

Socialist Parties in the EU

Por Anna Schlidt · 29/06/2016

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By Dominic Heilig

The European party system is changing rapidly. As a result of the ongoing neoliberal attack, the middle class is shrinking quickly, and the decades-old party allegiance of large groups of voters has followed suit. The European far right has been able to capitalize on this development; in many countries, populist and radical right-wing parties have experienced an unprecedented boom, as Thilo Janssen's RLS-study on "Far-right Parties and the European Union" shows.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the electoral victory scored by the Greek "Coalition of the Radical Left"—better known as SYRIZA—in January 2015 has galvanized the European Left, which had previously comforted itself by standing on the oppositional sidelines. Still rubbing their eyes in disbelief, the Left in Europe realized that they could not only conquer "respectable" positions, but could, in fact, become the leading force in government. The European and international Left was enthused.

At the same time, however, this electoral victory alarmed their opponents. Under the leadership of the German government, they made life for the Greek government difficult and, at times, turned it into a living hell. The struggles between SYRIZA and the Troika (consisting of the European Union, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) over Greek government policy dominated the headlines in spring and summer 2015. In the course of this conflict,

Merkel, Schäuble & Co. succeeded in defending the cornerstones of their neoliberal austerity regime against the Greek attack and forcing SYRIZA to accept cornerstones of this regime. At the same time, however, the re-election of the Tsipras government in September 2015 demonstrated that the Troika did not succeed in getting rid of the leftist “troublemakers.”

Since then, the Left in Spain and Portugal scored electoral victories in the fall of 2015. In Spain, the conservative People’s Party lost their majority due to the rise of Podemos. In Portugal, the conservative Prime Minister was even replaced by a center-left government. In Britain, the Labour Party elected socialist Jeremy Corbyn as their new party chairman, while in other European countries, including Germany, the left parties were able to reorganize and stabilize themselves.

So it’s about time we take a closer look at the European Left! Which parties are of particular relevance, and where do they stand politically? What is dominant: programmatic parallels or national differences? How was the Left able to organize on the European scale?

In this study, journalist Dominic Heilig examines the current situation. Starting from an overview and a categorization of the different European left parties, Heilig focuses on three particular parties: SYRIZA, Podemos, and DIE LINKE. In his thorough presentation of recent developments, Heilig shows what has already been accomplished—thanks to the rise of the Left—but also where the Left still needs to evolve. For one thing is clear: The Left still has a lot of work to do if we want to politically influence the path of the European continent.

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