

NEWSLETTER



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Party Congress in Rostock: Ovation for the old and new chairpersons of DIE LINKE



Fotos: Frank Schwarz

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Gesine Löttsch and Klaus Ernst new DIE LINKE chairs

In mid-May our party, DIE LINKE, elected a new executive board at its 2nd party congress in the northern port town of Rostock. 570 elected delegates had to decide about the composition of the new leadership. The previous chairpersons Lothar Bisky and Oskar Lafontaine were given a warm farewell applause after they had laid down their views on the fundamental tasks ahead of the party. Oskar Lafontaine stepped down from his office as chairman for health reasons. Lothar Bisky did not run again after 16 years as chairman because he wanted to concentrate on his work in the European Parliament. Both played a big part in founding the new party and developing DIE LINKE from the WASG and the PDS.

Taking over from Lothar Bisky and Oskar Lafontaine is a new duo of chairpersons. Gesine Löttsch and Klaus Ernst were elected new DIE LINKE chairs at the congress. Gesine Löttsch comes from a typical 'east German' background. She chairs our party's district organization with the biggest membership, i. e. Berlin-Lichtenberg. She has been a Member of the Bundestag since 2002 and held one of two single mandates of the for-

mer PDS in the Bundestag between 2002 and 2005 together with Petra Pau. She will contribute her east German experiences to the new board. "We do not just want to criticize the government from the outside, that is not enough. We really want to change this country," Löttsch said in her acceptance speech. She gained 92.8 percent of the votes. Klaus Ernst, also Member of the Bundestag, comes from Bavaria. As a trade unionist and co-founder of the WASG he will represent the west German organizations of the party. "Strong leadership is now more important than ever," Ernst said in his speech referring to one of DIE LINKE's main issues, the lack of regulation against financial speculators. Klaus Ernst was elected by 74.9 percent of the delegates.

The pattern of a dual east/west, male/female combination of leaders was also accepted for other posts in the party. Just before the congress the membership was questioned about their approval for the necessary changes to federal statutes of the party. So now there are also two National Secretaries, a woman and a man and, in addition, two representatives for party-forma-

tion issues for east and west Germany the aim of this dual structure being that members coming from different approaches and both sources – i. e. the WASG and the PDS – meet more frequently than in the past and have a concrete contact for the east and the west. Both National Secretaries have been elected for two years initially and can be re-elected.

Dietmar Bartsch did not run again as National Secretary. Elected as new Secretaries were Caren Lay from Saxony and Werner Dreibus from Hesse. The newly installed party formation representatives will be taken by Halina Wawzyniak from Berlin and Ulrich Maurer from Baden-Württemberg. Raju Sharma from Schleswig-Holstein was elected new National Treasurer.

Following the election of the higher positions on Saturday the other members of the board were elected the next day. All in all 44 men and women were voted into the new executive board, which is faced with major challenges. Since the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia DIE LINKE has now been present in 13 state assemblies and thus established in Germany. Yet, this position must be extended and consolidated. The debate on the new party programme, which shall be adopted in the autumn of 2011, is already under way. This is certainly one of the most difficult tasks as there are open political issues in the party. They shall be discussed and decided in a spirit of openness and solidarity.

Bisky's speech at congress (excerpts):

Left policy is needed and shows effect

A European-level remake of the 2008 bailout packages for the banks was enacted over the past few weeks; this time under the heading of 'How to prevent national bankruptcy'. The scene was set by heads of government meeting to discuss the crisis. The International Monetary Fund put together its loan package for Greece. They also mentioned the usual price: plundering the public purse and picking the citizens' pockets. The governments of the member countries sometimes masked inactivity and pointless actions by statesmanlike responsibility and sometimes by the killer argument of a lack of alternatives. The people who cannot afford cinema tickets any longer know the consequences of this script-book political drama best. One thing is clear: poverty is going to spread in rich Europe. Confidence in political solutions is shaken ...

"Let's look at Hungary. The scorched earth the International Monetary Fund left

behind gave rise to a right-wing populist government. The IMF even has its share in the collapse of Yugoslavia. What is to come of the IMF specialists now being sent to Athens? This question occurs to me. There is enough material to be studied in and outside Europe in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In the eyes of the International Monetary Fund expenditure for education, health care, social progress and ecological development are merely useless.

"Let's ask people in the developing countries. All hopes for overcoming poverty have dispersed under the IMF diktat. Only interest demands by the creditors have been canonized. The result is bitter poverty for decades – that is for more than 2 billion people on this planet. These realities are hard to comprehend for us though. Only if the private banks had really overdone it and the developing countries were threatened with insolvency western governments entered the scene. They bought the credit risks off the banks with taxpayers' money and brokered a debt remission.

"Now the European remake of the debt crisis has started. Banks speculate for huge profits from the high interest rates of the in-

debted countries. Together with other speculators they drive the interest rates higher and higher till finally collapse is looming. And the taxpayers are to step in, waive part of their incomes so that the bill can be paid. During the first 3 months in 2010 alone Deutsche Bank raked in Euro 2.8 billion. 99% thereof came from investment banking. However, decades of poverty are on the horizon for Greece. Yet, if the Greek government can no longer invest in education and research the country will lag more and more behind other countries. This much can be said. No bailout packages but rather vicious circles are being installed here. We must fight against this.

"As long as speculation is not stamped out through political will these robber barons remain active and stage the next remake of their blackmail machinations ..."

End arbitrary regime of financial markets

Lothar Bisky recalled that the EU declared 2010 the year of campaigning against poverty and social marginalization. "After all more than 80 million people are poor in Europe

and another 80 million are threatened with poverty. Behind these figures lies the unbearable marginalization of Roma families, millions of illegal immigrants who enjoy neither civil rights nor are they able to negotiate their incomes. In Germany one in seven children hardly stands a chance of having their gifts supported ...

“Wasn’t Europe once known for a successful welfare state where cooperation and participation, co-determination instead of heteronomy were sacred and vivid values? Instead of modernizing the welfare state it’s being demolished beyond recognition. In Germany the coalitions of first the SPD and the Greens, then the CDU and SPD and finally the CDU and FDP have all steered this adventurous course. They destroyed an entire idea, waffled about responsibility and demanding and still today maintain that we cannot afford a dignified life any more. One has to say: It is high time the welfare state was safeguarded through EU investment instead of dismantling it. It is high time political intelligence was focussed on harmonizing social standards at a high level. It is high time the throttling of the domestic markets was ended. It is time the hedge funds were outlawed, tax havens were dried up and a tax on financial transactions introduced in every country. It is time the arbitrary regime of the financial markets was terminated. Poverty and social marginalization are not fought in the EU, instead gamblers and speculators are being served ...”

Europe should export social security

Lothar Bisky went on: “What acceptance could Europe meet with in worldwide peaceful conflict settlement if its countries were to withdraw their troops from the war in Afghanistan at last, if our continent no longer served as an arms exporter but rather an exporter of social security. This includes that it does not mutate into an export region of the IMF diktat. The ideology of the unfettered market only helps the gamblers and speculators and paralyzes Europe in the worldwide campaign against climate crisis and hunger. This policy prevailing in the EU blocks solidarity and responsibility in a multipolar world, in a world in which rapid economic growth is tested in Asia and new economic models in Latin America.

“The transnational economic powers” Bisky went on “dictate the working conditions and drive wage dumping around the globe. Only those income parts from profits and wealth are growing. Wages have long been disassociated from productivity. The gain in leisure time has long been absorbed by the cuts in working hours. For some the social gap means permanent cultural marginalization and this gap is even aggravated

in the schools of this country. The non-voters have meanwhile become one of the biggest groups amongst the electorate. Many of them come from the poorer sections indeed. This is how majorities and winners emerge which only gives a distorted reflection of the interests of all.

“While poorly paid or unemployed people think their vote would not count anyway their vote is actually missing for different politics. These votes are missing for a change in politics and majorities for a reform. I see this as one of the biggest challenges to our party. At the end of the day the undermining of democracy is not an economic issue, not a problem of the economic and labour market policies. It is a cultural, a social issue of the system. The welfare state of the 1970s neither cracked traditional images of families nor did it comprehensively promote justice amongst the genders. Yet, its formation meant that it was considered indecent to judge people only by their position within the economic life. Educational advancement or legal counselling as part of the welfare recipients’ package are successful examples for social integration that are nearly history again today. Being accused of wanting the 1970s welfare state back I say clearly: We Left shall defend the welfare state idea and develop it.

“The aid for Greece illustrates the task for us Left particularly clearly. Of course we are not interested in Greece going bankrupt” said Lothar Bisky. “The hesitation on the part of the German government only worsened the crisis and that’s what we criticized. Yet, we are unable to agree with aid making the elimination of social standards a condition. It is our cause to defend social standards in Europe and adapt them to the higher standards. As European Left we must campaign for a European set of rules so that this can begin. The speculators live off the economic imbalances within the EU. The German banks earn cash galore. The German export model with its low unit labour costs has partly devastating consequences for other countries. The fact that we demand higher wages, a good minimum safeguard and strengthening the demand at home boils down to a good deal of European solidarity.

“I shall make my contribution in Brussels and the EU” Bisky stressed “so that our action programme shall develop into more than just a wise congress resolution. The 3rd congress of the European Left will take place in Paris this December. We want to prove that we are successfully fighting poverty and marginalization every year – and this requires that we shift from third to fourth gear in terms of party development occasionally.

We are still the party of peace, social justice and democracy

Oskar Lafontaine’s speech at the congress (excerpts)

“We are the party of democratic socialism. We want democratic socialism. And we can also say what we mean by it. Democratic socialism means a society without exploitation and oppression. This places it not just in the tradition of the working class. It is fundamentally the tradition of the freedom movements of this world.” These were the words Oskar Lafontaine said at the beginning of his farewell speech as DIE LINKE Chairman at the Rostock congress. “To me democratic socialism has always been a movement towards human freedom, freedom for each individual.

“That is why it is part of a great historic tradition ... Democratic socialism and thus all of us are part of this freedom tradition. We are a major freedom movement. The struggle for more freedom has flanked human history and that is why it will never end. In modern society freedom requires a social order we call democracy. Speaking of freedom and democracy one must also be able to say what one means. Freedom means the right of every individual to determine their lives as much as possible. This right is only limited by the same right of others. This is where also the deeper reason for democracy lies, a society in which the interests of the majority gain the upper hand. Democracy is only possible if each individual can determine their lives as much as possible. Which means the majority can assert themselves, however they must not enforce their will on the minority.

“Now we have a situation in the world in which democracy and freedom are challenged in an unprecedented fashion ... The financial crisis has proved bitterly what then Federal Bank President Tietmeyer said at the world economic forum 15 years ago: You politicians – I say it in my own words – have nothing to decide any more. You are all under the control of the international financial markets. Then this analysis was applauded. Democracy is dead. Parliaments and governments are only puppet parliaments and puppet governments that chase after the financial markets and agree on huge amounts without knowing what they are doing. That is why we can say with justification we are a party of democratic renewal for we, allegedly incompetent in economic matters, we the party of populists and ideologues, are the only ones who gave the modern answers to the financial crisis and the world economic

crisis. We are the only ones. The others only copy from us.

“Our programme can be summoned in three letters: KfW. This does not stand for the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (state bank providing loans for smaller companies – the edit.). It stands for Keynesianism, financial market regulation and economic governance at European level (abbreviation makes KfW in German). These are the three pillars of our economic policy. Keynesianism saved the world economy in this crisis. Without Keynesianism, without the money injection by the states and central banks the world economy would have collapsed. Yet, now comes something new the supply-oriented economic teaching in Germany has not comprehended yet: Keynesianism can only work once the financial markets are regulated. If they are not it will miss its mark, the central banks’ money goes into speculation, there’ll be no growth in the economy and the economy is destroyed even further. That is why we can be proud of this coupling. Keynesianism coupled with regulation of the financial markets are the prescriptions for the future. The world economy cannot be saved in any other way or restarted.

For European economic govern

European economic governance – we have demanded it for many years, also in the Bundestag, time and again. We pointed out that there is no other way. It doesn’t even take a deeper insight into correlations. Well, the Greeks have always raised their wages too much. And the Germans have always raised their wages insufficiently. The balancing mechanism was simple: The Greek currency was devalued and the German currency revalued. That was the adjustment mechanism for wages drifting apart, in more precise economic terms unit labour costs drifting apart. Everybody has to face the question: What happens when that is no longer possible? The answer of economic science in other European countries was then, I especially name Jacques Delors as a crown witness: We need European economic governance. We need a body that coordinates the financial policy, tax policy, which mainly coordinate the wage policy otherwise the Euro will collapse. Unit labour costs drifting apart and economic developments drifting apart need adjustment mechanisms. This is the reason behind European economic governance. We, DIE LINKE, were the only ones that have demanded this in the Bundestag. And when we demanded a European economic programme once the crisis was visible ‘each should keep their own house clean’ was said in the Bundestag. This is a relapse into nationalism. Each keep their own house clean. This does not work any more today.

We cannot turn the clock back. We must find international regulation mechanisms ... One must not come up with excuses and say we cannot do anything at home. If the German Bundestag would pass a single law decreeing that whatever was enacted in terms of deregulation over the past few years would be retracted, many criminal acts would be banned. The SPD and Greens – one mustn’t forget this – all make out they have always favoured regulation – laid out the red carpet for the sharks ... A single law could decree that all deregulating measures would be retracted. That would mean we outlaw hedge funds, we had no special purpose vehicles. We would have banned trade in toxic papers and we would especially have banned the criminal business with tax havens. This is a disgrace. There you can see what is really going on.”

Federal government is fencing tax fraud

“The German government is aiding and abetting tax fraud. It finances Commerzbank through Euro 18 billion, which calls on to cheat taxes in their brochures and leaflets. This is the state our society is in.”

Oskar Lafontaine went on: “The second major issue apart from our response to world economy challenges is the reinstatement of the welfare state. This is part and parcel of left policies. We mean by this that we have to create an unemployment insurance worth this name again. We have some ideas ... We want a pension that enables senior people to enjoy the autumn of their years in what one can call dignity. The erosion of the pension insurance is a disaster. All other parties were party to it. We can give figures. Those who earn Euro 1,000.00 a month now end up with Euro 400.00 after 45 years of work. Unbelievable. The average of the OECD countries is Euro 730.00. What is the reason for Germany to batter the pension like this? That is why we say: We, DIE LINKE, campaign for a pension insurance providing for a dignified life at old age. This means the factors curtailing the pensions must be removed from the pension formula again. It’s as easy as that. The third item is health insurance. One doesn’t actually dare imagine what attitude is behind those people who declare, smiling coldly, that they favour equality. Equality means to them the doorman pays the same amount as the general manager. This is incredibly just, isn’t it. All are offered the same services for the same pay. We reject this perversion of equality coming from the so-called Liberals. We want social equality. We have a different understanding of equality. The welfare state is the basis for freedom. Those who don’t recognize this don’t understand freedom. Those who, at the end of the month, don’t know

whether they can pay the rent nor whether they can go shopping, are not free. Those who can’t plan their lives are not free. If you can’t plan your life you cannot participate in democratic life. That is why temporary work contracts are an assault on freedom. Temporary agency work is an assault on freedom. Mini jobs (limited to Euro 400) are an assault on freedom. We shall never accept these forms of marginalization because we know what freedom means, because we see ourselves as a freedom movement. Let’s never allow people to be marginalized in a rich society and have to lead unfree lives.”

Finally Oskar Lafontaine said: “We keep saying: War is the worst form of environmental destruction. I am proud that we can say today: We are the only anti-war party in Germany. We are following the working-class tradition alone in this. We adhere to the imperialism thesis of the working class, which first and foremost results from an analysis of society. It is true and the wars in the Middle East show this: Wars are not fought for freedom and democracy, there were and will always be fought for raw materials and markets and DIE LINKE will never get involved in them. There is no comprehensible ethical reason for the so-called humanitarian intervention, which, unfortunately, is also found in the SPD policy statements and, unfortunately also the Greens stand for. I keep saying it and I say it today: as long as much less money can save the lives of millions of people from hunger, as long as much less money can save millions of people’s lives from diseases a ‘humanitarian intervention’ costing many billions is not ethically justifiable.”

Gesine Löttsch and Klaus Ernst talking to Neues Deutschland

Prior to the Rostock congress the members decided in a ballot that their party was to be chaired by a dual leadership. Proposed by the previous executive board Gesine Löttsch (48) and Klaus Ernst (55) were running. Gabriele Oertel and Jürgen Reents (Neues Deutschland – ND) spoke to the philologist and mother of two as well as the economist and secretary of the metal workers union (excerpts):

» In 2010 there are no other elections after North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) are coming up in which the new executive board could gain contour and prove their mettle successfully. There are six state

elections in 2011 and then we are on to the general elections in 2013. Do you want to present DIE LINKE as a driving force for an alternative to the CDU and FDP at national level?

› **Lötzsch:** We wrote down in the draft programme for the first time that we are looking for participation in government at national level under certain circumstances. This needs approval by the voters. Potential partners, especially the SPD, must think about what they want. And then, this takes a disposition in society absolutely, which stands for change. Of course, our party also has the government option when running in the election. If we ruled that out we would make it far too easy to the other parties.

› **Ernst:** Our goals are clear, it now takes to find out how green the Greens will become and how social democratic the SPD. This is the foundation for finding common ground among the parties on the basis of the party programmes. All that matters are the contents. It would be completely wrong to rule out government participation – just as wrong as wanting participation at any price.

› **Beyond any political premises the SPD seems psychologically blocked because they had a partner at the helm of DIE LINKE who used to be their chairman and left the SPD (referring to Oskar Lafontaine – the edit.). Do you think the SPD will be less inhibited vis-a-vis a Chair of DIE LINKE who was expelled from it?**

› **Ernst:** It is less about personal animosities but rather about Lafontaine like DIE LINKE as a whole is holding up a mirror to the SPD permanently. As long as the SPD does not change, cooperation at national level is impossible.

› **Would it not mean DIE LINKE was obsolete if the SPD would swerve left as you like it?**

› **Lötzsch:** No. Many people want an independent DIE LINKE left of the SPD especially since it proves time and again that not every change on paper really leads to a change in politics with the SPD. Experiences of the recent years show: The more successful DIE LINKE the more the SPD changes.

› **Ernst:** At the time when the SPD loses a corrective from the left it moves to the right. This is a fact. And I think that more and more people notice this. We must remain the motor for the really fundamental social changes. The majority in the SPD is unable to fill this gap. If our positions meet with people's approval – and they do – the others change too. You can see it when it comes to minimum wages and pensions as well as Afghanistan.

Gysi in the Bundestag:

We don't want to pull out like headless chicken, you went in headlessly

The atmosphere on 22 April was absolutely tense, even heated at the Bundestag: Again German soldiers died in Afghanistan, seven within few days only. Chancellor Merkel felt obliged to defend her government's Afghanistan policy and justify the Bundeswehr participation in the NATO war at the Hindu Kush. On top of this ISAF commander McCrystal announced that the battles to come could even claim more victims. Numerous other circumstances could be recalled which prove that the Afghanistan policy would fail inevitably despite rising costs of the war, the use of more weapons and more soldiers.

This was the situation in which Gregor Gysi took the floor the speech of which we print slightly abridged:

"I stand for the party which said from the very beginning: This war is wrong, it'll lead to a fiasco. And it is clear, and gets clearer every day that we were right in every respect." What was new about the situation was that DIE LINKE was confronted with accusations such as Those who are against the war indirectly help the Taliban.

Responding to an FDP MP shouting this was also about respect for soldiers. Gregor Gysi said: "Those who campaign for peace are denied their respect for soldiers. I think this is absurd. Those who opposed the war never ever endangered a single soldier, woman or man, and did not intend to either. If our demands for an immediate withdrawal had been met more injured and dead on both sides would have been prevented. We also have the Afghan civilians in mind who have not been mentioned here at all. One of the Greens said to me: When German soldiers die I should at least keep quiet and not demand a termination of the war in this conjunction. Why not? I think especially when soldiers die the outcry has to be big for ending this fiasco ..."

Gregor Gysi went on: "The majority in the Bundestag and the government should be careful about denying others having respect. They send soldiers into a war, and that is, as we now learn, without proper training and equipment. They now plan the involvement of the Bundeswehr in a major offensive together with US general and ISAF commander McCrystal. This will entail a major risk for all involved, won't it. You allowed for a single psychiatrist for 4,500 soldiers in Afghanistan. It was the armed forces commissioner, not we, who pointed out that the care for re-

turning soldiers with psychological traumas is insufficient. He also criticized that there are too few medical specialists for psychiatry with the Bundeswehr in Germany.

"Those who are to blame for all this" Gysi went on "are not in the least in a legitimate position to accuse the opponents of war of a lack of respect for the women and men of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. In contrast to you we are not ready to accept injured and dead Afghan civilians, injured and dead German soldiers and injured and dead members of Afghan and any other armed forces. Those who demand the immediate termination of the war want to protect the health and lives of all involved.

"Mr. President of the Bundestag, I thought it was very correct and you have my full support in this, that you commemorated the dead German soldiers today. That we rise to do so goes without saying. Yet, let me add: I and part of my party do not share your reasoning. I must say this clearly.

"The Bundestag should have also commemorated the killed Afghans of Kundus. I'd like to emphasize that it would have been good for the Bundestag if we had risen for those more than 100 Afghan civilians of Kundus and had commemorated them."

Addressing Merkel Gysi said: "Mrs. Chancellor, we have to do with a difficult situation because the reasons given by the government for the war are changing all the time. May I remind you? At the beginning you said – that was your first reason – the war would have to be waged to fight terrorism. Yet, we all know: You cannot fight terrorism by war, you only produce more of it. We all know that the Taliban were not really terrorists, they rather allowed al-Qaeda terrorists to train their activists. The problem is that al-Qaeda is no longer in Afghanistan but rather in Pakistan and other countries. If the reason was true that terrorism needs fighting wherever it exists, where there are camps and training we would have to invade Pakistan, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia now. Justifiably nobody demands that. So then the reason is wrong for al-Qaeda is no longer in Afghanistan. I tell you once more" Gysi continued "if you want to fight terrorism you need a more just world economic order, a new dialogue amongst different cultures and religions, unselfish development aid and civilian construction."

UN proves: Afghanistan war solves no problem

"Your second reason was" continued Gysi: "Military protection is needed for building a civilian order. Interior Minister de Maizière, however, noted that police training in Afghanistan was not a success story. How do you explain that what you have not managed in 9 years is going to work in a few months to

come? Who is supposed to believe this? The UN reported that after almost nine years of war the following must be stated apart from a few successes: The number of people living in poverty in Afghanistan rose from 33% to 42%. 30% are no longer malnourished, it is 39% of Afghans now. 12% of the population used to have access to sanitation facilities, it is only 5.2% now. Not 2.4 million but 4.5 million people live in slums. These are the figures given by the UN. Of young people no longer 26% but 47% are now unemployed. Poppy fields for drug harvests used to cover 131,000 ha, now there are 193,000 ha. Warlords, i. e. the drug and arms dealers rule the country like nine years ago. Where is the civilian progress you have allegedly organized with the help of the Bundeswehr for nine years?

Civilian redevelopment requires ceasefire and talks

“Civilian helpers report that civilian construction is more successful without the military than with it. Mrs. Merkel, Mr. Gabriel (SPD) and Mrs. Homburger (FDP) I tell you: Civilian redevelopment requires a ceasefire and negotiations between the parties to this conflict. War, on the contrary, stirs up hatred and gives the Bin Ladens the opportunity to recruit new terrorists. Therefore, building civilian structures requires peace and not war. We spend 1 billion Euros annually for the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. If we had spent only part of this amount for peaceful reconstruction we would have made clearly more progress. So this reason does not fit either.

“As a third reason you said the rule of the Taliban had to be ruled out; what mattered there was to establish some sort of democratic conditions, not ours but somehow something. Now look at that, this is not a reason for war. Assertions are spread now that if we withdrew the Taliban would rule like in the past. If that is true, Mrs. Chancellor, what have we been there for for nearly nine years? Have we achieved nothing but the certainty that the old conditions would be re-established once we are gone? May I remind you? If what was said before is the yardstick for wars we would have to invade Uganda for the child soldiers, Bangladesh for the acid attacks on young women, Kenya for the genital mutilation of young girls, Iran for the execution of oppositionists, Saudi Arabia for denial of democratic rights especially for women and many other countries too. You cannot really be serious. These arguments are not in the least convincing. Nobody wants to invade these countries and this is no argument either for the war in Afghanistan.

“Now comes the fourth reason: Minister Niebel and also you, Mrs. Chancellor, said

that it was necessary to prevent the terrorists from getting access to nuclear weapons. Come on, Mrs. Chancellor, there are no nuclear weapons in Afghanistan. If at all, they are in Pakistan. This would be a reason for invading Pakistan but not for a mission in Afghanistan. Apart from that, the nuclear weapons there are said to be as safe as in other countries as has been found out, so that this would not even serve as a reason at all. The problem is that you know exactly that none of the reasons are convincing. That is why you come up with a new one every day. This is what we have to deal with.

“Mrs. Chancellor, today again you said a withdrawal would be irresponsible vis-a-vis the allied partners because one could not desert them there etc. First, we can say: we are a sovereign country. We also said No to the Iraqi war. Why can't we say No here? Second, Canada and the Netherlands decided to pull out their troops. What are we accusing them of? They are sovereign countries. They only chose a different path from ours.

“And there is something else: President Obama said that he wants to withdraw the American troops starting in mid-2011. Mr. Niebel was asked on TV if one could also reckon with the German troops being withdrawn from that time onwards. He was not able to give an answer. You didn't say anything in this respect either today. With respect, you don't want to stay there alone, do you? Well, why don't you just say that you will join them on this road? This would be the least one can expect here.

“Mr. Gabriel, I listened carefully to what you said, but what did you say? You said the war was right, but you didn't want to call it that. This is not a social democratic policy. Why don't you change and struggle to pull out at last?”

Finally answering a comment by FDP head of the parliamentary party Homburger Gregor Gysi said: “Let me be quite frank Mrs. Homburger: We don't want to pull out like headless chicken, you went in headlessly. This is the problem we have to face. That is why I tell you at the end: I am convinced that the members of the German government and many members of the Bundestag know much more than the members of our party: This war was, is and will always be wrong. Mrs. Merkel you are just lacking the courage to admit this, to withdraw the Bundeswehr as quickly as possible from Afghanistan and act in harmony with the interests of the vast majority of the people in this country at last.”

Lafontaine:

Germany involved in unwinnable war

The Afghanistan policy of the top SPD brass was hypocritical, said Oskar Lafontaine to Spiegel Online during the run-up to the election in North Rhine Westphalia (NRW). “At the beginning of the Afghanistan mission many Bundestag MPs believed that this was a mission for building schools, drilling wells and helping the population. Meanwhile everybody should be aware that this hope has not been fulfilled and that we are involved in a hopeless war. That is why the Bundeswehr needs to be urgently withdrawn from Afghanistan.”

Responding to the hint that SPD Chair Sigmar Gabriel recently brought into play a new Bundeswehr mandate for the German soldiers in Afghanistan because the government now spoke of war Lafontaine said: “SPD head Gabriel is lacking all credibility. As part of the government the SPD agreed with the combat mission in the past and not just that: The Social Democrats also voted for beefing up the Bundeswehr contingent. They knew that a war was going on there. The most recent words by SPD Chair are therefore hypocritical and not comprehensible at all.”

Being asked how the relationship between DIE LINKE and the SPD had developed since Gabriel took office Oskar Lafontaine said: “We had hoped that Gabriel took notice of the reality and accepts the 5-party system. Instead he also tries to ostracize DIE LINKE in NRW. The SPD still doesn't know what they want and seek cooperation with the CDU/CSU, Greens and the FDP – i.e. the parties that represent Hartz IV, Agenda 2010, pension cuts, copay, additional health insurance fee and war participation ... We are ready for participation in government. All it takes is a change in politics. At state level there is a lot of common ground between DIE LINKE, the Social Democrats and the Greens. However, the Greens and the SPD apparently have an ambiguous strategy. For both do not rule out being available to NRW Prime Minister Jürgen Rüttgers as partners for a coalition. They deceive the voters ... To many disappointed voters the SPD and Greens stand for combat missions, Hartz IV, pension cuts, Agenda 2010, copay for medical drugs. The people in North Rhine Westphalia will hardly wish this for themselves ... The ballot in North Rhine Westphalia is a key election: We want to terminate the CDU and FDP majority in the Bundesrat. We would only take part in a government in Düsseldorf that makes a binding pledge not to vote for social decline in the Bundesrat.”

Government mas- sages figures of war costs

“The government has systematically deceived the public about the costs of the Afghanistan war” commented Paul Schäfer, defence policy spokesman of DIE LINKE in the Bundestag on a survey of the Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung according to which the German participation in the Afghanistan war caused at least three times the amount, which has officially been published. Schäfer went on:

“While ways to economise on everything and higher taxes are being brooded on everywhere the government is squandering billions for a politically wrong and militarily hopeless war. Even worse: They camouflage and cover up those costs and their connection with the Afghanistan war. This way they hide the true cost of the war from control by the parliament and public debate.

“DIE LINKE in the Bundestag demands explanations: In a parliamentary inquiry regarding the costs of the military intervention in Afghanistan it demands from the government the comprehensive and unadorned accounts of the mission so far and the disclosure of the calculations for its continuation.”

Chancellor hands out bad cheques

In response to the Euro 750 billion rescue package and the promise Chancellor Angela Merkel made to introduce a financial market tax the chair of DIE LINKE Gesine Löttsch said:

“Mrs. Merkel offers cheques without cover for an endorsement of the Euro 750 billion bailout package. The promise by the Chancellor to introduce a financial market tax she tied up with the condition that there should be an international agreement to this end. Merkel knows exactly that there will not be any international solution in this respect in the foreseeable future.”

Concluded Löttsch: “DIE LINKE will not engage in such a dodgy deal. We expect the Chancellor to give written confirmation of a comprehensive regulation of the financial markets. She must also give a binding declaration that the rescue of the Euro is not being used to push through social cuts and cuts in education in Germany.”

Wagenknecht says:

Government criticism of rating agencies long overdue

“The government is always lagging behind developments” Sahra Wagenknecht of DIE LINKE commented the hesitant criticism of the rating agencies. DIE LINKE economics spokesperson in the Bundestag and Vice Chair went on:

“As early as July 2009 DIE LINKE demanded the establishment of an independent state rating agency – the CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD and Greens refused. Merkel, Schäuble and Westerwelle should have long taken a hard line the rating agencies. Their current hectic demands are just an expression of their lack of concepts. They still have not taken notice of the actual causes of the financial and Euro crises;

First, The foreign commercial imbalances between Germany and the rest of the Euro zone can be attributed considerably to the German wage and tax dumping.

Second, Speculations against countries will only stop once legislators have outlawed the instruments to this end, i.e. credit default swaps.

Third, Private rating agencies are not a solution, they are part of the problem. They pour oil into the fire of speculation. The high interest Greece has to pay could be lowered by means of Euro bonds.

The government has done nothing in all these fields. Had there been the felony of failure to render assistance, it would have long been sued.”

Talks with SPD in NRW failed – SPD and Greens disregard voters’ will

The preliminary talks to find out whether a coalition government is possible between SPD, DIE LINKE and the Greens in North Rhine Westphalia have failed. SPD and the Greens refused to bring about a change in politics together with DIE LINKE in favour of what the people wanted.

“The talks had apparently been planned to fail. While the statement by the SPD and the Greens was read out the news tickers already announced that the SPD had invited the CDU to meet twice for talks. The proponents of a ‘grand coalition’ (composed of the two major parties) obviously gained the upper hand. A change in politics has failed be-

cause of the SPD and the Greens. It seems the SPD and Greens did not really want to talk about facts” said Wolfgang Zimmermann, DIE LINKE Chair in the NRW assembly.

Teach speculators a lesson

“The shameless activities of hedge funds, short sellers and credit default swap jugglers (CDS) must come to an end. A Euro bond and the foundation of a European rating agency are also overdue. The scaremongering about the threatening bankruptcy of Greece must be unmasked” said Ulrich Maurer, Vice Chair of DIE LINKE in the Bundestag.

According to Maurer the renewed aggravation of the worldwide financial crisis showed “through her incantations that politics had to gain the upper hand in the financial crisis again Mrs. Merkel is pulling wool over people’s eyes. Three years after the outbreak of the financial crisis the gamblers are operating more unscrupulous than ever. Hedge funds earn billions again, banks issue high-risk papers and wager on their demise at the same time. Private rating agencies are at their assistance trying to drive Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland into bankruptcy. While the German president demands an EU-wide ban on CDS the government lets the speculators get away. Nothing happened so far in terms of the oft-demanded regulation of financial markets. As for Greece the Bundestag parties are held at gunpoint. The Greece crisis shows more than clearly that the governments are merely wax in the hands of the speculators. The diktat of the speculators’ economy must be broken. Issuing a Euro bond in the range of three-digit billions is of no less importance to overcome the dire straits Greece and other EU countries are in.”

New majorities for new decisions

DIE LINKE in the Brandenburg state assembly met with the Chairs of those parliamentary parties which already had the experience of being part of or tolerating governments in their German states during the in-camera meeting in Bad Saarow. Current conclusions were laid down in the ‘Bad Saarow Statement’. The Chairs of their parliamentary parties in Brandenburg (Kerstin Kaiser), Saxony-Anhalt (Wulf Gallert), Mecklenburg West Pomerania (Helmut Holter) and Berlin (Udo Wolf) said in it:

“Our experience with tolerating SPD-led governments in the 1990s in Saxony-Anhalt, the participation in governments in Mecklenburg West Pomerania and in Berlin as well as the plans and decisions of the SPD and DIE LINKE government in Brandenburg show: The involvement of DIE LINKE in state governments leads to important decisions in favour of more social justice, for a future-compliant education system, more sustainability, for a solid economic and financial policy on the basis of social stability, for more democracy and civil rights and for an open political culture. However, DIE LINKE new draft programme is also relevant in saying: ‘The nation level is ... of importance for implementing a change in politics. This is where the most competencies necessary to this end lie and where most decisions are made.’

“We know these experiences from everyday political life. Yet, we do not want to have the reference to obstacles and counterforces at the national level understood as a pretext for DIE LINKE being only partially or not at all able in a state government to put its plans into practice. We consider national politics a challenge – to ourselves, to our ability to act and resolve of state governments, to the ability to mobilize people on the part of our state organizations as well as the political clout of our national party and the party in the Bundestag. We can only jointly bring about the publicity for necessary changes, mount growing political pressure and really effect changes at national level at last ...”

The left politicians declared in conclusion: “For these reasons we encourage our party to work actively towards a new coalition this side of the CDU and FDP at national level through concrete political demands. It is not enough just to say: We shall not be in the way of a change in politics. Following the experience during the years of SPD/Green governments between 1998 and 2005, the CDU/SPD coalition from 2005 to 2009 and especially now under the CDU and FDP more is at stake: Only we, Die LINKE, can be instrumental and bring about a change in politics.”

120 km of human chain against nuclear power plants

On 24 April 120,000 anti-nuclear activists formed a human chain between two nuclear power plants (120 km) in north Germany protesting at the continued operation of these plants. The action two days before the 24th anniversary of the disaster in Ukrainian Chernobyl was also meant to protest the continued use of the Gorleben nuclear storage. Some days before farmers from the region took their tractors to the streets in a demonstration almost two kilometres long through the state of Lower Saxony.

For a future without nuclear weapons

DIE LINKE supports the appeal entitled ‘For a future without nuclear weapons’ by the peace movement and called on its members and friends of the party to work in initiatives of the peace movements locally to this end. National Secretary Dietmar Bartsch told the initiators in a letter. He wrote: “A world without nuclear weapons always starts with the next step. The next step in Germany must be asking the US to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Germany. All parties in the Bundestag agree in their desire to have a nuclear-weapons-free Germany. However, the path to get there is disputed. DIE LINKE does not want to tie the withdrawal of the US nuclear weapons up with a decision by NATO. Whether or not nuclear weapons are to be stationed in Germany must be a sovereign decision of this country.”

According to Bartsch DIE LINKE wanted “to call off nuclear sharing at once. Justifiably Germany does not possess nuclear weapons and must, therefore, not be dragged into nuclear sharing via NATO. After new steps towards limiting strategic nuclear weapons have become possible at last through the START agreement between Russia and the US the question of the so-called tactical nuclear weapons must be put on the agenda for the disarmament debate. DIE LINKE stands for a nuclear-weapons-free zone in central Europe. A legal frame must be set for such a nuclear-weapons-free zone. Germany and central Europe free of nuclear weapons – there is no better signal for a nuclear-weapons-free world to us.”

Finally Bartsch expressed the hope “that the next anti-war day, 1 September 200, will be marked especially by the campaign for a nuclear-weapons-free world.”

8 May 1945 – a day of liberation

Statement issued by the speakers’ committee of the History Commission at the National Board of DIE LINKE commemorating the 65th anniversary of liberation from fascism (slightly abridged):

“During the night of 8 on 9 May 1945 representatives of the supreme command of the German Wehrmacht as well as the supreme commanders of the army, air force and navy signed the official document of unconditional surrender before representatives of the anti-Hitler coalition in Berlin-Karlshorst ... Together the armies and units of the allies had defeated the aggressor on its own territory. Together they also accepted the unconditional surrender. The peoples of Europe drew a deep breath. A war had ended for them the dimensions of which, destructions and victims outdid everything known thus far. These days went down in history and collective consciousness not only as the end of the war but also as days of victory and liberation.

“The victory over German fascism and the liberation of Europe is an achievement of all allies in the anti-Hitler coalition. Only joint efforts saved human civilization from a terror regime that stopped at nothing. The threat brought together countries of different social orders and people from various world outlooks and political orientations. The Soviet Union bore the main burden of the fight against Nazi Germany. The long awaited second front in the west shortened the final phase of the war tremendously.

“The people of poets and thinkers’ had discredited itself as the ‘people of murderers and hangmen’. No more fascism and war was the message, therefore, which arose from bitter experience in 1945 and also echoed in Germany. This included the question for responsibility and guilt.

“While May 1945 was never questioned as liberation and chance by the women and men who returned from prisons and concentration camps and from emigration the traditional elites spoke of collapse. Their attempts to relativized the importance of these days with reference to the German people as the victims even last to this very day. Though not generally without guilt, certainly many Germans too were among the victims of the regime, which they had hailed before. Yet, it was true for all survivors: they had been liberated from the terrors of war. They had been liberated from the part they had played as following of a murderous regime. They had been liberated from the possibility of a nefarious prospect as slave holders of Europe.

“Richard von Weizsäcker’s invitation 25 years ago, directed at the society in the Fed-

eral Republic of Germany as their President, to understand 8 May 1945 also as a day of liberation and not to separate it from 1933 despite contradictory experience remains a yardstick for a democratic culture of remembrance.”

More than 4 million unemployed in April

National Secretary Dietmar Bartsch said with reference to the labour market situation in April: “The situation in April in the labour market was everything but sunshine and roses. 3.406 million people officially had no jobs last month. This figure camouflages the real situation. Statistical prestidigitations gloss over what maths allow. DIE LINKE also calculated this month: The proper figure is clearly higher at 4.618 million. The destinies of millions of families are hidden behind them. Nobody must get used to unemployment figures of more than 3 million.”

Bartsch went on: “Still the unemployment rate is nearly twice as high in the east (12.7%) as in the west of the country. This is unacceptable and must be a challenge to politics.

“It is a disgrace in society that the government does not attain anything and only hopes the weather will be good so that figures will go down in summer. Labour market measures – nothing in sight.

“In the interest of the people we urgently need jobs providing a livelihood and paying into social insurance schemes. More and more precarious low-paid jobs emerge instead, which offer no perspective especially to women and younger people. DIE LINKE demands a nationwide legal minimum wage and publicly funded employment such as in Berlin and Brandenburg.”