

German Left Party on course for war and joining a government

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Even before this weekend's Left Party conference begins in Bielefeld, Germany, one thing is certain: the combination of ex-Stalinists, former members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), washed-up trade unionists and pseudo-left tendencies like Marx 21 and Socialist Alternative (SAV) are transforming themselves into an open party of war. There is much that recalls the development of the Green Party in 1998, save that the Left Party has already unveiled its reactionary character before entering into government at the federal level.

In the week before the party conference, several leading representatives of the Left Party made statements which just a few years ago would have been considered as militarist or revanchist even in conservative circles.

The "high point" is the interview with Bodo Ramelow in the *Rheinischen Post*, titled "Pacifism is not for Germany." Ramelow, the first Left Party prime minister of a German state, puts forward such right-wing and pro-militarist positions that even the party's *Junge Welt* paper felt compelled to call him the "anti-pacifist of the day."

In the interview, Ramelow came out as an advocate of a possible Left Party-SPD-Green ("red-red-green") coalition government, which would conclusively end Germany's foreign policy restraint and the pacifism of the post-war period. He declared bluntly that while he has "respect for anyone who says 'I am a pacifist,' I don't see that as a plan of action for a nation like Germany."

Asked what he wants "to talk about with the SPD and the Greens," he outlined his idea of a new world order in which Germany increasingly sets the tone. This would entail "a reform of NATO" and "a new architecture of world peace." Ramelow said that "for many years," he has "questioned whether every continent shouldn't take responsibility for its own security. In a world peace council one would find seated the security organizations of all continents and not the anti-Hitler coalition serving as the perennial world security system."

Ramelow does not just make comments with revanchist undertones; the prime minister of Thuringia also explicitly pleads for a build-up of Germany's military. "For me, the German military is needed as a defense army. For me, the location of the military in Thuringia is important. And I find it out of order that the military has bad guns, bad ships, and bad helicopters."

Ramelow wants the Bundeswehr to be "a national defense army and not an interventionist army," but he leaves no doubt that "national defense" can also mean "intervention". In the interview, he supports not just the deployment of the military for the supposed rescue of refugees in the Mediterranean, but also attacks those in his party who are not (yet) ready to openly support foreign deployments.

He says he has "not at all understood" the "internal debate" about whether the military should support the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. Moreover, he is "proud that our specialist Jan Van Aken [the foreign policy spokesperson of the Left Party's fraction in the German parliament] identified the German origins of the Syrian chemical weapons." However, says Ramelow, one would also have to "participate to make sure the matter was handled without incident and be proud of the role of the Left there!" He added: "Thank you for eliminating the chemical weapons. Thank you also to the soldiers who have helped."

Ramelow now demands such staunch militarism of his entire party. It is a matter of "clarifying our relationship to the military. Unemotionally, calmly and objectively."

To underline that the Left Party, despite its occasional pacifist phrases, belongs in reality to a grand war coalition of all the bourgeois parties, Ramelow also stresses that he wants to speak not only with the SPD and the Greens, but "also with the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] and the FDP [Free Democratic Party]."

Gregory Gysi, the leader of the Left Party's

parliamentary fraction, gave another interview on war to *taz*, the organ of the Greens. His message is unmistakable at a glance. Under the article's headline, "Gysi on wartime deployments and fishing," there is a picture of German tanks with the caption: "In compromises made during participation in government, Gysi can also be counted on for a 'Yes' to a combat mission."

In the interview, the Left Party leader, who openly declared last summer that he wanted to serve as foreign minister in a red-red-green government, outlines his key foreign policy demands: the pursuit of economic interests in Russia and a confident assertiveness by German imperialism towards the United States.

Gysi makes clear that these aims can ultimately only be carried out militarily. When *taz* commented that the Left Party would have to "leave behind its strict no to combat missions for the military," Gysi cynically indicated that they had already done so: "It is true that our party spoke out firmly against combat missions. But one could talk about which ones are involved."

Apparently, the Left Party can hardly wait to join a government and support deployments of the *Bundeswehr*. In another interview in *Tagesspiegel*, Gysi made clear that the Left Party would immediately join a red-red-green government "if it came to the breakdown [of the current Grand Coalition government]." He added, "Obviously, the SPD could have the Chancellor's position tomorrow if it wanted it. We could also have new elections. But the SPD apparently doesn't have the guts for any of that."

Not so the Left Party! The main goal of the party conference will be to prepare for possible participation in the government at a federal level and join in the related war policies. The latest edition of *Die Zeit* carried a long article cautioning Gysi "not to look at the audience" during his speech to the conference, "but only at his conscience. Just like the time in the Dynamo Stadium when he made German citizens out of communists."

On February 4, 1990, Gysi pledged the Socialist Unity Party (SED) cadres to German reunification. The fact that *Die Zeit* is referencing this speech underscores the role played by the Left Party for the German ruling class. Twenty-five years after the Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism helped to organize the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, they are needed to strengthen the foreign policy offensive of German imperialism and to suppress popular opposition.

The paper describes how Gysi will again attempt "to change the Party of Democratic Socialism, now the Left Party, in a second tour de force so that it becomes capable

of governing before he reaches retirement age." As supposed opponents of this course, *Die Zeit* points to allegedly incurable "believers" in the party like Wolfgang Gehrcke, Christine Buchholz, or Sevim Dagdelen.

In reality, the bourgeoisie knows that they can count on these people when it comes to war, as in all other questions. They may use a few radical phrases at the party conference, but in the background they are already fulfilling their duty to German imperialism.

Buchholz has sat for years on the defense committee of the German parliament, has travelled with the defense minister to visit troops in Africa and given speeches on foreign policy to the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP).

Gehrcke is a notorious operator who is equally active for German imperialism on both sides of the Syrian war, as well as in Ukraine. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* called him "extremely flexible." Gehrcke senses "immediately where the majority is."

The opponents of Gysi are not to be found in the ranks of the Left Party. It is the German working class, which is opposed to war and militarism after the terrible experience of two world wars. Also in this respect, the Left Party sent a signal before its party conference: It supported the reception of the Egyptian dictator Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi by the German government and signalled that, as a governing party, it would also enforce, when necessary, al-Sisi's dictatorial methods to suppress resistance to war and austerity.



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