

The "Erfurt Declaration"--an electoral pact for Schröder

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In the run-up to the federal elections in Germany this September, an alliance has been formed calling for a vote for a social democratic government, to be supported in parliament by the Greens and the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, successors to the ruling Stalinist party in the former East Germany). A mass demonstration is to take place in Berlin on June 20 based on the so-called 'Erfurt Declaration' issued by this alliance.

The initiators and first to sign the declaration fall into various categories. Let us first name those who are providing the underlying political line: a number of hard-boiled, high-level union bureaucrats, who have been instrumental in effecting cuts in workers' living standards in Germany for many years now. Alongside of these union officials are their academic advisers. These include Margret Moenig-Raane, the chairwoman of HVB, the banking, trade and insurance union; engineering union IG Metall executive board member Horst Schmitthenner; chairman of the HBV in Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow; and Berlin professor Dr. Elmar Altvater. Also in this category are long-established and high-ranking Social Democratic Party (SPD) politicians, such as Egon Bahr and Dr. Peter von Oertzen.

Next come some former oppositionists from East Germany. They are of the type that first joined in organising the reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis, and then evaded the disastrous consequences by finding a warm nest in the apparatus of the Protestant Church or the SPD. Indignantly noting that their appeals for justice and democracy have fallen on deaf ears for nearly ten years now, they continue, undeterred, to preach morals to the ruling elite.

The immortal image of Don Quixote comes vividly to mind when one reads the statements of these valiant knights. Here can be found the unavoidable Vicar Friedrich Schorlemmer, who is already being promoted as the coming president of the national parliament; Protestant Provost of Erfurt Dr. Heino Falcke; co-founder of Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now, a bourgeois opposition grouping in East Germany formed in 1989); Dr. Hans-Jürgen Fischbeck (now head of a Protestant academy in the West); and the Erfurt theologian Dr. Edelbert Richter, an SPD Member of Parliament since 1994.

Then come a few more subordinate figures from various categories: the Greens, environmentalists, scientists, publicists and literary figures such as Walter Jens and the PDS MP Gerhard Zwerenz.

Unfortunately, the name of the author Günter Grass, whose works have so sharply illuminated the abyss of philistinism and who resigned his membership in the SPD following their agreement to the abolition of the right of asylum, can also be found supporting this farce.

The 'Erfurt Declaration' is an attempt to channel the widespread dissatisfaction with the worsening social conditions behind the SPD.

'A new policy to create work and social justice', the appeal to the

June 20 demonstration says, 'cannot be realised simply with a cross on a ballot paper. It requires the impetus of a strong and resistant extra-parliamentary opposition movement which can influence the party spectrum from the SPD and Greens to the PDS, thus effecting a change.'

The slightly irritated undertones cannot be missed. Indeed, the flagging enthusiasm for such a perspective gives the initiators cause for concern. They are worried by the ever greater polarisation between rich and poor. They fear the growth of a broad movement against the existing order which can no longer be controlled by the established parties and structures. What other reason can there be for condemning an 'extra-parliamentary movement' to impotence from the start, by limiting it to the purpose of influencing Social Democrats, Greens and ex-Stalinists?

'In the fifth decade of its existence', the 'Erfurt Declaration' begins, 'the social consensus on which the success of the Federal Republic rests is being destroyed by the radical redistribution of wealth to the benefit of those already rich in influence.'

To recast the resulting dissatisfaction of the mass of the population into votes for the SPD is certainly no easy task. In the numerous Länder (states) and localities where the SPD forms the government, working people have already had many bad experiences with this party.

The large vote for the extremely right-wing Deutsche Volks Union (DVU--German Peoples Union) in the recent state elections in Saxony-Anhalt can be traced to such experiences. A coalition government of the SPD and the Greens in Saxony-Anhalt, supported by the PDS, administered and implemented enormous social attacks. Protest against this was expressed, especially among younger voters, in a vote for the DVU. This was the fatal result of precisely the form of government demanded by the 'Erfurt Declaration'.

Under the pressure of social contradictions, the parliamentary structures are beginning to fail. In order to counter this reality, the initiators of the 'Erfurt Declaration' despairingly hold up a thin sheet of paper. They gather behind the words of Article 14.2 of the German constitution: 'Property brings responsibility. Its use shall always serve the general good.' This is to serve as a motto of the planned demonstration.

In answer to the question as to why this text has been unable to influence previous developments, the Social Democratic professors and men of the Church who set the tone say nothing. But then again, they are not really concerned about a sincere and viable perspective for the future. They are simply reckoning with the growth of social protest and seeking to emasculate it in advance.

The 'Erfurt Declaration' justifies its support for the SPD with the

alleged possibility of a return to a policy of social reforms and social equilibrium, as was the case in West Germany from the 1950s to the early 1970s. 'Faced with wealth worth hundreds of thousands and property worth millions, shouldn't the redistribution which occurred in the 1950s be repeated again?' it states.

However, it remains unclear why precisely the Social Democrats should be counted on to fulfil this hope. For most of that period the policy of social equilibrium was pursued not by the SPD, but by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). For this reason, true to form, some of the 'Erfurters' raise the figure of Ludwig Erhard (CDU) as a model for the future. Erhard was Federal Minister of Economics in 1949-63, Vice-chancellor from 1957 to 1963, and Chancellor from 1963 to 1966. He was a key founder of the policy of the 'social market economy,' when West Germany was described as an 'economic miracle'.

But is a return to the past at all possible? And *which* policy could control the economy in the interests of the ordinary people? The 'Erfurters' address this question very vaguely. For good reason, as their answers are extremely threadbare.

If the hope is to be raised that the SPD can be moved back toward a policy of social reforms, then somehow one thing has to be obscured: the consequences of the globalisation of the economy and the financial world. The latter means that the interests of capital can no longer be reconciled with social equilibrium and lasting social reforms. The tremendous intensification of competition on the world market between gigantic transnational concerns demands the destruction of all past social gains, with the aim of reducing workers' living standards to the lowest international level. This necessity determines the programme of the SPD, which is why they have gone from a policy of social consensus to a policy of social confrontation. This will not be altered by a demonstration, be it large or small.

But the rapid rightward turn of the SPD is not the only development which arises of necessity out of globalisation. No less compelling, there arises the necessity for an independent class policy of the workers, which strives for a fundamental transformation of the capitalist economic system on a world level.

The authors of the 'Erfurt Declaration' fear nothing more than this understanding beginning to take hold among workers and youth. God forbid! That would mean subversion and extremism! Such an 'extra-parliamentary' movement, which is not trying to 'influence' the existing parties, but opposes them, would certainly be deemed undemocratic.

Thus, the SPD politician Egon Bahr, known as a right-winger, justified his signature on the 'Erfurt Declaration' with the argument: 'Democracy needs a strong opposition. A grand coalition (i.e., a coalition of the SPD and CDU) could potentially strengthen the more extreme parties on the right and left.' His SPD colleague Peter von Oertzen advises all the established parties to take up this 'extra-parliamentary movement', otherwise 'democracy will fall in a crisis, which will make the present day political apathy appear quite harmless in comparison'.

By 'democracy' these gentlemen understand an authority which will protect them in their comfortable situation from the anger of the oppressed. They demand 'a different policy' in order to prevent such a catastrophe.

Heino Falcke, the Protestant Provost of Erfurt, anxiously poses the question, 'but is a different policy at all feasible and can it be expected of another government? I have come across a frightening fatalism regarding this question in many discussions--although there are

always plenty of alternatives to discuss. What a spirit of fatalism there is. To be German in these times, does it mean that everyone just feels sorry for himself? We need a movement in opposition to this fatalism.'

The more fearfully the signatories of the 'Erfurt Declaration' try and avoid the challenges of historical development, the more bombastic the swell of their phrases. In this they cut not a few ideological and theoretical capers.

Vicar Schorlemmer preaches the 'conciliation of the market with man, who is the purpose of all things'. Former East German oppositionist Daniela Dahn hopes for the 'democratic globalisation of workers' interests' from the highest authorities of the opposing side, namely from the UN or UNESCO. Perhaps because this seems a little unconvincing even to her, she adds Greenpeace, Amnesty International, the International Federation of Trade Unions and the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Her final battle cry, 'socialism or barbarism', underscores the deplorable consequences of her Stalinist education, which has clearly contributed to this chaotic state of mind.

Professor Altvater demands the 'laying down of limits for globalisation through political regulation at all levels'. Then adds that there are no political institutions which could carry this out.

The SPD deputy cited above, E. Richter, cuts the Gordian Knot without further ado as a good theologian by declaring the world market to a phantom devised by the Devil. In January 1997 in a 'speech on the Erfurt Declaration' he told his 'fellow Christians and fellow citizens' that it was pure nonsense when the destruction of wages and social provisions was justified by the 'might of the world market which bears down on us'. According to SPD deputy Richter, 'since the Christian does not even recognise death as the final power, he thinks even less about such earthly forces! Since the coming of Christ himself it is over as far as such forces are concerned, even if they present us with ever new pretences, now in the guise of the 'world market'.'

It would not be the first time in history that the democratic petty bourgeoisie in Germany, eyes firmly closed to reality, surrendered itself to catastrophe with loud screams and angrily lashed out at those who dared to point this out. However, this time the working class must ensure that they do not pull the whole of society with them into the abyss.

The most important step in the struggle against the danger from the right, as reflected in the success of the DVU, is the building of a revolutionary opposition to capitalism from the left. The 'Erfurt Declaration' is aimed precisely against this.

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