

"We need a militant, anti-capitalist LEFT!"

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Interview with Nina Gunic, a member of the League of Socialist Revolution (LSR), Austrian Section of the League for the Fifth International and a candidate of the new LINKE (LEFT) electoral list in Austria

Question: What circumstances led to the formation of the LEFT?

The background is the historic crisis of the social democratic party (SPÖ). As in other countries, there has been a long-term loss of support for the SPÖ among workers but 18 months ago it formed a coalition with the conservative party and that enormously discredited it. Now the coalition has collapsed. So the crisis of the SPÖ, the breakdown of the government and the new elections on 28th September gave us the opportunity to stand at the elections.

Who is in the LEFT?

There are several currents. Beside the LSR and the youth organisation REVOLUTION these are the Socialist Left Party (SLP, sister party of the Socialist Party in Britain) the Communist Initiative, the Turkish immigrant organisation ATIGF and activists of the social forum movement. So far, not many people from outside these forces have been attracted to the project.

What are the reasons for this?

The SLP is the strongest grouping. It has reduced the election campaign to collecting the 2,600 signatures required to stand in the election. Currently, we have sufficient signatures to stand in 5 of the 9 provinces of Austria. However, necessary as this is, it has meant that for most supporters collecting individual signatures has been the only activity. As a result, the LSR has been alone in organising public rallies and meetings, including weekly rallies and meetings in the biggest district of Vienna. We also called a rally in front of Telekom, the leading telecommunication enterprise, where redundancies have been announced. For us, campaigning on the streets, discussing the issues with workers, is central. We need an activist party, a party that goes into the trade unions and workplaces and fights alongside workers against job and wage cuts.

Are there many differences inside the LEFT?

There are permanent discussions. The main question is: what shall be the character of the LEFT? Should it be a copy of the social democracy of a few decades ago (like Old Labour) or should it stand for fundamentally changing capitalist society? Of course the fight for reforms is very important. But we need to show a road from today's struggles to a tomorrow where everyone can live in peace and have a decent life. This is only possible if we smash the present system in a socialist revolution. We live in a world where rich people exploit the rest of us. Their only aim is to make more profit from our work. At the moment, thousands of jobs are being cut in Austria as the capitalists try to raise their profits despite the coming recession.

Are the other forces in the LEFT not fighting for this too?

Yes, but not consistently. There are many examples of this in the LINKE programme. It calls for higher

taxation of profits, that's all. That's good, but it's not enough. The rich will never give up their accumulated wealth voluntarily. They have plenty of ways of hiding their profits from the taxman. We must take the economy and the wealth out of their hands altogether. The capitalists, the rich, must be expropriated. Control over production and administration should be in the hands of the workers, they have the best work-experience!

Of course, the expropriation of the rich cannot be done in one day, but it must be our goal, and we must say it. The majority in the alliance excluded this issue from the programme even though many agree with it in private. Their argument is: the LSR's demands might be correct, but we cannot say so in public because people won't understand or agree to them! But how will they ever understand if we do not argue openly for them?

Have there been other differences over programme?

Yes, particularly about immigrants' rights and international solidarity. The LSR and REVOLUTION demand the right for migrants to use their mother language in all schools and public services. This means that migrants should be employed as teachers and civil servants to allow the use of various languages ? German, Turkish, Serbo-Croat, Kurdish, Urdu etc. according to people's needs. There are bi-lingual German-French schools in Austria but it is supposedly impossible to have bi-lingual German-Turkish schools! This is all wrong! Of course it's possible and it could lead to a closer integration of migrants and Austrians because it would combat the oppression of migrants.

While ATIGF supports our demand, the other forces in the alliance say: Against racism? Yes! Equal rights? Yes! Right to use your mother language? No, because ?the people won't understand this?. This is, of course, a concession to chauvinism. As a Bosnian migrant myself, I know the importance of the right to use your mother language in public institutions.

We also had a hard fight with the SLP to include opposition to the occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine and against a new war against Iran.

Is there a future for the LEFT despite the differences?

There will always be discussion on the programme that has now been adopted, against serious opposition from the more radical forces. A LEFT that says virtually what social democracy said 30 years ago cannot become a real, anti-capitalist force. Neither can it be a serious pole of attraction if it only repeats old slogans that the socialist left used to argue against! However, an effective election campaign could attract new forces and open the prospect of winning the LEFT, or sections of it, to the building of a new party that is militant and anti-capitalist, a revolutionary party of the workers, the migrants and the youth.

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