

How the German Left Party backs Israel's war against Gaza

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Germany's Left Party has taken on the task of defending the Israeli army's brutal attack on Gaza. While Israel's bombardment has claimed almost 600 lives, including numerous women and children, the Left Party is systematically suppressing every protest against this.

The campaign was begun on July 11 by the leadership trio of Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping, and Bernd Riexinger. In a joint statement just three days after the launch of the Israeli air attacks, they warned against deliberately criticizing only one side in the conflict.

"The international community is well advised not to encourage both sides by a one-sided blame game," the statement reads. This is "nothing more than an encouragement to deny peace. In this war, no one is conducting a righteous war."

The message to their own party was unmistakable: No one should be in solidarity "one-sidedly" with the Palestinian victims of the Israeli assault. The party leadership has ordered its own members to observe strict abstention, and instead has appealed to the "international community," i.e. to the major imperialist powers and their allies, to take "decisive steps towards de-escalation."

Abstaining in the conflict between a highly armed military and a largely helpless civilian population, which is being starved, cut off from electricity and water and bombarded constantly, means tolerating and supporting a war crime. Moreover, Gysi and the other Left Party leaders know very well that the "international community"—Washington, Berlin and the corrupt Arab regimes—fully supports the criminal actions of the Israeli government.

The Left Party is determined to secure a position in the next German government. In addition, there are

state elections in Thuringia September 14, where the Left Party estimates it has a chance of winning its first state premiership. Therefore, they want to make sure that under no circumstances do differences break out in an important question of foreign policy with their future coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens, who are both supporting Israel.

When one of the Left Party's state associations nevertheless called for protests against the Gaza war, they were deluged with a flood of threats, insinuations and slander that is unusual even for the Left Party.

The party's state association in North Rhine Westphalia, as well as its local youth organisation, Linksjugend Solid, called a demonstration for July 18 in Essen under the slogan "Stop the bombardment of Gaza—for an end to the escalation in the Middle East".

The statement calling for the demonstration barely went beyond the German government's official position: Stop the violence by all the participants. The statement also calls for an end to German arms sales to the region, the admission of more refugees, the sending of medicines to Gaza and the lifting of the blockade by Israel and Egypt. There is no sharp condemnation of Israeli crimes. Nevertheless, it led to hysterical reactions within the Left Party.

Anti-Semitic statements posted by outsiders on the Facebook page for the demonstration—and which were taken down as soon as they were discovered—were seized on to insinuate that the entire demonstration had an anti-Semitic orientation.

The Berlin state association of Linksjugend Solid demanded the rally be called off, saying the call for the demonstration was "hard to out do for one-sidedness" and that it must have given the impression to anti-Semites "that they are among like-minded people". There was a real danger that anti-Semitic slogans would

be shouted at the demonstration and attacks made on the nearby Old Synagogue, they claimed.

Left Party Thuringia state deputy Katharina König expressed herself even more sharply. In a post on the “Ruhrbarone” web site, she presented the Palestinians as the aggressor and Israel as the victim. The deaths of hundreds of civilians was a reaction forced by terrorists “to isolate Israel”. “Israel is defending itself against the ongoing rocket attacks. Protests by Islamists, Nazis and the German Left follow,” writes König.

Those who protest against the war in Gaza, are presented by König as accomplices of terrorists: “Islamists, Nazis, left-wingers, naifs and anti-Semites worldwide ensure that the terrorists’ calculations pay off. Also, they are the ones who motivate Hamas and others to carry on.” And on the demonstrations against the assault on Gaza, König wrote: “They are not demonstrations for peace. They are demonstrations against Israel. They are a calculated and functional part of the terror.”

Such words provide a foretaste of the means the Left Party will employ when a real anti-war movement develops.

The federal parliamentary deputy for Brandenburg, Harald Petzold, was not content with words. On July 18, he traveled to Essen to appear as a speaker at a counter demonstration at which the right-wing populist and Islamophobe Michael Höhne-Pattberg from Krefeld also participated.

Despite the heated atmosphere, the Essen demonstration against the Gaza war, involving some 3,000 people, was peaceful, a fact also confirmed by the police. There were some individuals shouting anti-Semitic statements on the periphery, which were isolated by the organisers; however, this was eagerly seized upon by the right-wing media and the Left Party leadership and blown up out of all proportion.

The Left Party federal manager, Matthias Höhn, published a statement immediately after the demonstration—“It is shameful”—in which he expressed his deep shock over the events during and after the Essen demonstration.

Exaggerating and contorting the actual events, Höhn writes: “That in the run up to a demonstration, for which Left Party members also called, the protection of Jewish establishments had to be stepped up; that at and after such a demonstration anti-Semitic slogans were

chanted; that the Essen Synagogue was a declared target of anti-Israel participants at this demonstration; that bottles and stones were thrown at pro-Israel demonstrators—it all shames me deeply.”

A party that denounces its own members because they protest against a brutal war, albeit weakly and spinelessly, has lost the right to call itself “left”. In reality, the party’s name was always a fraud.

The Left Party—an alliance of the heirs of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the former East Germany and a wing of the West German SPD and trade union bureaucracy—was from the beginning a right-wing party of state. They have always regarded their task as suppressing social discontent and leading it into harmless channels. Now, the development of war and social conflict forces them to openly show their true colors and defend brutal war crimes, such as the Israeli attack on Gaza.



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