

Germany: The bankruptcy of the Left Party

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The congress held by the German Left Party last weekend in Hanover confirmed that this party, despite its name, has nothing in common with genuinely left or socialist politics, but instead defends capitalism.

Although both the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party have given it the cold shoulder, the Left Party is utterly submissive to the two parties responsible for the antisocial Hartz IV and Agenda 2010 laws and fully complicit in Germany's embrace of militarism.

The same applies to support for the European Union and its savage austerity policies. At a time when the reactionary character of the EU institutions in Brussels is glaringly evident in the austerity imposed on Greece, the vicious methods used to exclude refugees, and the EU's massive build-up of military forces at home and abroad, the Left Party professes its love for the bankers' union against the working class.

At its conference in Hanover, party Chairperson Katja Kipping described herself as a "fervent European" and pleaded for the transformation of the EU into a "peace-keeping power." Dietmar Bartsch, the party's leading candidate in this September's federal election, declared that the entire party backed participation in a federal government: "We have all said a thousand times without any differences in the parliamentary faction and the party: 'Of course we are ready to take up government responsibility.' There's no doubt about it. Of course we are!"

The last speaker at the congress, Sahra Wagenknecht, the chair of the party's parliamentary faction, similarly did not rule out participation in government: "We want to change the basic direction of politics in this country," she told delegates. She added that the Left Party sought to restore the "social state," "rescind the damn Agenda laws" and "end Germany's war adventures." When a partner for this agenda emerges, "then we want to rule, that is quite clear."

Wagenknecht interspersed her speech with a few rhetorical tirades against the SPD and the Greens, but her claim that these same parties could be "partners" in the struggle to oppose social attacks and war revealed the bankruptcy of her perspective.

The SPD is what it is: a right-wing state party that is carrying out devastating austerity measures in Germany and throughout Europe. When its leading candidate, Martin Schulz, criticises the German chancellor in his election campaign, it is invariably from the right. He openly defends his party's despised Agenda 2010 policies and, together with Social Democratic Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, is campaigning for a militarisation of Europe under German leadership.

A similar policy is pursued by the Greens, who, according to election polls, are currently hovering around the minimum of five percent needed for entry into the next parliament. This party of former pacifists can no more be transformed into a progressive "partner" than the SPD.

The Greens now have the vote of those with the highest income levels. The party's colour no longer stands for environmental protection, but rather for money and militarism. Following the agreement in 1999 by former radical street fighter turned foreign minister Joschka Fischer to allow Germany's first combat mission since the end of the Second World War—in the Kosovo war—the Greens have enthusiastically supported every German military intervention, even while out of power and in opposition.

With all its empty talk of social justice and antimilitarism, which also features in its election program, the Left Party is pursuing two distinct aims. On the one hand, it wants to conceal its own role, which does not differ from that of the SPD and the Greens. Its forerunner, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Stalinist ruling party of the former German

Democratic Republic (East Germany), helped secure the restoration of capitalism in the GDR in 1989-90. Since then it has been responsible for imposing harsh social attacks at the local and state level.

It is also clear where the party really stands in relation to the issue of war. Its lead candidate, Bartsch, is one of five Left Party Bundestag deputies who in April 2015 voted in favour of an international deployment of the Bundeswehr (German army).

Above all, Wagenknecht and company are determined to prevent the development of an independent movement against the capitalist system, under conditions of growing social inequality. This is the worst nightmare of the Left Party and its pseudo-left supporters (the groups Marx 21, SAV and RIO). In the 2014 European election, the Left Party put up posters with the slogan “Revolution—No thanks!” to signal to the ruling class that it would do everything in its power to prevent a revolution.

The party’s call for a “wealth tax” and the reintroduction of a tax rate of 53 percent for top earners serves precisely this goal. Following the bitter experiences of recent years, everyone knows that such demands are not worth the paper they are written on. Nor do people believe that the rewarming of a few outdated social reformist nostrums from the post-war period is sufficient to break the power of capital and close the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor.

This is possible only through the implementation of a socialist program—something the Left Party completely rejects. As the Socialist Equality Party of Germany (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP) stated in its election manifesto: “The super-rich, the banks and the corporations must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the population. Only in this way can the social rights of all be secured. These include the right to an adequately paid job, a first-class education, affordable housing, a secure pension, high quality old-age provision and access to culture.”

The same goes for the struggle against militarism and war. This can be successful only if it is directed against the objective source of war, the capitalist system. At the same time, such a struggle must be international and based on the working class.

Such a genuinely socialist perspective has nothing in common with the criticisms made by the Left Party of the US-led NATO wars. Just like the SPD, the Greens

and the conservative Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), the Left Party is trying to transform widespread opposition to US President Donald Trump into support for an independent German and European great power policy. This is at the heart of the propaganda about “European peace-keeping” (Kipping).

Just a few days before the party conference, Oskar Lafontaine, one of the founders of the Left Party, praised the former French president, the authoritarian nationalist General de Gaulle, as a role model: “For years, the Left Party has been calling for an independent European foreign policy. It is a long time since Charles de Gaulle realized that France itself must decide whether to participate in war. That is why he did not integrate the French army into the military structure of NATO, or that of the US.”

For Kipping, the problem with Germany’s foreign policy makers and generals is that they lack sufficient self-confidence and arrogance. It was time to redirect the relationship with the US “into a relationship of equals” and end “subservience to the US,” she told the congress. In order to make the world “safer,” what was necessary was “an alternative” to NATO, “a collective security system.”

The Socialist Equality Party in its election campaign will expose the reactionary role of the Left Party. The SGP conducts its struggle against social inequality, militarism and war on the basis of a socialist strategy. The alliance of the Left Party with German imperialism against Trump must be countered by unifying the German and American working classes against the capitalist warmongers on both sides of the Atlantic.

All those seeking to oppose social inequality, the rise of the far right and the return of German militarism should assist in building the SGP and support its campaign for the September federal election.



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