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Germany

A predictable fiasco - on the outcome of the European elections and the immediate tasks for Die Linke

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Lucy Redler and Thies Gleiss are members of the *Antikapitalistische Linke* current, which has existed inside *Die Linke* since March 2006. We reproduce here their contribution for the *Die Linke* leadership meeting of 16 June 2019.

1. After the congress of *Die Linke* devoted to the European question, which was held in Bonn in February 2019, the Anti-capitalist Left (AKL) analysed the decisions taken:

For public opinion, Die Linke is quite clearly identified as a party opposed to the European Union. And in view of what is the reality of the Union, its warlike attitude towards Russia and its other weapons programs, faced with Frontex and the terrible treatment to which refugees are subjected, in view of the diktats that have imposed austerity on Greece and other member states, mass youth unemployment in the South and East of the EU, the inertia it opposes to the measures necessary to protect the climate and many other things, that is the least one could ask for. Anyone who identifies with the left, and *Die Linke*, should be honoured to voice their opposition to this Union and at the very least refrain from feeding the flow of nonsense around the "European idea". Given the considerable progress of the radical right and the racists, due to the effects of the EU's concrete policy, it is also completely idiotic to assert, as does the right, that any criticism of this EU, any political orientation that would be hostile to it, would amount to demanding "a return to the nation state". Indeed, criticism of the bases of the EU is left-wing, a criticism from the right barely exists, or at most does so in the rough form of a "Europe of nations" presented as a counter-model. Unfortunately, at its special congress on Europe, *Die Linke* took the decision not to make this issue the point of honour that should have been, placed at the centre of the election campaign. This makes it more difficult to mobilize a part of our members, our electorate and supporters of the Grünen [Greens] who are likely to turn away from them because they no longer support the infantile Europeanist euphoria and declarations of love to capitalism that are the mark of this former leftist party. As in 2009 and 2014, we can then predict a result that will not exceed two thirds of the votes that the final polls will give *Die Linke*. [1]

The actual results impose the conclusion that this has unfortunately been so. [2] Whether *Die Linke* would have got more votes by running a different campaign, clearly oriented against the EU, remains in the domain of speculation. On the other hand, it is certain that such a campaign would have allowed it to really defend its positions, thus helping to root it in popular opinion. The work of explanation - which is the noblest task for a left-wing activist - has been purely and simply neglected.

2. This election result, however, is nothing other than a validation of one of the issues discussed between the AKL and other *Die Linke* currents. But there is more. This European consultation has shown that it is still not and that it will not be in the future a true election in the bourgeois-democratic sense, but a propaganda show by the European ruling class which is witnessing the disintegration of its project of capitalist economic unification. To prove it, it is not necessary to refer to the usual European constitutional experts who point out the absence of an electorate and an electoral system. A simple look at the election campaign says much more: never before has capital, through its organizations and companies, intervened so directly in an election. The golden rule of the bourgeois democratic election, which is that the sovereign, that is to say, every individual enjoying the right to vote, has the ability to put their cross on a ballot paper without any pressure or tutelage being formally exerted, has been shamefully trampled underfoot. After the big groups in chemicals, cars, metallurgy and commerce got involved, it was the turn of the railway companies to intervene in favour of Europe. As did entities placed under the aegis of *Deutsche Bahn*, so late that their statement appeared only the day before the election. The campaign gave rise to mass entertainment and propaganda shows, with the sole aim of raising the level of participation and a hollow feeling of almost religious adherence. The unanimous cry of "Go to vote" came from TV sets, football stadiums or fairgrounds.

Unfortunately, the governing bodies of the DGB and its federations have also perfectly integrated into this concert, singing in chorus "Europe!" And "Go to vote!". The big demonstrations [against the far right] of May 19th, which could have been an occasion to make heard in the street a critical left-wing voice opposed to the EU as it exists (a goal that Die Linke had elsewhere initially set, in accordance with the decisions of the party's executive committee), turned into a grand apolitical spectacle. Unfortunately, Die Linke did not, so to speak, make any discordant voice heard in the enthusiastic chorus of Europeanists calling for their "vote". And yet in this situation (as already unfortunately in previous elections) arithmetic could have been enough to convince Die Linke to rely instead on participation in the reduced vote so that the weak mobilization of its electoral base allowed it at least to have a presentable percentage.

The EU is designed to respond to the interests of capital and not to those of the European peoples, let alone the lower classes. This fact, which was at the heart of the criticisms made by the AKL before the elections, was only too well confirmed during the campaign.

3. Propaganda for "Europe" has constantly used two "narratives", as they say today. In the first, "Europe" is the EU, and the EU is a tremendous unifying project in the service of peace that in recent years has embarked on a wrong path. The second: whoever is not for the EU strengthens the radical right and the nationalists.

These two narratives are the opposite of the truth and what people in Europe have felt in their bones for years. These are two gross lies that those who dominate this Europe have more and more trouble defending. This year's European election campaign has already spread these lies in an almost impertinent way and has not even concealed the fact that these are lies - propaganda was the only goal, so that the legitimacy of the EU leaders, which had been collapsing for years, was at least strengthened on election day.

In an adversarial discussion with a young social democrat from Pulse of Europe, organized by the daily *Neues Deutschland* and published in its 15 May edition, Lucy Redler explained why the EU is not a roadblock against racism nor an instrument for the defence of peace:

I believe that with its neoliberal policy, the EU has promoted the rise of racist parties. It has a policy of closing the borders: setting up the Frontex agency, criminalizing rescue at sea, agreement with Turkey on the backs of refugees. And within the EU, it has a disastrous anti-social policy, for example with regard to Greece. It is the EU that has pushed for drastically lower wages, and unemployment, especially among young people, is still extremely high. In spite of everything, I find it important to give more weight to leftist forces in the European Parliament. But it is wrong to believe that we could make this European Union a social Europe. It has never been anything other than a treaty-based construction through which capitalist states strive to achieve their economic and foreign policy objectives. The 2007 Lisbon Treaty makes military spending and close military cooperation mandatory. In April again the European Parliament voted 13 billion credits for the European defence fund (...) Naturally [during the Cold War] it was about building a bastion against the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Before 1990, it was a matter of one half of Europe against the other, within the framework of NATO. And at a certain moment, the idea that the interests of the German and French capitalists could be better defended in association with other states was imposed. But that does not make an imperialist enterprise a pacifist enterprise. [3]

Die Linke has unfortunately submitted to these two "narratives" of the bourgeois camp on the EU. What would have been right is for it to oppose these two legends with all its strength. Firstly, because the truth requires it, secondly because it is the only way to give a real left-wing response to the claims of the extreme right and the nationalists. The discourse heard, even within *Die Linke*, according to which one should not leave to the right the ideas of fatherland, of national state, of defence of the borders are not correct; on the contrary, and in a very concrete way, we should not leave the critique of the EU to these people. This is unfortunately what happened during this campaign. Nothing should be abandoned to the right.

4. Our criticism of the submission of the radical left to the dominant ideological narratives unfortunately relates to almost the entire radical left of Europe. For example, the alliance made around La France insoumise, though more critical of the EU, also got a bad result.

Nobody developed in this campaign the left-wing perspective of a European association on completely different bases, a socialist Europe, although at the party congress some reformers constantly referred to Altiero Spinelli and the Ventotene manifesto of 1941, according to which the European revolution would be socialist. The sharp criticism of the EU as formulated by leftists in France, Greece, Slovakia, Scandinavia, unfortunately leads each time only to a criticism of the institutions which is immediately understood as the demand for a "European Union of nation states" - as the German comrades grouped around Diether Dehm, Sahra Wagenknecht, Sevim Dagdelen and others regularly demonstrate with the same mechanistic argumentation. In this campaign, we have barely heard the three constituent parts of a policy of transcending the EU: "criticism of what exists", "a rebel opposition policy where left activists have the possibility of it" and the contribution to the construction of a "Europe from below" from concrete class battles and social movements. Many on the radical left, although they have already defended at least some aspects of such an approach to the European question, have remained largely dumb under the pressure of bourgeois and Europeanist propaganda and according to a series of tactical, national and parliamentary considerations.

In addition, in each of the countries of the Union, as at the European level, disagreements on the left are significant on the political basis, tactically more so, and it is divided into different camps. That is why the overall number of MPs elected to Parliament represents a painful weakening. It is not yet certain that it will be possible to succeed in forming a left-wing parliamentary group capable of taking initiatives (at least 25 members from 7 different countries), and it is to be feared that this group will even be less capable than the outgoing GUE-NGL group.

5. *Die Linke* did not succeed in its attempt to combine a critical position towards the EU and the display of a desire to place its action within the framework of the actually existing EU. On the one hand, during the electoral meetings, on the information stands, the *Die Linke* members were the most severe critics of the EU (and were, according to expectations, perceived as such), while most of the chapters of the electoral program and the election posters had a content that had *Die Linke* labelled as "Euro-sceptic" when it was not an "enemy of the EU".

But this contrasted with the central orientation given to the campaign: the press releases, the campaign newspaper, the short version of the program and all the material published by the campaign team without democratic control by the steering committee were focused on the illusory slogan "make Europe social", like the SPD, the CDU and the *Grünen*. This was a deliberate deception and betrayal of positions developed collectively on the EU issue and adopted at the party congress and steering committee.

With regard to the criticism of the capitalist EU and the strategy to be put in place against it, the credibility of *Die Linke* and most of its sister European parties is seriously undermined. Without credibility and without being able to rely on a new and valid social conception throughout Europe, it is not possible to obtain electoral success, much less to excite activists. This is simply the record of the 2019 European election.

That is what is determinant in explaining the poor performance of *Die Linke* in Germany. We should add also some personal quarrels, the conflicts between the parliamentary group and the party, and the presence among some members of fantasies of "red-red-green" [SPD-Linke-Grünen] governmental combinations which, above all where *Die Linke* participates in regional governments, have contributed still a little more to the demobilisation of our voters.

6. The high-profile propaganda spectacle staged by the ruling class in Europe to contain the legitimacy deficit of the European project, including that of the bourgeois parties that supported it, largely missed the goals pursued. Participation made little progress, and non-voters could have the largest elected group in parliament. The pro-European bourgeois parties everywhere have been shunned or sanctioned at the polls. In Germany, voters de

facto delegitimized the parties making up the ruling coalition. Unfortunately, it is not the left-wing parties that are benefiting from this situation but various right-wing parties (even though we have not seen a far-right breakthrough as terrible as some forecasts had predicted). It is the old social democratic parties that have been particularly affected by this phenomenon of defection, with the exception of the PS in Spain and the Dutch social democrats. The venerable parent organization of the Second International, the matrix and model of all the social democratic parties - the German SPD - is on the precipice.

This result is not surprising. They have nothing to oppose the perspective of the dominant European Union to which there is no alternative, and are devoid of any vision, any hope for a better future for the people. The EU is a sordid project of domination and management of the main components of European capitalism. It is in its bases militaristic, anti-democratic and neoliberal. How many more times does this simple truth have to be politically confirmed in practice before Die Linke admits it?

There was in the bourgeois camp a political force that knew how to play the big advantage of not having so far any responsibility in endorsing the European disaster and, in Germany, not having not participated for a long time in the federal government, and which indulged in an indecent orgy of pro-EU enthusiasm in its electoral program. These are the green parties, first and foremost the *Grünen* in Germany. They appeared as the very incarnation of the pro-EU campaign that all others led, or intended to lead, and were thus able to arouse hope and capture as a "virgin" bourgeois party the votes of disillusioned electors. In addition, the *Grünen* benefited from the fact that the crisis of the capitalist mode of production is now worsening to the point of destroying the climatic and ecological conditions essential to human life. A broad movement of youth across Europe for radical measures against climate destruction has unexpectedly offered to green Europeanist euphoria an anchor in the real world. But this does not increase the chances of seeing the *Grünen*'s cherished "green capitalism" emerge, or even those of a "green new deal".

Another factor was that the AfD designated the *Grünen* as its main adversary, and so many people opposed to racism and extreme right-wing populism gave them their voice. The Die Linke conflict over immigration and how to approach the AfD certainly did not help to make the party appear as a clearly anti-racist alternative. Thus, on issues of the climate and extreme right-wing populism, the *Grünen* have managed to position themselves as an alternative to the CDU-CSU and the SPD.

7. Throughout Europe, nationalist and far-right forces have seen their numbers increase, though not to the extent we feared. Their success is confirmation of the analysis repeatedly made by the AKL and others: it is first and foremost the crisis of the EU and the authoritarian politics linked to it that has advanced the forces the far right in Europe. The opposite view that extreme rights triggered the crisis in the EU is false news - and this was the central thesis of pro-European propaganda during the campaign. This is true only to the extent that when the extreme right reaches a certain level corresponding to the weakness of the left, the nationalist and extreme right parties serve to Hoover up protest and dissatisfaction.

The situation in the European Union after these elections is more polarized, but the left is weakened. The increased fragmentation in the European Parliament will make the implementation of policy more complicated and raises fears that this evolution will lead even further to its loss of power and to the strengthening of the EU's executive bodies (and ad hoc special bodies that the European Constitution did not foresee).

It remains to be hoped that the left in Europe and Die Linke in Germany will draw the proper consequences of this election and this campaign. Without a left-wing strategy to go beyond the EU as it exists, building on existing struggles and movements and with a radical critique of capitalism, it will not be possible.

8. The elections in Bremen are a welcome counterpoint to these gloomy European prospects. The AKL is delighted to see the increased vote for the comrades there. The possibility of a "Jamaican" coalition is opposed to the

arithmetical majority for the SPD, *Grünen* and *Die Linke*. [4]

The AKL is against the entry of *Die Linke* in the regional government of Bremen. By "taking responsibility" in the context of an alliance with the losing SPD and the *Grünen*, totally committed to capitalism, *Die Linke* can only lose. This coalition would not be a leftist government. However, the AKL proposes to take advantage of this tactically favourable situation to advance themes and proposals specific to the left. One can imagine support for a minority government of the SPD and *Grünen* without any condition or commitment, as minimal as it may be, with *Die Linke* only providing support to push through the concrete measures that it considers positive. For all the rest, the government would have only to get its majority from the CDU or the far right.

The European elections and the Bremen elections has pushed the SPD to a new phase of its agony. This is a very understandable situation, and like all crises, it also reveals the disgusting traits of corrupt and unprincipled professional politicians of bourgeois parties. We have no sympathy for the SPD or its resigning president Nahles. At the same time, the fate of the SPD is a reminder of what happens to left-wing parties that are completely determined by the own interests of their permanent members, for whom only parliamentarism counts, and who forget their principles to comply with the rules of functioning of capitalism. For *Die Linke* too, such a prospect looms on the horizon, unless it starts internal structural reforms as soon as possible and draws the necessary political consequences from the proposals repeatedly made by the AKL as by others.

The end of the "grand coalition" before the end of the legislature is quite possible. The largest regional federation of the SPD has already voted for exit. This emergency measure is today an option widely discussed in the SPD, including within its leadership. *Die Linke* should not take part in these debates. The end of a bourgeois government should be for us simply a cause for satisfaction.

However, *Die Linke* must make a strong commitment against the prospect of an alliance between the CDU and AfD. In the CDU, some have already expressed themselves in this direction. And *Die Linke*, instead of calling for new national elections, should develop a program of action with measures to be implemented immediately, so as to engage in pre-campaign on the fundamentals rather than begging from the SPD and *Grünen*.

PS:

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[1] See [here](#).

[2] *Die Linke* won 5.5% (-1.9%) of the vote and elected 5 members to the European Parliament (as against 7 in May 2014). It lost in percentage terms in all these Länder, but very significantly in the east: in Berlin -4.8%, in Thuringia -8.7%. In absolute votes, *Die Linke* progressed in the west, except for the Land of Rheinland-Pfalz.

[3] See [here](#).

[4] From the colours of the Jamaican flag, black, yellow and green, respectively referring to the CDU, FDP and *Grünen*.