

Germany's Left Party declares support for war with Russia at Erfurt party congress

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“‘General’ enthusiasm over the prospects of imperialism, furious defence of it and painting it in the brightest colours—such are the signs of the times,” wrote Lenin in his work *Imperialism*, which analysed the driving forces of the First World War.

The supremacy of finance capital over society and the struggle between the great powers for the division of the world in the First World War had, as the leader of the October Revolution emphasized, “caused the propertied classes to go over entirely to the side of imperialism.”

It would be hard to more aptly characterize the Left Party Congress in Erfurt last weekend. In the midst of the escalating NATO proxy war in Ukraine, which increasingly poses the direct threat of a third world war, the Left Party has abandoned its rhetorical criticism of NATO and stepped forward as a party of war. The party congress was dominated by a hysterical atmosphere in which one speaker after another demanded, to the applause of the delegates, a harder line towards Russia.

Here are only a few examples:

Gerhard Trabert, the Left Party candidate in the election for Germany's federal president earlier this year, declared: “One thing is important to me. Please do not condemn those who are in favour of arms deliveries. I personally have been a doctor in so many relief operations where I have had the experience that the civilian population, in particular, can only be protected against the aggressiveness of a despot by being able to counter something militarily.”

Thuringian Minister President Bodo Ramelow, who was celebrated prominently at the party congress as the only “left” minister president in Germany's 16 federal states, made it clear that the Left Party as a party of government is already involved in the supply of arms.

Nobody should think that “we can decide freely at this level in the end,” he said. “If the question is whether weapons are ordered—and weapons come from Thuringia—then the question is whether I can permit myself to refuse.”

Ramelow's clear answer was “No.” Putin and Russia had to be stopped. In the style of a right-wing, anti-Russian NATO militarist, he said: “I am in favour of finding solutions alongside Ukraine, but also alongside Moldova. So that Russia does not take Transnistria, no one should advocate that Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk become Russian territory.”

His speech culminated in the statement that the world definitely needs “a German power that leads” if it ever again wants to refer to the former Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chancellor Willy Brandt and make pledges about “peace,” “disarmament” or a “non-aggression pact.”

This statement could hardly be clearer. In all essentials, the Left Party supports the foreign policy of the German government which is using Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine, provoked by the decades-long NATO offensive against Russia, to return to an aggressive great power policy of war.

Just a few days before the Left Party Congress, SPD leader Lars Klingbeil emphasized in a keynote speech on foreign policy that Germany must “have the ambition to be a leading power again after almost 80 years

of restraint.” Klingbeil also referred to Willy Brandt. He already “knew that the foundations for a powerful peace policy are also military strength and capability.”

A group of young Left Party members from the Left Party Youth Solid group was especially aggressive in spreading war hysteria and “#MeToo” allegations at the congress. For example, 19-year-old Sofia Fellingner described all previous contributions that had not explicitly spoken out in favour of arms deliveries as “intolerable” in an angry speech.

Everyone speaks about “peace,” she said. Peace comes, “but not if you let people die. Peace does not come from hugging tanks.” Addressing all those “who are so remote from reality,” she advised them “to go to their Ukrainian comrades who are currently fighting and dying.”

It is not known whether and how many delegates accepted Fellingner's invitation, but the party leadership was only too willing to give these “fighting comrades” a platform.

In a greeting to the congress, Olena Slobodian, a representative of the Ukrainian “left” party Sozialny Rukh, boasted: “Our comrades are now defending Ukraine as part of the armed forces and territorial defense.” In other words, they fight arm in arm with far-right militias such as the Azov Battalion and act as NATO proxies against Russia.

Provocatively, Slobodian asserted: “The Ukrainian women are very disappointed by the attitude of Germany's ruling circles, which are in every respect evading practical support for Ukraine.” The “so-called German military aid for Ukraine” was “so meagre that it can only provoke a sad smile and sarcastic jokes in Ukraine,” she added.

In fact, Germany is now one of the largest arms suppliers to Kiev. Significantly, German self-propelled PzH 2000 howitzers arrived in Ukraine during the week of the party congress.

According to Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), the “training of Ukrainian soldiers on the Cheetah flak tanks” and training “on the promised multiple rocket launchers” are also underway. Further deliveries—including the IRIS-T air defense system and tank swaps with Eastern European states—are being worked on “at full speed.”

The goal of NATO and the German government, a military victory over Russia, is essentially shared by the Left Party. At the party congress, the Russian opposition member Oxana Timofeeva, a professor at the European University in Saint Petersburg, declared, “A ceasefire is impossible, because it would result in the occupation of Ukrainian territory by Russian troops under the terms of the aggressor. The only way to end this war is for Ukraine to win. For this, it needs the consistent support of other countries, the support of the European Union.”

For her “clear words,” Timofeeva was celebrated on social media by leading Left Party representatives—including the party's former federal affairs officer and security policy spokesman Matthias Höhn.

One of the Left Party's key tasks is suppressing any criticism of NATO and the imperialist goals behind the war offensive. The foreign policy spokesman and founding father of the Left Party, Gregor Gysi, shouted to the delegates: “Of course, the US is now trying its hand at supplying

weapons against Russia. Of course, they now want to weaken Russia.”

The “responsibility,” however, lies “with the Russian leadership.” One should “not condemn the war and immediately afterwards say ‘but,’ and thereby relativize the condemnation of the war.”

The main motion of the party executive, which was passed at the party congress, follows this line. While Russia is described as a “geostrategic center of power in fossil capitalism,” which “uses a nationalist, militaristic and autocratic great power ideology,” it says of NATO: “Especially in the Eastern European states, the desire for membership in NATO has grown due to the Russian war of aggression.” The war has thus supposedly given NATO new legitimacy.

The Left Party self-critically declares that in the past it had “paid too little attention to imperial wars beyond NATO, such as Russia’s military interventions in Chechnya and Syria.” Russia has for years been pursuing “a policy aimed at keeping the post-Soviet states under the influence of Russia, by attempting to establish authoritarian vassal regimes or—if this does not succeed—to destabilize the states.”

There is nothing progressive about the Putin regime. It represents the interests of a mafia oligarchy that has enriched itself enormously since the reintroduction of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy 30 years ago. But the Left Party’s main motion turns reality upside down.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO has been systematically encircling Russia. Not only does it “destabilize,” it conducts wars of aggression and regime-change operations that are contrary to international law and have destroyed entire countries and cost millions of lives.

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is reactionary, but in Eastern Europe the imperialist powers are the aggressors. In early 2014, Washington and Berlin, supported by fascist forces such as the Svoboda Party and the Right Sector, organized a coup in Ukraine to install an anti-Russian regime. The NATO powers first provoked the invasion of Russia, and now they continue to escalate the confrontation on a daily basis. They aim to militarily subjugate and dismember the resource-rich and geostrategically crucial country so that it can be exploited and dominated by the imperialist powers.

The newly elected party leadership—about which the WSWs will write separately—has the task of controlling the growing opposition to this madness and passing on the costs of war to the working class. Already, wherever it governs at the state level with the pro-war and pro-austerity SPD and Greens, the Left Party implements social attacks and brutally pushes ahead with the rearmament of the police and secret services.

But the party is increasingly hated by workers and young people. The shroud of its decline hovered over the entire party congress. After catastrophic electoral defeats at the federal and state level and internal power struggles, Gysi warned the Left Party on its “15th birthday” that it faces an “existential crisis.” This admission does not change anything about the political course of the party, which articulates not the interests of the workers but those of the capitalist state and the wealthy middle classes who fear nothing more than revolutionary struggles by the working class.

In her speech, party leader Janine Wissler, who was re-elected with just under 58 percent of the vote, said she was strongly in favour of tougher sanctions and trade war measures against Russia. She is fully aware that this will have dramatic consequences for the working population—not only in Russia, but also in her country and worldwide.

“We were often against sanctions in past conflicts for good reasons, because they hit large sections of the population,” she said. She continued: “We are in favour of targeted sanctions against oligarchs and the military-industrial complex if they are consistently enforced.”

A gas embargo would have “dramatic consequences for the population” and “would lead to dramatic social upheavals,” she warned. But it was right to “reduce dependence on gas and fossil fuels.”

In order to conceal the essentially right-wing capitalist policy of her

party, Wissler peppered her speech with a few social phrases and even claimed at the end that the Left Party would stand “in the tradition of the socialist movement, in the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.”

What an absurdity! Luxemburg and Liebknecht were revolutionary Marxists who paid with their lives for their tireless and principled struggle against imperialism and war and for the conquest of power by the working class.

The Left Party, on the other hand, was always a bourgeois party that defended German capitalism and imperialism and was rewarded for this with ministerial posts and government subsidies worth millions. It was founded in the summer of 2007 through the merger of two bureaucratic apparatuses, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Election Alternative Labour and Social Justice group (WASG), both of which had decades of experience in the suppression of the working class.

The PDS was the successor to the Stalinist state party in East Germany (German Democratic Republic), which co-organized German unity on a capitalist basis in 1990 and immediately afterwards assumed governmental functions in the new federal states. The WASG was initiated by long-standing SPD and trade union officials with the aim of absorbing the social anger about the Agenda 2010 austerity policies of SPD Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Alongside Gysi, the initiative for the merger came from Oskar Lafontaine, one of the most experienced bourgeois politicians, who had previously held leadership positions in the government and the SPD for 40 years. He has since left the Left Party.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) has regarded the Left Party as an opponent of socialism and the working class from the outset, unlike pseudo-left tendencies such as Marx21, from which Wissler emerged. This is now undeniably clear. A party that aggressively takes the side of imperialist war policies is what it is—a right-wing, pro-imperialist party of war.

Workers and young people must draw the necessary political conclusions from the party congress in Erfurt. The struggle against the danger of a third world war requires the construction of an international anti-war movement based on the working class—in Russia, Ukraine, Germany, throughout Europe and in the US and worldwide—which fights for the overthrow of capitalism and the socialist reorganization of society. The only party representing this program is the SGP, the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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