

German Left Party congress backs imperialist campaign against Venezuela

By Johannes Stern
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The Left Party's European election congress late last month in Bonn sent a clear message: the bourgeoisie can rely unconditionally on the Left Party's support for the enforcement of its pro-war policies and attacks on the working class.

The right-wing, bourgeois character of the Left Party was underscored in particular by its explicit endorsement of the imperialist offensive against Venezuela. The party responded furiously to a solidarity action involving 20 delegates led by Left Party parliamentary group deputy leader Heike Hänsel in which two banners were unveiled, one reading "Hands off Venezuela" in English, and the other "Hands off Venezuela! Forward to socialism" in German.

The leader of the Left Party group in Saxony's state parliament, Rico Gebhardt, who chaired the congress on Saturday, February 23, condemned the "outrageous action" in the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel*. He stated that he was unimpressed at the disruption of an otherwise relatively orderly party congress. He had "no idea ... what was on the placards," but he was at least able to prevent "the party congress from taking up the motion on Venezuela."

Stefan Liebich, the Left Party's foreign affairs spokesman, told NDR in an interview that the declarations of solidarity with Venezuela "confused" many people. Nobody supports "an intervention by the US, but it is unacceptable not to say a word about Maduro's responsibility." It is "totally unacceptable for an elected parliament to be suspended and replaced by another." The Maduro government has "manoeuvred the country into a serious social, economic and political crisis."

Liebich declared his explicit solidarity with the right-wing protests against current Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, which are aimed at bringing about regime change in collaboration with the imperialist powers. He can "well understand the protests there" and "I think they are legitimate."

Other Left Party leaders spoke along similar lines. Thomas Nord, a member of the Left Party national executive since

2012, described the protest at the congress as a "deliberate provocation. Organised with the expectation that someone does something about it so that they can portray themselves as victims and secure more attention as martyrs. Perverted but true."

The spokesperson for the Left Party youth group Solid in Bavaria, Anna Westner, raged on Spiegel Online, "It's an outrage to present it as though the entire federal party congress declared its solidarity with the Maduro government just because 20 people stormed the stage without authorisation from anybody." It amounted to "a relatively unrepresentative action by a few individuals," she added.

Under conditions of the growth of the class struggle and mounting tensions between the major powers, the Left Party is moving ever further to the right. The party is not even prepared to tolerate verbal criticism of imperialist-sponsored regime change operations at its party congress, let alone pay lip service to socialism. The Left Party attacks the bourgeois nationalist Maduro government, which defends private property and the interests of Venezuela's financial elite, from the right, and is explicitly hostile to the programme of uniting the working class internationally in the struggle against capitalist exploitation, militarism and war.

Following the party congress, Hänsel and her collaborators made clear that in reality, they endorse the imperialist offensive against the resource-rich country. Hänsel claimed on Twitter that neither she nor the Working Group for Cuba Si bore responsibility for the placard that declared "Forward to socialism." In an interview with MDR, she then declared her solidarity with the right-wing opposition, stating, "The criticisms of and demonstrations against Maduro are legitimate if the people are resisting policies and if they have no basic necessities. That's very clear."

When uttered by Left Party politicians like Hänsel, slogans such as "Hands off Venezuela" have nothing to do with a principled opposition to imperialism. On the contrary, behind their criticism of Washington's external interference and reference to the bloody history of US imperialism in Latin America, they advocate the position of the European

imperialists, who support the coup attempt in Venezuela because they see it as an opportunity to expand their own influence in the region.

The Left Party, which enjoys historically strong ties to the “left” nationalist regimes in Latin America, is playing an active role in this. “The option of mediating between the two power camps exists, and that’s the right position in our opinion,” stated Hänsel. One of her collaborators, the European affairs spokesman for the Left party in parliament, Andre Hunke, has scheduled a five-day visit to the South American country for the coming week, according to *Die Welt*. He plans to hold talks with government representatives and has invited the foreign minister, supporters of the pro-Guaido opposition, and left-wing critics of the Maduro government. He is also interested in finding out the opinion of the German ambassador and aid organisations in the country on the situation, added the newspaper.

The Left Party and its allies in Venezuela make no secret of the fact that their activities are directed towards the installation of a right-wing regime in Caracas totally subservient to finance capital. In an interview with the Left Party-aligned Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Venezuelan sociologist Emiliano Teran Mantovani declared, “It sounds almost cynical to believe that anything will change with the Maduro government.” To “rebuild the economy ... liberate it from its sole focus on raw material exports, while at the same time accelerating oil production ... a stable political framework is necessary.” He is also “aware that the next government will work hand in hand with the major corporations and push forward an economic recovery to enable capital accumulation.”

As a whole, the congress exposed the Left Party as a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist, and pro-militarist organisation. Already in the lead-up to the gathering, the party banned all criticism of the European Union, and removed a passage from the European election manifesto that described the EU as “militarist, undemocratic and neoliberal.” The delegates then adopted the draft programme in Bonn by a large majority, and one leading official after another lauded the European Union.

Gregor Gysi, the leader of the European Left, informed the delegates that the militarist character of the EU should not be a reason to describe it as such and refuse to support it. “Militarism, that’s a very famous debate,” he cynically declared. “So, if we describe the EU today as militarist, it means an EU militarism without a soldier or weapons. If we say that now, what will we say about the European Union when it has its own interventionist army and actually organises its own invasions? Will it then be ultra-militarist?”

The experience of the Iran agreement has also shown that the European Union is crucial for German imperialism to

enforce its strategic and economic interests against the United States. While Washington abrogated the agreement, the other parties, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany, desired to maintain the deal. The European powers did this with the support of the EU, continued Gysi. It is “therefore certainly possible to break with the US and its ‘America first’ course in international relations.”

Dietmar Bartsch, the Left Party’s parliamentary group leader, boasted in his speech that the Left Party already cooperates closely with practically all of the other parties to enforce German capitalist interests in Germany and around the world. “Certainly in the parliamentary sphere, as the pictures have shown, we are prepared to cooperate with other parties,” he said. They “initiated a case at the Federal Constitutional Court with the FDP and Greens,” “work with the Greens,” and “it is also the case that we have a lot in common with the SPD (Social Democratic Party).”

The title of the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) and SPD coalition agreement, “A new beginning for Europe, a new dynamic for Germany, new cohesion for our country,” “could have come from us,” boasted Bartsch. The isolated social and anti-fascist slogans at the party congress were exposed by such explicit statements. The coalition agreement laid the groundwork for a massive programme of military rearmament and the strengthening of the domestic apparatus of state repression, a new round of social spending cutbacks, and the adoption by the grand coalition of the AfD’s far-right refugee policy.

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