

Germany's Left Party suppresses opposition to militarism

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The Left Party in Germany is using the war in Gaza to place itself unconditionally behind the national government's foreign policy. It is deploying its resources against anti-war demonstrations and seeking to isolate and suppress the Palestinian struggle.

A glance at the course of events clearly shows that the accusation of anti-Semitism used to libel the demonstrations originated in Karl Liebknecht Haus, the Left Party's headquarters in Berlin.

The party leadership set it in motion. Immediately after the start of the Israeli bombardment, leading Left Party figures, including Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, warned on July 11 against criticising Israel. They called upon all party members to firmly abstain, because "one-sided condemnations" were false. Hamas' rocket attacks on Israel were to be opposed just as much as Israel's bombardment of Gaza. The message to their party was unmistakable: no one should show "one-sided" solidarity with the Palestinian people against Israel's attacks.

When a few days later the Left Party's North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) state organisation and the party's youth movement proposed a rally under the slogan "Stop the Bombardment of Gaza: For an End to Escalation in the Middle East," the party leadership responded angrily.

Left Party federal Managing Director Matthias Höhn demanded the rally be cancelled. When the NRW section refused, he turned to the press and initiated a media campaign against his own party's members. In a press release cited by *Junge Welt* August 5, he warned of anti-Semitic attacks before the demonstration and rally had even taken place.

Höhn demanded that the protection of Jewish institutions be stepped up and stated that the synagogue in Essen would be a target of anti-Israeli participants in

the rally—a thoroughly unjustified claim. At the same time, Höhn organised a pro-Israeli counter-rally at which his party colleague, Left Party leader in Brandenburg and parliamentary deputy Harald Petzold, appeared as the main speaker in support of Israel against the Gaza support demonstration.

In spite of the tense atmosphere that had been incited, the protest in Essen against the Gaza war ultimately took place peacefully, with around 3,000 participants. This figure was officially confirmed by the police. There were only a few anti-Semitic statements on the sidelines of the protest, whose authors were immediately isolated and excluded by the organisers.

Nevertheless, the Left Party leadership blew up the incident. Höhn published a statement immediately after the demonstration that was circulated by the media. Under the headline, "It is shameful," he stated that he had been deeply affected by events during and after the rally in Essen.

In a massive distortion of what really happened, Höhn claimed that at the rally "anti-Semitic slogans were raised, that the Essen synagogue was a declared target for anti-Israeli participants on the rally, that bottles and stones were thrown at pro-Israeli demonstrators: I found all of this deeply shameful." This statement contributed to the media campaign defaming all demonstrations against the Israeli bombardment as anti-Semitic.

The Left Party simultaneously used the media campaign in parliament to conclude an all-party alliance for the support of Israel. On July 22, the executive of the German-Israeli parliamentary committee published a statement in which it expressed its concern "over the outbreak of anti-Semitic violence and acts of criminality, especially at demonstrations."

Völker Beck (Green Party), the group's chair, Gitta

Connemann (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union), Kerstin Griese (Social Democratic Party) and Jan Korte (Left Party) unanimously declared, “It is clear to us across all factions that we sharply condemn all forms of anti-Semitism.”

The actions of the Israeli army and the horrific bombardment of an area more densely populated than Berlin was not condemned in the text. Instead, allegedly “terrible scenes on German streets” were reported, “ranging from the relativising and denial of the Holocaust to anti-Semitic chants and outbursts of violence against suspected pro-Israeli protesters and Jewish fellow citizens. This escalation has a new quality and is very concerning.”

The dishonesty of this campaign becomes clear when the statements of the Greens and other parties on Ukraine are read. There they celebrated the Maidan movement earlier this year, in which open anti-Semites and fascists played a leading role, as a democratic movement.

The Left Party is utilising this campaign to demonstrate its unconditional support for the German government on the issue of war. It supports the shift in foreign policy to an aggressive and imperialist great power policy and the return of German militarism.

At the beginning of the year it was revealed that the Left Party had been involved in the revival of German militarist policy from the outset. The party’s representative on the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, Stefan Liebich, cooperated for months on the strategy paper “New Power, New Responsibility: Elements of German Foreign and Security Policy for a Changing World.” This served as the basis for the new direction in foreign policy.

Then, in April, several Left Party parliamentary deputies voted in favour of an intervention by the German military, supporting the sending of a frigate to the Mediterranean Sea. This was the first time the Left Party deputies voted to support a military intervention.

Now the Left Party is going a step farther, denouncing and suppressing anti-war demonstrations. The party is using its influence in the trade unions to undermine any participation by workers in the struggle against war. At the same pro-Israeli rally in Berlin where the Left Party’s Berlin state leader Klaus Lederer attacked the anti-war demonstrations, Michael Sommer took part. Sommer was the long-time head of

the German trade union confederation until he was replaced just a few months ago.

An especially despicable role in the rightward evolution of the Left Party is being played by pseudo-left groups inside the party such as the SAV (Socialist Alternative). Its role as a political fig-leaf for the Left Party is becoming increasingly obvious. The organization is in agreement with the right-wing policies of the Left Party and justifies them with opportunist phrases. Some of the most reactionary demagogues are to be found in its ranks.

SAV spokesman in Munich Max Brym wrote that “the main task for the left” was to distance itself “from the fascist Hamas.” He claimed that any critique of the Israeli government leads to anti-Semitism.

The responsibility of the left, he continued, was to identify and combat anti-Semitism on the streets and squares. Brym wrote, “Mass consciousness is deeply reactionary in Germany.” Anti-Semitism predominated on the streets. “It is not possible at the moment in Germany to show solidarity on the streets with the people of the Middle East,” he added.

The only reaction by the SAV was to comment: “Comrade Max exaggerates. He would have done better to discuss his opinion prior to publishing it alone.”



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