

German Left Party backs European Union

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In advance of its congress this weekend, the German Left Party (Die Linke) has removed all criticism of the European Union from its European election programme.

The party executive has erased from the draft programme a passage in which the EU is described as “militaristic, undemocratic and neo-liberal.” On Sunday evening on the ARD programme “Report from Berlin,” Dietmar Bartsch, the leader of the Left Party in the Bundestag (parliament), announced, “This passage will not be submitted, it has been changed.”

Bartsch justified removing the passage by saying that if the Left Party presented harsh criticism of Europe, its position would resemble that of populist parties in Italy, Hungary and France. “Our job is not to leave Europe to the right wing,” he said. The Left Party wanted to “build on the tradition of the European peace project, the great cultural project,” he added.

On Monday, party co-chairs Bernd Riexinger and Katja Kipping confirmed that the party executive had voted to adopt a draft programme that defends the EU and calls for making it “more social” and “more democratic,” with only two votes against. “The old sentence is no longer in it,” said Riexinger. Kipping described herself as a “glowing European.”

The decision of the executive was preceded by an internal party dispute in which Bartsch and former party leader Gregor Gysi, Wulf Gallert from Saxony-Anhalt and parliamentary delegate Stefan Liebich had their say. They publicly decried the fact that the original draft counterposed the “European Union of Millionaires” to a “Europe in Solidarity with the Millions,” criticized EU treaties as the embodiment of “neo-liberalism and profit-seeking” and accused the EU of having become “more neo-liberal and authoritarian” in the last 10 years.

Gallert said the description of the European Union was “so radically negative that it raises the question of

why we are going to participate in the parliamentary elections of an EU that combines all bad things ... We must stop demobilizing our voters.” Liebich said the task of the Left Party was to “protect the EU from destruction by Le Pen, Strache, Salvini and Gauland.”

The Left Party’s attempt to portray the defence of the EU as a fight against the rise of the right wing is demagoguery of the worst kind. In reality, the right wing is gaining influence mainly because the “left” defenders of the EU give it free rein to channel the anger and indignation against this reactionary institution and direct it along a nationalist path.

Every day, millions of workers experience the EU as an extended arm of powerful financial interests that destroys their livelihoods through ruthless austerity, invests billions in military rearmament, builds an Orwellian police and surveillance apparatus, incites hatred against migrants and send sthousands of refugees to certain death.

With the EU, the Left Party is not defending “Europe” against the right wing, but capitalism against the working class. That is why it seeks to equate the opposition of the working class to the European Union with the nationalist right-wing extremists—Le Pen, Strache, Salvini and the Alternative for Germany’s Gauland. In fact, the antithesis between a left-wing and right-wing opposition to the EU could not be sharper.

The opposition of the masses is directed against social inequality, militarism and political oppression and inevitably takes on international forms. For example, the rebellion of the French “yellow vests” against the social attacks of former investment banker Emmanuel Macron has been met with sympathy and solidarity protests across Europe. In almost all European countries, the number and extent of strikes and protests against low wages, exploitation and political repression are growing.

This is the objective basis for a true unification of

Europe—not as an alliance of imperialist powers armed to the teeth, but as the United Socialist States of Europe, in which workers’ governments expropriate the large corporations and fortunes and deploy the vast human and material resources of the continent to satisfy the needs of society, rather than the profit interests of a few.

The return of the extreme right, on the other hand, is a direct result of EU policy. Austerity, militarism, the build-up of police powers and attacks on refugees have paved the way for it.

Right-wing parties are now in government in nine EU countries. In Germany, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) enjoys support in the highest echelons of the intelligence service, the military, the police and the universities. Just as 90 years ago, the ruling class needs fascism to crush the resistance of the working class and to prepare new wars.

The EU has always been an instrument of the most powerful European economic and financial interests against the working class and against the international rivals of European capital. With the escalation of conflict with the US, which after the Second World War had acted as Europe’s military protector and political referee, the old conflicts between the European powers are also breaking out again. Britain is on its way to abandoning the EU; France and Italy are engaged in a proxy war over oil in Libya; Paris has recalled its ambassador from Rome; and Germany is striving to become Europe’s task master.

The Munich Security Conference earlier this month marked a turning point in this regard. The conference was marked by fierce conflicts between the NATO partners, all of whom responded with increased emphasis on great power politics and militarism. “Subject or object of world politics—this is the crucial question of the future, before which Europe stands,” German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas of the Social Democratic Party said in summing up the new orientation.

That is why the Left Party can no longer tolerate any criticism of the EU in its programme. In the past, its criticism of the EU was never more than lip service, with no practical consequences. The Left Party has consistently supported the EU and its austerity and great power politics. Stefan Liebich was involved in the preparation of the 2013 white paper “New Power—New

Responsibility,” which laid the foundation for the return of German militarism. And the Left Party still stands behind its political colleague Alexis Tsipras, who has presided over a devastating EU austerity programme against the working class in Greece.

To the extent that the Left Party has made any criticism of German militarism, it has mainly been directed at its dependence on the United States. Now that the federal government is committed to a more independent military and foreign policy, the Left Party is fully engaged.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) is the only party that is presenting an election programme in the European elections aimed against both the rise of the right and the EU. Together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, it fights for the unification of the continent on a socialist basis.



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