

German Left Party MPs vote for military deployments

Ulrich Rippert
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Five Left Party deputies, including a number of leading members, voted yesterday in favor of the deployment of a German frigate to the Mediterranean. Eighteen members of the party abstained in the vote. The vote by Left Party members for military intervention is a new development and marks a significant further shift to the right by the party.

Until the vote on April 9, the Left Party was the only party represented in the German parliament (Bundestag) that officially rejected Bundeswehr (German army) missions abroad and warned against the militarization of foreign policy. Yesterday's vote makes clear this stance has now been junked.

The change of attitude by a number of leading members of the party is directly related to the military buildup against Russia, which has been sharply intensified with the eruption of the Ukraine crisis. Following the declarations in February by the federal president and government ministers that the period of military restraint was over and Germany would intervene more aggressively—including militarily—in global crisis regions, leading political circles and the German media have unleashed a barrage of warmongering propaganda.

In the past week, NATO has declared that Russia is no longer a partner, but rather an opponent. NATO has moved aircraft, ships and troops close to the Russian border and is preparing a massive intensification of its military presence in Eastern Europe. German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen is overseeing a reorganization of the Bundeswehr and military leaders are arguing in favor of the reintroduction of conscription.

Against this background, the Left Party has responded by supporting the government. At the same time it has sought to cover its tracks and sow confusion by presenting its support for military missions abroad as a “consistent peace policy.”

At a meeting on March 31, the head of the party's parliamentary faction, Gregor Gysi, declared that there were good reasons to approve the dispatch of the German frigate. The deployment of the ship, together with 300 soldiers, was, he argued, aimed at protecting the American special freighter “Cape Ray,” which has been commissioned to

disable Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean. The demand for the abolition and destruction of chemical weapons is a traditional demand of the Left Party, which it is now using to argue that the participation of the German military is part of a “peace mission.”

Gysi encountered resistance, however, at the March 31 meeting and subsequently appealed to his parliamentary faction to abstain in the vote in parliament—but to no avail. The group decided not to exercise a party whip and allow members to vote freely.

Previously, Left Party executive member Stefan Liebich, who represents the party on the Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee, had announced that he would definitely vote in favor of the Bundeswehr deployment. The destruction of Syrian chemical weapons was “undoubtedly a good thing,” he said, and he supported the decision of the government to eliminate them.

In an interview with Südwestrundfunk (SWR2) earlier this month, Liebich said, “I have agitated in our group in favor of supporting the mission.” It involves an “entirely sensible deployment,” he added.

When asked why there was still opposition to Bundeswehr missions in the Left Party and its parliamentary group, Liebich said, “I do not agree with this position.” There was a difference between the Bundeswehr being sent to war in Afghanistan, he said, and its being deployed to take part in the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

A similar argument was used by Paul Schäfer, who was the defense spokesman of the Left Party for many years. In a letter to the Left Party parliamentary faction, he called for a clear vote in favor of the government's motion. Otherwise, he wrote, the Left Party would lose “its credibility as a party of disarmament.”

Such demagoguery is not particularly original. A similar process took place in the post-World War II period, first with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and then with the Greens. Both parties similarly sought to conceal their conversion from pacifism to militarism with phrases about disarmament and human rights.

In 1992, the SPD justified its first-ever agreement to Bundeswehr operations abroad on the grounds that the deployment was aiding a medical mission in Cambodia. In 1999, Green Party leader Joschka Fischer, as foreign minister in the SDP-Green coalition government, justified German participation in the war in Yugoslavia with the utterly cynical slogan: “Never again Auschwitz.” At a special party conference, delegates argued that the supposed struggle for “human rights” required the participation of the Bundeswehr in an illegal war!

The fact is that the Left Party is marching in lockstep with the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel. As long as German imperialism chose to drape its military interventions behind a cloak of “pacifism”—describing operations such as in Afghanistan as a contribution towards “humanitarian reconstruction”—the Left Party was able to parade its pacifist credentials. But once the government announced its foreign policy shift to one of militarism and war, it became more difficult for the Left Party to maintain a show of pacifism and retain its credibility in ruling class circles.

Since the shift in foreign policy announced in February, the Left Party has been integrated into the highest levels of the state. The party plays an important role because popular opposition to the new military policy is widespread and rising. The Left Party has been assigned the task of propagandizing for war in the name of “humanity.” With its help, the entire pseudo-left spectrum is being integrated into the military offensive of German imperialism.

Last spring, the government-linked Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), together with the American German Marshall Fund, commenced work on a comprehensive foreign policy document titled “New Power—New Responsibility: Elements of a German Foreign and Security Policy for a World in Transition.” Stefan Liebich was involved in the work on the document.

On his web site, Liebich reported excitedly on his collaboration with leading military strategists “even though the end result is not a leftist document.”

A few weeks later, an anthology was published with a number of essays on the topic “Left Foreign Policy: Reform Prospects.” In the anthology, leading Left Party members argue for acceptance of German military operations, close transatlantic cooperation with the US, and a greater international role for Germany.

In an article entitled “The Left and Military Operations,” Paul Schäfer openly calls for support for military interventions. Schäfer argues that the Left Party could “not reject a priori” future war operations. It should not be overlooked, he writes, that there are missions that “reflect the legitimate concerns of the hitherto oppressed and disenfranchised.”

The most recent example of the warmongering of the Left Party is the travelogue by Christine Buchholz, a Left Party member who sits on the parliamentary defence committee. While Liebich was involved in the drafting of the great power strategy document, Buchholz traveled to Africa in the company of the German defence minister as a sort of “embedded opposition.”

The trip to Mali and Senegal followed the Munich Security Conference, where German President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen all proclaimed the necessity of advancing Germany’s economic and strategic interests by utilizing military means.

It is no accident that the Left Party has now stripped off its guise of pacifism and is openly committing itself to the war policy of German imperialism. It follows directly from the capitalist orientation of the party. The forerunners of the Left Party—the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)—played key roles in reintroducing the capitalist market into the former East Germany.

The party’s “critique” of capitalism was always confined to demands for more privileges for its relatively better-off social base. The Left Party speaks for layers of the wealthy middle class that have found their niche in the capitalist system and profit from the attacks on the working class. As the class struggle intensifies, these layers increasingly line up with the ruling class.

Any serious opposition to war requires the sharpest struggle against the reactionary policies of the Left Party.



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