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Germany:

Die Linke takes another step towards adaptation

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Germany's Die Linke party (Left Party) met in a congress of preparation for the European parliamentary elections in mid-February 2014. Die Linke remains the first political reference point for those who orient to the left politically in Germany. In its programme, we find not only a whole series of demands and proposals in the interests of employees, the deprived, women, youth, and ecologically sustainable development, but also the objective of the transcendence of capitalism through a socialist and democratic project of society. Also, the party seems to have overcome the electoral crisis it underwent in 2011-2013 – it is at 11% in polls of voting intentions and thus begins to approach its best result, that of 2009, where it won 11.9% in the federal elections.

But it is also true that the party has from the beginning – already in its precursor, the PDS/Linkspartei – suffered a strong pressure towards adaptation. In the Land of Brandenburg, it co-governs as a junior partner of the SPD and bears co-responsibility for a policy of capitalist crisis management to the detriment of the exploited and oppressed as well as the natural bases of human survival. In full negotiation for the formation of the new grand coalition with the CDU/CSU, the SPD had declared publicly that it did not rule out a coalition with Die Linke in the future. Thus, the leadership of Die Linke has tried to make advances to the SPD and Greens with a view to the 2017 federal elections and to prove that it is serious and responsible.

To become a party of government at the federal level, Die Linke must eliminate some key points of its identity and political profile, which will not be easy. First, it must accept the interventions of the Bundeswehr around the world. Secondly, it must accept the austerity programmes inflicted on the economically weakest countries in the European Union, starting with Greece. Thirdly, it must accept budgetary discipline in Germany, and thus measures of privatisation and austerity, and new gifts for the banks and trusts. Fourthly, it must prove its fidelity to the established state institutions, the bourgeois parliamentary system and its divine centre of gravity: the private property of the billionaires and multi-millionaires. Also, it must demonstrate its capacity to marginalise the decidedly anti-capitalist forces it still contains.

In this respect, in mid February 2014, Die Linke made an undeniable step forward at its congress of preparation for the European parliamentary elections. That goes both for the content of its electoral programme for the European elections as well as for the selection of candidates on its electoral list.

Already before the congress, by the vote of a commission of around 80 or 90 members responsible for proposing the list of candidates to the congress, only Tobias Pflüger, an anti-militarist activist and member of the Anti-capitalist Left (Antikapitalistische Linke - AKL) current, was able to find a place in the first six of the lists proposed, in place 2. Michael Aggelidis, a former Die Linke deputy in the regional parliament of Rhineland-North Westphalia and a comrade of the isl [1], as well as being a member of the AKL and of Syriza Germany, although warmly applauded for his speech stressing international mobilisations of solidarity against the Troika, was eliminated with only one vote. Already a bad sign for the congress.

Gregor Gysi, chair of the party's parliamentary group in the Bundestag, together with the heads of the co-governmentalist current of the party, the Forum demokratischer Sozialismus (FdS) and the representatives of the party's big detachments in eastern Germany, had meticulously prepared his coup. Neither Tobias Pflüger nor Sabine Wills, both well known for their critical attitude towards the European Union, and their involvement in extra-parliamentary movements, were selected. At the head of the list, in the first places which have a chance of being elected, there is no member of the AKL, the most left wing candidate being Fabio Demasi in place 6 – he is a collaborator of Sarah Wagenknecht and a member of Sozialistische Linke (SL), a fairly heterogeneous current with a

left reformist profile.

For the content, it was the same as for the personnel: decidedly anti-capitalist positions rejecting acceptance of the institutional framework of the European Union (EU) were marginalised at the congress. It was not really the overall electoral programme for the European elections which was at issue – it is some 80 pages and contains a whole series of very acceptable passages alongside others which are ambiguous or doubtful – but above all its preamble, whose draft text had been formulated by members of the Lafontainist, anti-capitalist and reformist left of the party in the commission responsible for preparing congress documents. Gregor Gysi and those close to him had launched a public polemic against this preamble in the media, citing the “unbridled radicalism” of the text.

It was above all a phrase in this text which was the target of this campaign of denunciation, in which the EU is characterized as “neoliberal, militarist and to a great degree non-democratic”. Although with these characterisations of the EU the text did not imply any nationalist fall-back, but rather the construction of another Europe from below, it was denounced as “anti-European”. At the congress, the passage was eliminated by a large majority, and only the AKL and another small left current (Geraer Dialog/Sozialistischer Dialog) rejected the formulations of “compromise” which were patched up.

The consistent left was thus isolated. Even some AKL members, above all deputies and members of the leadership, had called for moderation while saying that the differences should not be “exaggerated”, when there was a solid base of common positions in the party. At the congress, they spoke and voted against the amendment seeking to reintroduce the disputed passage. It seems then that the Anti-capitalist Left current will undergo further processes of differentiation and disaffiliation, after already having lost the comrades around Sarah Wagenknecht who have formed the association Freiheit durch Sozialismus (Freedom by Socialism), leaving the AKL some time ago.

If we study the electoral programme for the European elections in its entirety, as well as the public statements of the spokespersons of the party and its Bundestag fraction, we find a characteristic ambiguity: on the one hand, the constitutional bases of the EU like Maastricht and Lisbon are rejected as are the policies of the majority parties in the European Parliament, the European Council of Governments, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, whereas the EU is accepted as a framework serving to preserve peace and organiser social and ecological progress. Instead of proposing new genuinely democratic European institutions, built on the basis of the mobilisations and self-organisation of the popular masses and leading to a democratically elected constituent assembly and the participatory drawing up of a European constitution representing popular interests, it is reform of the EU which is proposed. At the centre of the proposals is the demand to broaden the rights of the European parliament. That isn't very different from the positions articulated by social democracy, notably by its European president Martin Schulz in his book “Der gefesselte Riese. Europas letzte Chance” (“The Chained Giant. Europe's Last Chance”).

It is probable, or at least possible, that our long-time guiding line – of bringing together anti-capitalist forces both inside and outside Die Linke to reflect together, draw up and articulate positions and take common initiatives as well as to participate jointly in extra-parliamentary mobilisations – could soon be concretised.

In Berlin, a new anti-capitalist organisation (Neue antikapitalistische Organisation, NaO) has just been created, and a process to broaden it to the federal level has begun. The NaO has already asked the AKL for a meeting to discuss the situation after the Die Linke congress and talk about possible common initiatives, like the creation of an anti-capitalist forum (Antikapitalistisches Forum) open to both members and non-members of the party.

It should be said that there have already been disaffiliations by members of Die Linke frustrated by the results of the congress. It is thus urgent to create structures which will avoid an uncoordinated loss of activists by offering a new framework for militant activity – while being conscious of the fact that Die Linke has not yet arrived at its August 1914,

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and that there is not as yet space for a new party to its left.

[1] One of two organisations linked to the Fourth International in Germany, the isl is active inside Die Linke while also participating in the NaO (see below). It has just proposed a fusion process to the other FI organisation, the RevolutionÄr-Sozialistischer Bund