

da Neue Deutschland una intervista a Gregor Gysi sul tema “la questione sociale riguarda tutta l’umanità”

Gregor Gysi on broad left and right collective movements and the division of labour between parties.

Gregor Gysi, President of the EL

Photo: ND / Ulli Winkler

Interviewed by Wolfgang Hübner and Uwe Kalbe, published in *Neues Deutschland*, 7 April 2018 – abbreviated.

*Gregor Gysi, do you believe that the leadership of Germany’s Die LINKE party has done a good job?*

Our polling number are certainly not bad, and there is a growth in membership, with many young people in particular. Which gives me hope because it used to be very difficult for us to reach out to youth. Second, the situation between the party leadership and the leadership of the Bundestag group is not ideal, and I hope this can be sorted out before the party congress. But my optimism is qualified on this.

The conflict has to do with divergent political concepts.

*Namely?*

First the euro. Sahra [Wagenknecht] and others want to leave the euro; the other side fears social dislocations. I myself was a strong opponent of the introduction of the euro, because integration cannot be achieved via currency, which simply pushes everything towards the cheapest offer. But I consider leaving it now wrong because it would lead to new dislocations. And who says we can get back the previous European currency system, which limited the room for play afforded by devaluing and up-valuing currencies? When you take step A you can’t get back to zero, you have to find your way to step B.

*After the financial crisis is euro exit still Wagenknecht’s goal?*

She’s clearly said this in her dispute with Frauke Petry, who was then still in the AfD. The second point of conflict is the relation between the EU and the nation-state. Sahra says: If you want more social state you have to get out of the EU and go back to more nation-state. This is already problematic for me because we have a European economy. I don’t know how

it could be regulated by the nation-state. And imagine if the USA carries out a trade war against the European states and instead of getting a unified answer from the EU it only gets different answers from the nation-states. That wouldn't have any impact.

*Should Die LINKE then think about how the different sectors of capital can be led to be at each other's throats?*

That's not the question. The question is how we can save and reconstruct the social state. In a trade war against Germany we would lose, and that would cost jobs. That concerns us. But there is also something else that interests me: Germany's Sonderweg [special path]. This is supposed to be precluded through Germany's integration. The German Sonderweg always meant that due to its belated nation-building Germany would strive for a redivision of the world. What if the AfD comes to power and observes that the former colonial states have more of a say than we do? Could the question of a repartition then come up again?

*You mean wars to newly carve up the world?*

There has never been a war between two EU Member States. My fear is: if we return to the old nation-states war will come back to Europe.

*The inner-party disputes seem to have less to do with such complex contests. There is always a big stir when Sahra Wagenknecht says something about refugee policy and the other wing of the party reacts.*

Because her arguments amount to caps on refugees. That's point number three.

*So far no one in Die LINKE, including Sahra Wagenknecht, has demanded a cap on refugees. Caps are always about economic immigration.*

Actually Oskar Lafontaine has proposed them. The corporations that created the globalised economy knew that there is no global policy that they can regulate. And they were happy about this. One consequence, with which nobody has ever come to grips, is a worldwide comparison of living standards. This is, alongside wars, hunger, and misery, another decisive cause of flight. Many people in Africa didn't know how we lived in Europe. But now they do – through the internet.

But what now? I too know that there isn't enough room in Germany for all of humanity. But, still, our answer can't be: We'll close the borders. Our answer has to be: How can we, as effectively and quickly as possible, overcome the root causes of migration so that people no longer have to flee their countries. There are different political interests within society, and

the task of Die LINKE in this debate is different from that of the CSU.

The CSU can use the issue to win over the population. But we have to try and propose concrete steps for making the world truly more just. Why aren't the transnational seed corporations forbidden to manipulate seed genetically so that farmers can no longer propagate it? Why does the EU export food to Africa so cheaply that no indigenous agriculture can grow there? Why do we conclude free-trade agreements according to which everything can be shipped there and they hardly have anything they can ship in this direction?

Here, incidentally, Sahra's criticism is right. She's also right in her criticism in terms of opposing a certain approach to immigration law: I'm worried that we're draining experts from the Third World. This means creating new causes of flight, because along with the elites innovative capacity will disappear. This can never be an approach the left can take.

*Does Die LINKE have a special task as the antipole of the right, of the AfD in the Bundestag?*

Yes, it has a special task in Europe and in Germany: it has to become the opposite number to the growth of the right. The AfD was founded as a neoliberal party. The real danger is that at some point, alongside nationalist and racist positions, they will increasingly put forward social programmes.

*The social democrats are continually coming apart. And we do not hear much from the Party of the European Left (EL) whose chair you are.*

Yes, that's right, first of all because in the EL there are divergent approaches to the EU. Some say we have to go back to the old nation-state because it's more likely we can salvage the welfare state this way, and the EU is not internationalist. The second group wanted to reform the EU but doesn't believe that it's still reformable. The third group thinks it still is.

*How can you mediate in this?*

By making it clear that peace would be endangered if we go back to the old nation-states. I also point to the youth. In part it's nationalistic but increasingly European. If we were to say to them that we need to go back to the nation-state with border gates and passports, perhaps even back to visas, then we'll lose them right away. Here too I think the left in Europe has to find forward-looking answers.

*And is it looking for them?*

I don't want to sound too optimistic here. But actually I'm more confident now than I was two weeks ago. The reason is a motion introduced by France's Parti de Gauche to exclude Syriza from the EL.

*Is this perhaps an understandable motion? At issue is the weakening of the right to strike in Greece.*

It's about the right to strike, austerity packages, and the military accord between Greece and Israel. All of this can be criticised. But all parties present voted against the exclusion – even the most critical. And then we agreed to finally discuss Greece. Up to now the executive committee meetings have ranged from lively to tense. Polite, friendly but hardly political. That's over, because everyone became frightened by the prospect of exclusions and splits. Now they want to talk politically. Finally.

*How much time do we want to give the EL for this? The European elections are in spring 2019.*

At the next meeting of the executive committee in June we'll discuss Greece – as well as the beginning of an electoral programme. Perhaps we can arrive at something more than a small minimal-consensus paper. For example, we could call for a full right of initiative for the European Parliament. We could demand that fundamental social rights finally become enforceable in Europe.

*Translation: Eric Canepa*