

German Left Party defends drive to war

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The Left Party's deputy parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch gave his backing to the German government's aggressive foreign policy in an interview with the daily *Tagesspiegel* last Friday. His statements were aimed at defending the government against criticism and are part of a campaign against opponents of war.

In the interview, Bartsch called once again for a coalition between the Left Party and the SPD (Social Democrats). On many issues there was considerable agreement, above all in foreign and defence policy, according to Bartsch. "A coalition between the Left Party and SPD in 2017 (the date of the next federal election) will not fail because of foreign policy," he said. Together with foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), Bartsch said he was in favour of a "more active German foreign policy".

Bartsch explicitly included military interventions by the German army. "No government can cancel interventions Germany has committed to within the framework of a UN mandate overnight," the deputy leader stated. "The decision will be made when parliament has to decide on the extension of such missions. It will always be done on a case-by-case basis." Bartsch did not specify which "particular cases" would be agreed to by the Left Party. In April of this year he voted with four of his fraction colleagues in favour of a foreign intervention by the German army in the Syrian conflict.

He is now going one step further and giving his support to the militarist policies of the foreign minister. Bartsch asserted that Steinmeier had a lot in common with the Left Party's programme. In the coalition between the SPD and Christian Democratic Union, Steinmeier is the driving force behind the revival of German militarism.

At the beginning of the year, Steinmeier announced the end of military restraint and declared that Germany

was too big and powerful to merely comment from the sidelines on global politics. At the end of May he launched an Internet site calling for Germany to take more leadership in Europe and globally, and encouraging an aggressive foreign policy. At the same time, Steinmeier implemented an aggressive course towards Russia over the Ukraine crisis, collaborating with the Ukraine fascist Svoboda Party, among others.

Bartsch is now officially giving the Left Party's seal of approval for such policies. He is declaring openly something that the Left Party has been trying to conceal, but which they have been practicing for a long time. The party has been an integral part of German foreign policy for years. They have representatives on the defence committee in parliament, are involved in trips with the defence ministry, and actively participated in the war preparations against Syria.

Last autumn, several prominent party members, including Stefan Liebich, Gregor Gysi and Paul Schäfer, published a collection of essays under the title "A left foreign policy: perspectives for reform" in which, in full agreement with government foreign policy, they called for military interventions by the army and a greater role for Germany internationally. Liebich followed the same line with his involvement with a strategy paper financed by the government that has served as the basis of Steinmeier's course.

Bartsch's open acceptance of the government's foreign policy is directly connected with a campaign, led by politicians and the media in the days prior to the interview, against critics of the drive to war. A previously unknown local Left Party politician, Norbert Müller, was sharply criticised and threatened with prosecution after calling President Joachim Gauck a "disgusting warmonger." Gauck had previously spoken out in favour of stronger military interventions by Germany.

The Left Party leadership joined in the campaign

against Müller and firmly distanced itself from the deputy in the Brandenburg state parliament. Left Party federal parliamentary leader Gregor Gysi stated that Müller had “expressed himself incorrectly.” Gauck was not a “disgusting warmonger.” Left Party chairman Bernd Riexinger distanced himself from the statement and declared that the debate on military interventions must “be conducted with expertise and with the necessary respect to the authority of the (presidential) office.”

The Left Party not only chose this formulation to distance itself from Müller, but also to back the claim that Müller’s statement represented “an insult to the German President,” which, according to paragraph 90 of the criminal code, can be punished with a five-year custodial sentence. While the Potsdam state prosecutor is considering action and representatives from politics and the media have demanded firm judicial measures, Gysi and his colleagues have signaled their support for the intimidation of opponents of war.

Bartsch is now openly explaining why the Left Party took this course. The party used the campaign against Müller to demonstrate its reliability as supporters of German foreign policy. In dealing with its own member, it is showing its readiness to act ruthlessly against antiwar sentiment within the population.

This is fully in keeping with the party’s record. Emerging out of the highest layers of the Stalinist bureaucracy in East Germany and the trade union bureaucracy in the west, it has a long tradition of suppressing workers. In 1989, the then SED/PDS saw its task to be the organisation of capitalist restoration in order to secure the governability of the country, as their honorary chairman and head of state at the time Hans Modrow put it.

Since then, the party has been integrated into several state governments in order to impose social attacks on the population. The Left Party is now preparing to play the same role at the federal level. The defense of German militarism is a precondition for its place at the cabinet table.



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