

The war against Libya and the German Left Party

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The reaction of the Left Party to the German government's policy on the war against Libya demonstrates the extent to which the party acts as an adviser to German imperialism. The Left Party is using the war against Libya to move closer to the government and shield it against popular opposition.

Already in March the Left Party signaled in the European Parliament that it had no essential objections to the war against Libya. Lothar Bisky, for years a leading member of the Left Party and currently leader of their faction in the European Parliament, proposed a resolution which demanded official recognition of the National Transitional Council in Benghazi and supported the EU's military intervention. No one in the Left Party has since criticized Bisky for his stance.

The Left Party's role inside the German parliamentary defense commission also reveals more about the party's position regarding war than all of its hollow criticisms of militarism. This was particularly obvious after the massacre at Kunduz in September 2009—the most deadly military action in the history of the postwar German army.

Although Left Party members on the defense commission had reports at an early stage about the deaths of dozens of civilians and that the primary target of the attack was insurgents, none of them informed the public. Instead they left the initiative of uncloaking the affair to right-wing military circles, which then began a campaign aimed at freeing the Bundeswehr from any legal responsibility and giving it the right to kill.

Currently, however, Germany cannot uphold its interests in Libya against its rivals based on military force. This manifested itself in the German government's decision to turn against their traditional allies, France and the US, in the UN Security Council vote for war against Libya. Currently, the most

successful instrument of German imperialism to enforce its global interests is its ability to secure influence via diplomacy and economic relations.

In this respect, the Left Party has lined up fully behind the German government. The party's policy in the war against Libya, like all the other bourgeois parties, is directed at defending the interests of German imperialism in the oil-rich country and strangling revolution in the Arab region before it threatens its interests. In the current situation, however, the Left Party regards direct military intervention as unsuitable to enforce these interests. Instead, they are pressing the German government to maintain its present course of action.

The Left Party had already outlined this line of argumentation when the mass insurgencies in Tunisia and Egypt broke out earlier this year. In early February their foreign policy spokesman, Wolfgang Gehrke, stated that certain changes were necessary to advance German interests in the face of the protests in this region. Gehrke stated that the German government had to admit “without further beating around the bush, that their previous policies concerning Egypt and the Middle East were fundamentally wrong. Without coming to terms with this there can be no new start.”

A few days later, Gehrke called for a special session of the German Foreign Policy Commission to give concrete advice to the government: it must finally “bite the bullet and demand the immediate resignation of Egypt's still-ruling president.”

This was the only way to stabilize the situation, in the Left Party's view. At the same time, Germany had to cancel arms exports to Egypt and reassess its cooperation in the training of Egyptian police and military. It was also necessary to rely on fresh political forces. Gehrke had already located such forces. He

referred to a large number of “very serious discussions” which he had conducted with political groups and individuals in the region during a two-week journey he made through several Middle Eastern states.

In line with these arguments, the Left Party is now moving closer to the government on Libya. Instead of addressing the real interests behind the German government’s abstention in the UN Security Council, the deputy leader of their faction, Jan van Aken, exuberantly praised the stand taken by the German foreign minister: “Mr. Westerwelle ... I consider your decision very prudent and consequent.” Aken refrained from commenting on the fact that Westerwelle had previously demanded economic sanctions against Libya more fervently than anybody else.

The Left Party has no fundamental opposition to imperialism—be it German, French, British or US. If it did, it would be obliged to demand that all foreign troops and intelligence staff leave the region immediately and to support the workers of the region in the struggle against their own rulers and imperialism. Instead, the Left Party is giving advice to Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government on how best to enforce German interests.

Thus, in a recent statement, the Left Party warned the German government not to give in to pressure exerted by France and Great Britain. A press statement of their parliamentary faction read: “Pressure by the foreign ministers of France and Great Britain to step up NATO involvement in the war against Libya is clearly visible. There is the serious danger that, under this pressure, the German government might abandon its current stand and decide to support a military mission by NATO or EU combat troops. The Left Party will react with parliamentary and non-parliamentary resistance against such a course.”

Basically this means that the Left Party is offering its support to the German government to hold out against pressure exerted by their rivals on the geopolitical stage. At the same time, it promises to mobilize support for German policy in Libya against Germany’s rivals. The press statement ends with the words: “Germany must reject participation in the war and become an active factor in a peace agreement. This would finally be a German role we could support.”

Two weeks later, in a press statement titled “Rather isolated in peace than involved in war,” the Left Party

faction in the parliament once again declared their uncritical support for the government’s policy and even suggested that it had noble motives: “The Left Party supports an active German foreign policy, which is a policy of peace. The German government must finally start initiatives for an armistice in Libya and take up the role of a negotiator within the United Nations.”

The Left Party’s policies are dictated by the same geo-strategic interests as those of the right-wing Merkel government. The party currently has the luxury of not being part of the federal government and can therefore openly pursue a policy directed against Germany’s Western partners, without regard for the country’s traditional ties to the West. Due to the historical limitations on German militarism, this stance currently takes the form of an apparent opposition to war.

This can change very quickly, however, with the growth of inter-imperialist conflicts. The Left Party’s argumentation is leading the party directly into the camp of those supporting war in the name of German interests.

In this respect the Left Party—one of whose components is the political successor to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), the Stalinist ruling party in East Germany—could play an important role in reorienting German foreign policy, thanks to its background as the only German party to come from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain.



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