

# Left Party in Berlin supports Israeli war on Gaza

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The chairman of the Left Party in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, has come out publicly in support of the Israeli war against Gaza. He spoke last Sunday at a demonstration that unconditionally backed the military assault on the Palestinian population.

The pro-Israel demonstration had been called by Jewish organizations in Berlin and coincided with similar events in Munich and Frankfurt. The rally in Berlin was planned in response to a number of anti-war demonstrations that had taken place in Germany one day previously. Around 40,000 had taken part in the various anti-war protests.

For their part, the pro-war demonstrations organised by those supporting the Israeli military attracted only a few thousand—in the main full-time politicians and functionaries of various organisations. Those taking part in the rallies held banners calling for solidarity with Israel, reading: "Israel has a right to defend itself!" and "We need victory!"

The official appeal for the Berlin demonstration expressly defended the brutal military assault by the Israeli army on the inhabitants of Gaza, stating, "Israel's self-defence is legitimate and not a crime!" It then justified the enormous suffering of the 1.5 million Palestinian civilians in Gaza with the cynical remark that the "terrorists of Hamas" were using "human beings as shields" and thereby made "civilian victims inevitable." Hamas had "begun this conflict" and bears "responsibility for the suffering on both sides," the appeal declared.

The appeal concluded by demanding: "The Islamist dictatorship of the terrorist organisation Hamas must be permanently terminated!" thereby implicitly backing the extermination of Hamas leaders and members by the Israeli army.

Shortly after the Israeli invasion of Gaza, German chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) had proffered her unconditional support for Israel. But this was not enough for the organizers of the Berlin rally. They described Germany as an "active player in the conflict" and in particular criticised Germany's trade with Iran. According to the

appeal, this meant that Germany was financing Iran and, via Iran, ultimately the Hamas movement.

Despite the hysterical tone of the appeal, all of the political parties represented in the Berlin Senate sent prominent representatives to the demonstration. Speaking on behalf of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) was the leader of the party's parliamentary fraction, Frank Henkel. The Free Democratic Party (FDP) sent its regional chairman, Markus Löning. Parliamentary group leader Franziska Eichstädt-Bohlig spoke for the Green Party, while the president of the state parliament, Walter Momper, was sent by the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Representing the Left Party was its regional chairman, Klaus Lederer.

Christian Democrat Henkel and the free-marketeer Löning won applause from the crowd for their pledges of unconditional support for Israel. Löning justified his support for the savage intervention of the Israeli army with the argument: "Freedom of opinion prevails in Israel and that distinguishes Israel from all of its neighbours." He deliberately refrained from mentioning that the Israeli army has established strict censorship over the war and—in contravention of a number of legal decisions—categorically refuses to allow independent journalists to enter the war area.

The representatives of the SPD and the Greens, Momper and Eichstädt-Bohlig, also lined up fully behind Israel and repeated the chorus of claims that Hamas was responsible for the war. However, when they timidly raised the suggestion of a negotiated solution, the belligerent pro-Israel crowd responded with an outburst of catcalls and booing. In fact, the representative of the Greens was barely able to continue her contribution after she asserted that the Palestinian population should have the right to exist and declared, "Israel cannot win this war morally!"

There was a very different reception, however, for the representative of the Left Party. His speech was interrupted on several occasions by applause and cries of jubilation. He obviously struck a chord with the assembled crowd when he accused all opponents of the war on Gaza of being anti-

Semitic.

He had decided to come to the demonstration, Lederer declared, because in his opinion, "The brutal and bitter conflict in the Gaza Strip and in the south of Israel should not be used by anybody in our country to foment anti-Semitism." While not mentioning any names, his message the day after widespread protests against the attack on Gaza was unmistakable: any criticism of the Israeli government and its army is anti-Semitic and must be rejected.

In fact, the opposite is the case. It is the criminal actions of the Israeli government and its claim to be acting on behalf of all Jews—and not criticism of its politics—that encourages anti-Semitism. In Israel itself and around the world many Jews look upon the Israeli onslaught on Gaza with a mixture of abhorrence and anger and reject the policies of the Israeli government.

Lederer addressed the warmongering participants at the Berlin rally as "dear friends." Like all the other speakers, he ignored the prehistory of the war—the expulsion and decades-long suppression of the Palestinians—and declared the Kassam missiles fired by Hamas to be the root cause of the war. "Nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies the firing of shells and rockets on populated areas of the civilian population, on [the Israeli areas] of Ashdod, Beer Sheva and Ashkelon," he said. "For me that is the starting point of any discussion in our country with respect to such demonstrations."

Lederer said nothing about the massive destruction of the populated areas in the Gaza Strip. He did not mention the desperation of the Palestinian population, which has no means to defend itself and lacks any escape route from the murderous advance of the Israeli military. Nor did he say a word about the disproportionate strength of the Israeli army, which has resulted in 100 Palestinian deaths for every Israeli fatality.

Instead Lederer wept crocodile tears over the suffering of the civilian population and held Hamas responsible. "No matter how highly developed the weapon systems used," he said, "irrespective of who leads the war, the disaster hits first and foremost the civilian population, not least because the hostage-taking of the civilian population belongs to the nature of modern war. And this is precisely the case in the asymmetrical conflict strategy, which Hamas is pursuing."

The appearance of a high-ranking functionary of the Left Party on a pro-war demonstration marks a further lurch to the right by this organisation. Since its foundation, the Left Party had—at least verbally—largely dissociated itself from the foreign policy of the federal government and had rejected the intervention by the German army in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Now in response to the Middle East conflict it has swung over to the official line of German foreign policy,

in a similar manner to the Green Party 10 years ago.

A decade ago, in exchange for their seats in the federal government coalition, the Greens ditched their pacifist stance and supported the NATO war against Yugoslavia. They have since evolved into one of the most virulent supporters of German militarism.

The chairman of the federal Left Party parliamentary faction, Gregor Gysi, had set in motion the party's new course last spring when he made a memorable speech calling for a reorientation of political line with regard to Israel. He rejected the term "imperialistic" in characterising Israeli policy and called upon "the left" to acknowledge the right of existence of the state of Israel.

Lederer has now gone a step further by supporting Israel's vicious attack on the Palestinians. The fact that he does not stand alone is demonstrated by the absence of official representatives of the Left Party on the anti-war demonstrations the previous day.

Lederer is not a political nonentity. He is the chairman of the party in the only German state where the Left Party has shared government responsibility for the past eight years. In Berlin the Left Party, in coalition with the SPD, has demonstrated its loyalty to the bourgeois state and implemented social cuts far more draconian than those carried out in any other German state.

As the current economic and social crisis intensifies, the Left Party is now preparing to take up government responsibility at a federal level. To this end, it is required to adopt the fundamental pillars of German foreign policy, including unconditional support for Israel. The present war in Gaza has made it impossible for the Left Party to sit on the fence. It has to show its colours. It has now done so in the person of Klaus Lederer and his appearance on the pro-Israeli demonstration last Sunday.



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