

Die Linke/Left Party congress provides a safety valve for capitalism

Peter Schwarz
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The federal congress of Die Linke/Left Party took place in Potsdam from 19 to 21 June. The party executive's lead motion opens with the sentence: "A year ago we decided to organise hope." This is perhaps the only honest statement in the entire document.

"Organising hope" instead of overturning the untenable conditions of society — that was once the business of the Church. For precisely this reason, Karl Marx coined the phrase about religion as the "opium of the people". The Church directed hope towards salvation in the afterlife in order to prevent people from rebelling against the intolerable conditions of the real world.

Die Linke does the same in this world. It claims that militarisation, rearmament, climate destruction, the dismantling of social provision and the shift to the right can be overcome without touching capitalist private property and the social relations and state institutions built upon it. It fosters the illusion that four decades of social regression, the polarisation between rich and poor, internal rearmament and imperialist wars can be reversed by a few reformist sedatives.

Every sentence of the document is formulated so as to combine mild criticism of existing conditions with a policy compatible with that of the federal government — and at points with that of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) as well. Its goal is not to mobilise the working class against the billionaire oligarchs and their political lackeys who dominate economic life, but to blunt any such movement before it can develop.

This compels the party to criticise the most glaring abuses. Yet once one penetrates the fog of left-wing phrases, the executive's keynote motion reveals itself as a pro-capitalist, nationalist document that defends the interests of the ruling elites.

Die Linke and the AfD

Smothering resistance to capitalism has always been the role of Die Linke, ever since its predecessor, the PDS, crawled out of the ruins of the SED — the Stalinist state party of the former East Germany (GDR) — in 1990.

At that time, the PDS founded and supported the work of the *Treuhandanstalt*—whose role was to privatise, restructure, or liquidate roughly 8,500 state-owned enterprises. When workers rebelled against the social catastrophe this produced, it posed as the voice of the disadvantaged and entered eastern German state governments, where it continued the devastation. In Berlin, where the PDS/Die Linke governed in coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) from 2002 to 2011, it was a nationwide pioneer in destroying public sector jobs, cutting wages and social provisions, and privatising municipal housing.

The "Agenda 2010" policies of the SPD-Green federal government under Gerhard Schröder and the merger with dissident SPD members gave new momentum to the party, now calling itself Die Linke. In most eastern German federal states, it became the strongest or second strongest force; in western Germany it entered state parliaments for the first time; and in Thuringia it even provided the State Premier in the person of Bodo Ramelow for ten years.

With what result? Die Linke left behind a social wasteland into which the AfD is now advancing. Politically too, Ramelow paved the way for the AfD with his rigorous deportation policies. At the start of 2017, the deportation rate in Thuringia was almost three times as high as in Bavaria governed by the Christian Social Union (CSU).

Young people who have joined Die Linke out of opposition to the AfD should ask themselves why the AfD became by far the strongest party in Thuringia after ten years of Ramelow's government. The answer is simple: the combination of left-wing phrases and right-wing politics that distinguishes Die Linke is the best growth medium for the extreme right. It generates the frustration, disillusionment and hatred that right-wing demagogues exploit for their own purposes.

Die Linke itself denies any responsibility for the catastrophe it has itself brought about. Instead, it holds the population responsible for the growth of the far right. "It is clear that by now a section of AfD voters has adopted a racist worldview that cannot be won back by political demands alone," the party executive's keynote motion states.

In response, the motion proposes "an anti-fascist alliance policy" — meaning even closer collaboration with the despised establishment parties — and calls for a "ban on the AfD". Such a ban would only strengthen the state's repressive apparatus, which is itself riddled with far-right elements, and would serve as a precedent for the suppression of left-wing organisations, as numerous historical examples demonstrate. A ban on the AfD would not halt the construction of an authoritarian regime but accelerate it.

The AfD is not a foreign body that has invaded the peaceful garden of democracy. It was deliberately built up from above because it is needed to suppress resistance to unemployment and the dismantling of social provisions, to construct a police state, to drive forward rearmament and to prepare further wars.

The growth of the AfD cannot be understood, writes Christoph Vandreier in the foreword to his book "Why Are They Back?", "without examining the role of the government, the state apparatus, the parties, the media and the ideologues at the universities who are paving its way." The book demonstrates this in detail.

Hitler before was brought to power through a conspiracy of the ruling elites gathered around Reich President Paul von Hindenburg, Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen, the media baron Alfred Hugenberg and the leaders of industry, whom Hitler had convinced of his usefulness in a speech at the Düsseldorf Industry Club. He was needed to suppress the working class, to make the economy "fit for war" and to wage the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

Donald Trump, who openly supports the AfD, also owed his election victory to hatred of the ruling elites. Yet in office, he proved to be the pure embodiment of the dictatorship of finance capital. The five richest men in the world sat behind him at his inauguration; their wealth has since exploded. Elon Musk has become the world's first trillionaire. The SpaceX IPO alone brought the avowed AfD supporter a wealth increase of

624 billion dollars in the space of six days.

The Democrats and their pseudo-left wing, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — Die Linke's sister party — offer nothing in response. They themselves represent the interests of Wall Street and the military-industrial complex and are neither capable of nor willing to mobilise the working class against the fascist in the White House.

New York's new mayor Zohran Mamdani, a DSA member, had already cozied up to Trump before even taking office. He has largely shredded his election promises — free buses, affordable housing, a special tax on the rich. In doing so, Mamdani is following the same path as numerous other allies of Die Linke — Alexis Tsipras in Greece, Pablo Iglesias in Spain — who won elections with left-wing phrases only in government to implement the dictates of the banks, the IMF and the EU.

Die Linke wants to repeat this deception in its campaign for the Berlin state elections in September. “We are showing for Berlin what Zohran Mamdani has shown in New York: with a hard-hitting campaign for an affordable Berlin, a credible lead candidate, door-to-door canvassing and thousands of committed members in every district, we can show that politics in the interests of the majority of people can work,” the lead motion states.

The rise of the AfD can only be halted by a movement of the working class that combines the struggle against the dismantling of social provisions, dictatorship and war with the fight against capitalism. Such a movement must be international and independent of all the establishment parties as well as the trade unions, which have transformed themselves from reformist workers' organisations into corporatist co-managers and factory police. Such a movement would unite the working class as a powerful social force and pull the ground from under the feet of the right-wing demagogues.

Die Linke categorically rejects this. Instead, in the name of an “anti-fascist alliance policy”, it moves ever closer to the governing parties that are paving the way for the fascists with their attacks on refugees, their social cuts, their construction of a police state and their pro-war policy.

Die Linke's pro-war policy

The keynote motion takes the same line on the question of war. The party leadership is well aware that rearmament, conscription and war are deeply unpopular among the youth, from whom it has recently gained many new members. The motion therefore does not stint on condemnations of “the escalation of military violence and wars”, calls for investment in “technological independence, future-proof education and research and social cohesion” rather than armaments, offers support for conscientious objectors and similar positions.

Yet the political answers the motion provides to the current wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the preparations for war against China and the formation of new geopolitical alliances, largely correspond to those of the federal government and the interests of German imperialism.

Socialists combat imperialist wars using the methods of class struggle. They advocate the unity of the international working class in order to put a stop to the warmongers in all countries. Karl Liebknecht, who broke with the SPD in the struggle against the First World War, distilled this into the terse formula: “The main enemy is at home.” This is the line taken up today by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party), the German section of the Fourth International.

For Die Linke, by contrast, the main enemy is in China, Russia and Washington. It concedes that the EU does not differ “from other geopolitical actors” but argues it is “significantly less capable of action due to its internal contradictions.” The motion accuses Trump of a neo-imperialist policy, charges Putin with wanting “regime change and territorial gains in Ukraine” and describes China as an imperialist power, but does not condemn German and European imperialism or NATO with a single word.

Europe must become “a peace power capable of defence but not

exporting violence”, the motion demands. The federal government justifies its massive rearmament and its support for Ukraine in the war against Russia in similar terms: the aim is “defence”, “freedom” and “democracy” — not the “export of violence”.

This is of course a lie. NATO deliberately provoked the Ukraine war through its eastward expansion, the Maidan coup of 2014 and the arming of the Ukrainian army. What the NATO powers are after is control of Ukraine and Russia's vast natural resources, not freedom and democracy. Die Linke supports this objective — which is why it voted in the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) for the war credits of over a trillion euros.

Putin and his war are without doubt reactionary. But his overthrow is the task of the Russian working class, not of German or American imperialism. The Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk has been held for more than two years without a guilty verdict in a Ukrainian prison because he advocates ending the war through the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class. For Zelensky, the puppet of the imperialist powers, this constitutes treason.

In the Middle East too, Die Linke supports the war policies of Germany, the United States and Israel. The motion describes the US and Israeli attack on Iran as “contrary to international law”, yet when Iran's supreme leader Khamenei was targeted and killed on the first day of the war, party chairman Jan van Aken exulted: “May he rot in hell.” He could not have expressed his support for an act in breach of international law more plainly.

The lead motion also emphatically backs the Iranian opposition, even though parts of it are financed by the United States and advocate a regime under Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last Shah, who ruled the country from 1953 until the revolution of 1979 as a US satrap and torturer.

On the Gaza conflict, the party executive has tabled a separate motion because the issue is dividing the party. Last year the youth wing Linksjugend [‘solid] passed a motion describing the genocide against the Palestinians as such and calling Israel an apartheid state. The executive then attacked it sharply for doing so.

Now the party executive's Gaza motion reads like a caricature of political “balance”. Over eight pages it condemns Hamas and antisemitism, criticises Israeli policy and sets out various opinions, without taking a clear position on one of the gravest war crimes in recent history. Politically, it amounts to a call for a two-state solution, the same position held by the federal government.

Die Linke also supports the government's efforts to break free from dependence on the United States, forge its own geostrategic alliances and pursue its imperialist interests independently. The keynote motion advocates “an alliance of smaller states and middle powers in the North and South”, counting Germany among the “middle powers”. Both Europe and the Global South would benefit from technological emancipation from the United States and greater independence from the US financial system, it argues. Lula da Silva in Brazil and Claudia Sheinbaum in Mexico are recommended to the federal government as alliance partners.

None of this has anything to do with left-wing, let alone socialist, politics. Both Lula and Sheinbaum are unscrupulous representatives of the ruling class in their respective countries.

Social policy placebos

The keynote motion lists numerous reformist social proposals which, given the sweeping attacks on pensions, healthcare, education and social benefits, are reminiscent of an attempt to treat pneumonia with placebos. Through minor tax, insurance and social reforms, Die Linke promises to halt a disaster whose cause lies in the insoluble crisis of global capitalism.

While the party formally calls for “a wealth tax and a fair reform of inheritance tax”, otherwise, the colossal fortunes of the super-rich are sacrosanct to it. The number of super-rich individuals with assets exceeding \$100 million has risen in Germany alone by 1,100 to 5,000 in the past year.

The lead motion emphasises no fewer than eight times that Die Linke seeks “an alliance with the trade unions.” But the trade unions and their army of workplace officials are the pioneers of the destruction of jobs and social benefits in the workplaces. At VW alone, the IG Metall union signed off on the elimination of 35,000 jobs. They ensure that the demolition proceeds without friction and that no resistance stirs.

The trade unions also play a leading role in war policy. A week ago, Bodo Ramelow — now Vice-President of the Bundestag (federal parliament) — and Die Linke chairwoman Ines Schwerdtner took part in an IG Metall demonstration in Berlin that advocated billions in subsidies for the steel corporations, high import tariffs and local content requirements. Such trade war measures save no jobs; they are the precursor to war.



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