

German Left Party preparing to enter government and support war

By Johannes Stern
14 September 2020

In August, the Left Party's parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch gave his full backing to the German Army's foreign deployments and to NATO. In recent days, the party's foreign affairs spokesperson and founding father, Gregor Gysi, has gone a step further.

In an interview with the party's newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, Gysi declared that the Left Party would not allow its nominal position on the issue of war stand in the way of a possible Social Democratic/Left Party/Green coalition after the next federal election in October 2021.

With regard to NATO, "the party never decided that Germany should exit it, because that would just leave NATO as it is, but without Germany," he told the newspaper. The Left Party advocated "the dissolution of NATO and the creation of a new alliance for security and cooperation in Europe that includes Russia," he said. But this "probably won't happen overnight." It was thus necessary "to consider how we can gradually move in this direction."

In other words, like all of the other parliamentary parties, the Left Party will continue to support the NATO military alliance, at least as long as it fulfills the interests of German imperialism. In the same vein, Gysi appeals for a more aggressive foreign policy, with more frequent interventions around the world, on the pretext that Germany is a "mediator."

In response to a question from *Neues Deutschland*, he said Germany had to be prepared to intervene in "all conflicts, including those between NATO members."

With his inimical brand of cynicism, he claimed that entering government and continuing the aggressive foreign policy course pursued by the current Grand Coalition would be a "peace policy."

Gysi rejected "suspicions that we desire a development similar to that of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and Greens, and false accusations that we are weakening our commitment to our positions on a policy for peace." He said those making such criticisms would ensure "that one doesn't even discuss these possible options, never mind consider how to implement them in government, and so everything remains as it is." Of course, he added, "one can stand on the sidelines, wave a little flag, feel satisfied and pure, and abandon the possibility of making any changes to reality."

These are arguments in support not of "a policy for peace," but of a militarist policy. In truth, the "change in reality" being sought by the Left Party in government stands in the best traditions of the pro-austerity, pro-war SPD and Greens.

However, in contrast to the Greens in 1998, when they entered a coalition with the SPD and supported the first war mission of the German Army since the end of the Second World War—its intervention in Kosovo—the Left Party has let its mask fall even before

it enters the government by declaring its support for foreign military interventions.

"It was, is, and will remain our policy to end these interventions," Gysi said. "But on this issue too, we can't do it by snapping our fingers. Concrete conditions have to be taken into account. For example, the Taliban has threatened to execute native Afghans who have assisted the German Army. As the majority of the population now knows, we were absolutely right in opposing this war. Despite that, we must find a way to protect the lives of these helpers."

This could not be more clear: German occupying troops will remain in Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East under a government involving the Left Party. The fate of imperialist collaborators in these countries is the pretext; concrete geostrategic and economic interests are the real reasons.

Just a few days ago, the SPD-led Foreign Ministry published a "doctrine for the Indo-Pacific," which declared, "The Himalayas and Straits of Malacca may seem far off. But our prosperity and geopolitical influence in the coming decades will depend precisely on how we cooperate with the states of the Indo-Pacific." The statement added that as a globally active trading nation, Germany can "not afford to content itself with a spectator's role" with regard to military operations.

The Left party and the return of German militarism

It comes as no surprise that the Left Party wants to push ahead with the aggressive policies of German imperialism as a party of government. It has supported the revival of German militarism from the outset.

Stefan Liebich, Gysi's predecessor as foreign affairs spokesman for the party, was involved in authoring the study "New power, new responsibility" by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). It laid the basis for the imperialist speeches delivered at the 2014 Munich Security Conference by then-German President Joachim Gauck and his successor Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was then the foreign affairs minister.

In the intervening period, the Left Party has ever more explicitly supported the revival of German militarism. In April 2014, a number of Left Party parliamentary deputies, including Liebich and Bartsch, voted in favour of dispatching a German frigate to the Mediterranean to destroy Syrian chemical weapons. The party repeatedly gave its backing to the Grand Coalition's aggressive foreign policy and the German-French plan to establish a European Army. Earlier this year, the party endorsed the government's neocolonial Libya conference in Berlin and a further possible military intervention in North Africa.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the Left Party

shifted even further to the right on foreign and domestic policy. In March, the Left Party voted in the federal parliament in favour of the “coronavirus emergency bailout” package presented by SPD Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and the Grand Coalition, which provided hundreds of billions of euros to big business and the banks.

Wherever the Left Party is in government, it is working to reopen the economy so as to extract profits from working people to pay for the bailout. It is spearheading the deadly “back to school” policy, forcing teachers and students back into schools under unsafe conditions. It has responded to the global upsurge of opposition from workers and young people with hostility and calls for a strengthening of the police.

A new right-wing party leadership

The party’s new leadership will have the task of continuing and intensifying this course. The main candidates to succeed Katja Kipping and Berndt Riexinger at the Left Party’s congress in Erfurt at the end of October come from the leaderships of the party’s state organisations: Janine Wissler in Hesse and Susanne Hennig-Wellsow in Thuringia. Both figures personify the sharp shift to the right by the Left Party and the pseudo-left groups working within it in recent years.

As leader of the Left Party in Thuringia and its parliamentary group in the state parliament, Hennig-Wellsow is a spokesperson for the Left Party/SPD/Green state government headed by Left Party Minister President Bodo Ramelow. To impose the state government’s anti-worker policies, the Left Party cooperates closely in Thuringia with the right-wing Christian Democrats and even the far-right Alternative for Germany.

For example, Ramelow used his deciding vote to secure a parliamentary vice presidential position for the AfD’s Michael Kaufmann in March. Hennig-Wellsow now intends to pursue this hard-right government policy at the federal level. She recently told *Der Spiegel* that she is running for party leader “so that we are prepared to join the government, should the opportunity arise.”

Wissler, who emerged from the Marx 21 group, has been a deputy leader of the Left Party since 2014 and is also pushing for it to become part of a national government. “As you know, we already tried twice in Hesse to conclude an SPD/Left Party/Green alliance,” she said in an interview with the Hessenschau TV program on Thursday. “Its failure was not due to the Left Party.”

She then endorsed the Grand Coalition’s coronavirus policy, which is endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands of students and teachers, saying, “It is correct for schools to be reopened, and our top priority is to ensure that they never have to close again.”

On foreign policy, Marx 21 advocates support for the federal government’s aggressive militarist policy. Christine Buchholz, one of the group’s leading representatives, has sat on the parliamentary defence committee for over 11 years and is thus heavily involved in drawing up plans for Germany’s pro-war foreign policy at the highest levels of the state. Together with delegations from the Defence Ministry, she regularly travels abroad to visit the troops .

Marx 21 has long played a central role in the party’s aggressive military build-up in the Middle East and against Russia, which is being intensified with the Navalny campaign. The group supports military intervention in Syria, celebrated the far-right coup in Ukraine in 2014 as a “democratic revolution,” and has campaigned ever since for the installation of a pro-Western regime in Moscow. In early 2015, at a meeting titled “German foreign policy and new responsibilities:

the parties take their positions,” organised by the DGAP think tank in Berlin, Buchholz agitated for a “colour revolution” in Moscow.

The anti-Marxist roots of Marx 21

Wissler announced that while she runs for party leader, she will “give up her membership in all inner-party factions or associations.” In their reports on this, the bourgeois media has repeatedly described Marx 21 as a “Trotskyist organisation.”

In reality, Marx 21’s right-wing, pro-imperialist policies have nothing to do with the perspective fought for by the co-leader of the Russian Revolution and founder of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky, which is for the unification of workers in struggle internationally against capitalism and war.

The Trotskyist legacy and programme are represented only by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections, including the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) in Germany. By contrast, Marx 21 stands in the tradition of the anti-Marxist International Socialist tendency founded by Tony Cliff in 1960.

In the late 1940s, Cliff broke with the Fourth International and described the Soviet Union as a “state capitalist” society. This was not an abstract question of definition. The Fourth International defended the Soviet Union against imperialist attack despite its Stalinist degeneration because the property relations established by the 1917 Revolution were still in place and were historically progressive. The Fourth International defined the Soviet Union as a “degenerated workers state” and fought for a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy as part of the fight for world socialist revolution.

As with earlier versions of “state capitalism,” Cliff’s revisions amounted to an adaptation to imperialism and anti-communism concealed behind “left” phrases. This became clear in 1950, when Cliff’s group, under the infamous slogan “Neither Washington nor Moscow,” refused to defend China and Russia against imperialist attack.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and implementation by the Stalinists of capitalist restoration, the state capitalists and privileged sections of the middle class for whom they speak shifted openly into the pro-imperialist camp. As the Marx 21 network in Germany, they have buried themselves deeply in the structures of the state as part of the Left Party. Should Wissler become party leader, she will potentially emerge as a key figure in a new governing coalition that will launch attacks on the working class at home and prepare for war abroad.

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