

Jacobin Congress in Germany promotes war and capitalist policies

Gregor Link

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Jacobin magazine held its second “Socialism in Our Time” conference on 30 September and 1 October in Berlin, which was attended by around 200 activists from the Left Party and trade unions, as well as some students. Representatives of various political non-governmental organisations, foundations and trade unions, as well as members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and various bourgeois politicians, were invited as speakers. The entrance fee for the two-day conference was €50.

The congress had nothing to do with left-wing politics, let alone “socialism.” In the midst of the eruption of the class struggle worldwide, and increasingly brutal wars, the speakers explicitly rejected any struggle for socialism. Instead, they sought to mobilize a petty-bourgeois milieu to defend the political props of capitalism. Prominent speakers called for the strengthening of the Left Party, Greens and European Union (EU), and promoted support for the NATO proxy war in Ukraine.

Several speakers—including Dieter Klein, Cornelia Hildebrandt and Heinz Bierbaum—are leading figures in the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is affiliated with the Left Party and has played an important role in the geopolitics of German imperialism for many years. For example, in the proxy war against Syria, the foundation worked closely with civilian forces that called for NATO military intervention to overthrow the Assad regime or supported the murderous Free Syrian Army (FSA). After General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi seized power in Egypt in July 2013, the Foundation published a strategy paper advocating a political arrangement with the Egyptian military dictatorship.

Jacobin magazine was founded in 2010 in the US and supports the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a faction of the Democratic Party. DSA members have supported record Pentagon war budgets in the US Congress, supported billions of dollars in weapons shipments to the Ukrainian and Israeli regimes, and passed legislation that deprives rail workers of their right to strike. At this year’s DSA congress, the organization decided by an overwhelming majority to remain within the Democrats and not to criticize the right-wing voting records of DSA deputies.

Arms supplies for victory: “All that is necessary!”

The recent Congress fits seamlessly into this reactionary record.

Three panels alone were devoted to the war in Ukraine, in which the speakers excelled in war propaganda. Speakers from the “Right to Resist” network even handed out a leaflet to all participants on “A Just Peace for Ukraine” panel, condemning calls for a “peace agreement” between the two countries and openly advocating for Western arms supplies to the fascist-run Ukrainian military.

When asked by the WSWs what arms deliveries the panel specifically demanded, speaker Stas Sergienko replied that they demanded “everything that is necessary” to win the war against Russia. There is “no other option” for the left, as the issue is ensuring the existence of the Ukrainian nation-state. The Ukrainian population, Sergienko claimed, contrary to the facts, stands united behind the Zelensky regime’s war despite all deprivations. Those who are personally unwilling to finance arms deliveries should at least support Ukrainian exile organisations and their demands for arms deliveries.

A second spokeswoman for “Right to Resist” reacted angrily to the WSWs question, complaining that “many leftists” would not support arms shipments. She called on the German trade unions to set up “delivery corridors” based on the French model in order to support the Ukrainian side. She urged the trade union apparatuses to act as weapons suppliers and suppress opposition among workers. “It can’t be that arms shipments are blocked like last year,” she raged, “you really have to talk leftists out of it!”

In May 2022, strikes by Greek workers temporarily halted the transport of NATO tanks to the Ukrainian military.

Anti-Marxism in the service of imperialist politics

These nationalist and anti-worker positions—which are no different from NATO propaganda—were ideologically justified in a second panel entitled “Class, Nationalism and Imperialism in the Russia-Ukraine War.” Speaker Volodymyr Ishchenko turned geopolitical reality upside down by characterizing Russia as imperialist and portraying Ukrainian nationalism as a mere victim of external powers.

In fact, the Ukrainian regime acts as a compliant tool of the NATO powers. At the same time, the backward Russian economy is predominantly dependent on commodity exports and is unable to

export any significant capital. But Ishchenko summarily explained that Russia was a form of imperialist power hitherto unknown to Marxism, which “does not wage war on the basis of economic expansion, but on the basis of economic contraction.”

When asked by the WSWS how workers in Russia, Ukraine, Europe and America could put an end to the war, Ishchenko replied that workers could do “not much” in this war as well as in all other conflicts. Also, “the neoliberal radical cure that the European capitalists are striving for in Ukraine” could hardly be resisted by Ukrainian workers.

Ishchenko is the editor of the magazine *Spilne* (Commons), which, according to its own statements, wants to counter “the widespread stereotype ‘left = pro-Russian’” in Ukraine. The publication of the magazine is financially supported not only by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, but also by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The latter has played a key role in building right-wing pro-Western forces in Ukraine for years, and supported the right-wing coup that overthrew the elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014. Ishchenko’s *Spilne* journal is also among the first signatories of the “Right to Resist” appeal.

The subsequent panel, entitled “Putin’s Home Front,” based on this “analysis,” devoted itself to the internal crisis of the Putin regime. The speakers (Sasha Talaver, Alexander Tushkin) also invoked “Russian imperialism” and rejected any intervention by the working class. Instead, they discussed the conflicting tendencies of Russian nationalism and the devastating demographic consequences of the war for Russian society. The panel thus appeared more like a graduate school of the Rand Corporation than an event of “socialists.”

Campaigning for the Left Party, Greens and capitalism

This policy, which threatens to trigger a nuclear war, is being enforced by the ruling class in Germany and Europe with the sharpest attacks on the working class in decades. Resistance to record inflation, social cuts, wage cuts and mass layoffs is growing across the continent. In addition, there is the fight against the ongoing and deepening COVID-19 pandemic—but none of this was discussed at the *Jacobin* Congress.

Instead, the organizers provided a platform for an illustrious band of bourgeois politicians—including Julia Salazar of the DSA in New York and Zarah Sultana of the British Labour Party—to sell their bankrupt maneuvers as “socialism.” On the panel “What’s Left of the European Project?” Belgian MEP Marc Botenga (Partij van de Arbeid) called for a European Union that would set its geopolitical goals independently of the United States. Other panels dealt with “hyperpolitics” and “degrowth” or promoted a “socialist industrial policy” that had to position itself “between China and Bidenomics.”

The thrust of the congress culminated in a joint appearance by Janine Wissler, Federal leader of the Left Party, and Sarah-Lee Heinrich, Federal Spokeswoman of the Green Youth, under the title “What Next for the German Left?” While the Greens are a

driving force behind the policies of war and wealth accumulation for the rich pursued by the Social Democrat/Green/Free Democrat government, the Left Party is on the verge of collapse in the midst of burgeoning class struggles. In order to defend the two hated parties, Wissler and Heinrich, together with *Jacobin* publisher Loren Balhorn, explored the possibility of even closer cooperation.

Wissler complained of a lack of “mobilisation capacity” of trade unions and the Left Party, which had a negative impact on the “left milieu.” Heinrich replied that large “mobilizations” had taken place under their influence—Fridays For Future, Black Lives Matter. According to Wissler, however, these “hashtag movements” have not yet been transferred into “sustainable” organisational channels. By this she meant party and union channels that have more experience in suppressing mass movements. Wissler then praised the so-called “relief packages” of the federal government and defended the right-wing balance sheet of the Left Party-led government in the state of Thuringia.

The question of how “Socialism in Our Time” can be fought for was not dealt with anywhere—but the Congress provided illustrative material for the question of how the socialist property relations in Stalinist East Germany (GDR) had been liquidated. This was provided by an appearance by Christa Luft, the last Minister of Economics of the GDR, who by founding the infamous Treuhand played a central role in initiating the restoration of capitalism and the devastating social attacks associated with German reunification.

Luft spread the lie that her government did not want an “orgy of privatisation” and that, like “all people in the East,” they were taken advantage of by Western speculators and venture capitalists. The reason for the liquidation of the GDR companies was not the rotten policy of Stalinists like Luft, but that the workers had insufficiently identified with state property! She then told the audience an anecdote about how she had personally negotiated down striking East Berlin rubbish workers at the time of the reunification and brought them back to work after they had demanded the same wage as their colleagues in the West.

Anyone interested in socialism could only have been repelled by this anti-socialist and militarist conference of the privileged petty bourgeoisie. Socialists worldwide are fighting for the independent political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist elites. Amid the war, they do not advocate arms deliveries to right-wing regimes, but the defeat of their own ruling class. The objective conditions are in place for the global abolition of capitalism and the construction of socialism. If you want to fight for it, you should contact the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) today.



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