

German parliament snubs Left Party's chairman for fourth time

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In an act that exposed the undemocratic character of the German parliament (Bundestag), the candidature of Lothar Bisky of the new Left Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) was rejected last week for one of the six posts of Bundestag deputy president. This marked the fourth consecutive time that Bisky was snubbed for the post.

Bisky's party is the result of an alliance between former members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and trade union bureaucrats with the PDS—the successor party to the SED, the ruling Stalinist party of East Germany.

A month ago, Bisky stood for this post on no less than three occasions and failed to win a majority of the deputies' votes. Subsequently, leading lights in the parliament agreed to “pause for thought,” enabling Bisky to enter into talks with all factions about his personal history.

He offered to give a full account on all issues, including accusations that he had had connections to the Stasi—the secret police of the East German Stalinist regime. He professed to have nothing to hide, claiming that any contacts he may have had with the East German security forces were limited to his professional position as principal of the Babelsberg film academy. He insisted that he had never functioned as an “informal operative” for the Stasi.

It was thus an act of intentional provocation on the part of the deputies that even more voted against him November 8 than had voted against him in the final sitting of the outgoing parliament. A total of 310 parliamentarians voted “no” last week, as compared to 258 who rejected his candidacy previously.

The standing orders of the German parliament expressly prescribe that each parliamentary faction is entitled to fill a post of deputy president. Each party faction has the right to nominate its own candidate. Throughout the history of the German Republic, this right has always been granted unequivocally. Never before has a majority of representatives refused to give its support to a candidate for the post.

The overt hostility of the new parliament towards the Left Party is aimed ostensibly at its chairman, Bisky. According to a broadcast on the national television channel ZDF following Bisky's first defeat, Bisky had “long been part of the political establishment” in the 15 years since the fall of the Berlin wall—and not only east of the river Elbe.

Despite its known bias in favour of the major conservative parties, ZDF TV praised Bisky, stating, “Even though it may be hard for some to swallow, it is precisely people like Bisky who have succeeded in integrating leading functionaries and their sympathisers from the former communist East German state into the West German

democratic state, thus preventing the development of an unpredictable, extreme left-wing grouping in the new Germany.”

Very true! During the political and social transformations of 1989-1990 and the ensuing 15 years, the Party of Democratic Socialism played a key role in enforcing the introduction of capitalist relations in the former German Democratic Republic, initiating widespread unemployment and the dismantling of social gains. It also succeeded in checking resistance to this process and channelling it into innocuous forms of protest. Gregor Gysi, the PDS's chairman at the time, declared in a long speech on general principles to party delegates in the spring of 1990, “We stand for the kind of market economy that rewards ability and promotes economic initiative.”

In October 2003, Bisky presented the party convention with a policy statement that, according to the ZDF broadcast, “praises the reduction of restraints on business management and concedes to the United Nations Security Council the right to deploy military force to combat threats to world peace.” For his stance, Bisky was attacked by the so-called “Communist Platform” faction in his party, but he refused to give way. Scarcely a year later, he was elected by all factions “without the least sign of dissent” to the post of deputy chairman of the Brandenburg state parliament.

What accounts for hostile rejection of Bisky by the new federal parliament?

It may seem coincidental that just as the vote was taken in the upper house of parliament, the government in Paris, supported by the National Assembly, declared a state of emergency, giving the security forces a free hand to repress the revolt of young people in the French capital's suburbs. However, there is a connection between these events.

The time has passed when the ruling elites on both sides of the Rhine could react to social tensions and conflicts with concessions and compromises. They now know only one response to social problems: the exercise of state control and repression.

The words with which the retiring minister for economy and labour, Wolfgang Clement (SPD), recently slandered the unemployed and recipients of the drastically reduced Hartz IV social benefits in Germany display a striking similarity to the verbal attacks of the French Gaullist interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy described the rebellious youth in the suburban ghettos of France as “rabble” and “scum” that had to be removed with the aid of a high-pressure hose.

No longer are efforts made to integrate the unemployed into society through job-creation schemes, retraining and similar programmes. Now the unemployed are openly terrorised and forced to accept low-paid work of any kind, including “one-euro jobs.” At the same time, the huge army of unemployed and low-wage workers is used as a

lever to force through the dismantling of nationally agreed working conditions.

The plans of the Grand Coalition that has taken power in Germany to save 4 billion euros at the expense of Hartz IV recipients constitute a slap in the face to the socially deprived and a declaration of war against all those who participated in demonstrations against welfare cuts.

The Left Party/PDS has supported and implemented reactionary social policies wherever it has been in power. However, because it spoke of “social justice” and called for the abolition of Hartz IV in the recent national election campaign, it is being ostracised and punished in the federal parliament.

The PDS welcomed and supported, although at times “critically,” the reintroduction of capitalist relations in eastern Germany, thereby strengthening the most right-wing political forces. These now reward the PDS not with words of praise but with a kick in the gut.

Gysi, the Left Party/PDS’s parliamentary chairman, reacted angrily to the rejection of his friend Bisky by the deputies. Drawing attention to the Nazi past of many former members of parliament and senior government officials, he ironically remarked, “I know that Lothar Bisky’s biography also has blemishes.”

The first blemish was that Bisky had not read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in his youth, and was not “enthusiastic about it.” The second was that he never joined Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) Party. Thirdly, Bisky had never been employed in Goebbels’s propaganda ministry. If he had fulfilled these three prerequisites—as did the former federal chancellor, Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (CDU—Christian Democratic Union)—then, according to Gysi, the CDU and its sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), together with their ally, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), would have applauded and said this fellow might become chancellor one day.

Gysi’s remarks provoked a storm of indignation. Wolfgang Gerhard, the FDP’s parliamentary chairman, criticised Gysi for “massively slandering” his parliamentary colleagues. Susanne Kastner, the SPD deputy chairperson in the Bundestag, demanded an apology. Her party colleague, Stephan Hilsberg, referred to Gysi’s remarks as “cheeky and stupid” and demanded an investigation into the possible Stasi background of all delegates from the Left Party.

Claudia Roth, parliamentary leader of the Greens, said it was “simply outrageous” that delegates should be linked to the Nazis merely because they had denied Bisky their votes. She too demanded an apology from Gysi.

It is characteristic of Roth and the Greens that they express their solidarity with outraged deputies and endeavour to spread a cloak of silence over the Nazi tradition in the German state apparatus. They certainly know what is at stake.

The issue of Nazi links to post-war German society was comprehensively thrashed out in the protest movements of 1968, from which the Greens emerged. Now, however, the same issue exposes only too blatantly the class character of the parliament, disrupting the unity of bourgeois democrats in general and, more specifically, negotiations with the CDU/CSU about a possible Green-conservative alliance in the future.

For seven years, from 1998 to 2005, the Greens’ leader, Joschka Fischer, headed Germany’s Foreign Office, which, after 1945, was organised and run by former Nazis to a greater extent than any other government ministry. These links with Germany’s Nazi past continued well into the 1970s.

It is no coincidence that some of Fischer’s predecessors—like Hans-

Dietrich Genscher and Walter Scheel, who was later elevated to the post of federal president—were members of Hitler’s National Socialist Party. Recently, Fischer issued an instruction that former Foreign Office diplomats with a Nazi past should no longer be entitled to official tributes when they left office. Leading German diplomats reacted furiously, and as a result the measure was dropped.

The list of West German postwar politicians with a Nazi past would fill several volumes. Here are some of the best known:

Ludwig Erhard (CDU), who in October 1963 took over from Konrad Adenauer (CDU) as chancellor, disputed being a member of the Nazi Party, but in fact worked for years as an advisor to Nazi gauleiter Josef Bürckel in the Saar.

Former Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder (founding member of the CDU after the war—no relation to the outgoing SPD chancellor) had been a member of the Nazi Party and the SA storm troopers from 1933 until he resigned in 1941.

Federal Interior Minister Hermann Höcherl (CSU) joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and worked as a lawyer in Regensburg from 1933 to 1945.

Federal Finance Minister Rolf Dahlgren (FDP) also joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and was decorated for his wartime services.

The minister for expelled persons Hans Krüger (CDU) was a supporter of Hitler going back to 1923, and joined the Nazi Party in 1933. When his Nazi past came to light in 1961 and it was revealed he had led troops in occupied Poland and was guilty of war crimes, he resigned as a federal minister but remained a member of the CDU parliamentary faction.

Siegfried Zoglmann became a Bundestag deputy in 1957, later vice chairman of the FDP faction. He joined the National Socialists in 1934 and was leader of the Hitler Youth in the “protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia” in 1939. He rose to the top Nazi leadership in Prague, and from 1942 onwards was a volunteer with the notorious Waffen-SS and Hitler’s personal bodyguard.

As parliamentary manager for the FDP, Zoglmann proposed legislation in the Bundestag allowing former SS members to receive a pension, and in 1970 he was a leading figure in a right-wing opposition to the coalition between the SPD and FDP that was led by Willy Brandt. He later went on to found the extreme-right grouping “German Union.” In 1973, he received the highest award of the federal Republic—the Order of Merit.

(Information obtained from: Bernt Engelmann, *Die unsichtbare Tradition*, Bonn 1991, and Wikipedia)



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