the view that in difficult times, and particularly when the Left is entrusted with the mandate of the people, it has no other choice—no matter how difficult it might be—but to honour that mandate."

Despite the fact that since the summer of 2015 his government has gone even further in implementing austerity than demanded by the EU, pauperising Greece and its population in the process, Tsipras declared: "We need popular awakening and action to put an end to the Europe of mass unemployment, explosion of poverty and inequalities, social dumping and low public investment. … Greece is fighting to end austerity and exit from the neoliberal memoranda of social injustice and deprivation."

Tsipras would not be Tsipras if he had not ended his remarks by reassuring his country's creditors they could continue to count on him and his government: "Greece will achieve its goals according to the program." He reminded his audience Greece was doing most of the dirty work when it came to deterring refugees. Greece is "a partner at the front-line of Europe in managing the great migration pressures we all face," he argued.

The congress elected Gregor Gysi as the new chairman of the European Left, following a demagogic endorsement by Tsipras. Gysi began his career as an attorney in the former Stalinist East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR), where his father was Minister of Culture. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, he took over the leadership of the SED, the Stalinist state party, to help run down the GDR's economy and smoothly introduce capitalism.

Under Gysi's leadership, the SED was transformed into the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), whose dedication to defending capitalism was ornamented with leftist phraseology. In 2007, together with former Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman Oskar Lafontaine, he was the driving force behind the founding of the Left Party, which he chaired in the Bundestag [German parliament] until 2015.

That the 68-year-old, who has already suffered several strokes, has come out of retirement to take charge of the European Left is linked to the profound crisis of the European Union, which is hated by

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workers for its austerity policies. Gysi, like Tsipras, is determined to defend the EU at all costs.

He does so in the typical manner of the Left Party, with an abundance of critical phrases. “The European Union is anti-social, anti-solidarity, undemocratic, ecologically unsustainable, non-transparent, bureaucratic and is now seeking to become a military force,” he told the party’s paper *Neues Deutschland*. “But although I criticize it so much, there are reasons why I do not want it to go under.”

Gysi declared that the most important reason for preserving the EU was that “the old national states have no economic clout compared to China and Russia, and also no geo-political clout.” He speaks here as a thorough-going representative of the German ruling elite, who regard the European Union as a vehicle for increasing the international influence of Germany—economically, politically and militarily.

Gysi has long advocated the Left Party’s participation in the German national government. With the election of Donald Trump and the inevitable emergence of tensions between the US and Germany resulting from the latter’s America First policy, he sees a new opportunity to achieve this goal.

The European Left is being called on to assist in transforming the European Union into a political and military world power under German control and to suppress the resistance of the working class. To this end Gysi can fully rely on Tsipras, who met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel for a lengthy discussion prior to his attending the EL congress.

The author also recommends:

The Political Lessons of Syriza’s Betrayal in Greece, *Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International*

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