

German Left Party on course to join the government

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The Left Party leadership announced the nomination of Dietmar Bartsch and Sahra Wagenknecht as joint leaders of the party's parliamentary fraction on Monday. Current fraction leader Gregor Gysi announced on June 7 that he would not stand again as a candidate in October.

Given the growing instability of the current grand coalition government of the Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Left Party has begun positioning itself to participate in a new government coalition. It set out on this course at its party congress at the beginning of June.

Bartsch is a representative of the so-called reform wing of the party, which, ever since its founding, has lobbied for participation in government. Members of this wing had already spoken vehemently in favour of supporting the participation of the armed forces in foreign engagements.

Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), the minister-president and “reformer” of the state of Thuringia, said flat out that “pacifism is not for Germany” and that the “anti-Hitler-coalition” is no longer good for security in today's world.

Bartsch is one of the five representatives of the Left Party who in April last year voted for the first time in favour of an overseas operation by the armed forces. Back in June 2007, when the Left Party was founded, Bartsch had already declared: “We must be willing and able to rule.”

After he was nominated, he reiterated this point, stating in the *Ostseezeitung* that he wished someone in the SPD (Social Democratic Party) would “shake the fence around the post of chancellor”—referring to the last SPD chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, who said, “I want to get in”, while shaking the bars of the fence

around the chancellor's building back when he was a member of the party's student organization in Bonn.

Wagenknecht represents the so-called “left” wing of the party. She is married to former Left Party chairman Oskar Lafontaine and has criticized the positions of the “reform wing” in the past.

However, Wagenknecht and her fraction by no means reject participation in government on principle. Wagenknecht herself showed her readiness to participate in government at the party congress, “if one has partners who at least want to go in the same direction as oneself.”

The “left” wing has in the past often taken on the responsibility of covering for the right-wing course of the party with left-sounding phrases. Whenever it has come to a vote, however, it has supported the politics of militarism and social cuts. This was the case in the expedited proceedings for a bank rescue passage for which the Left Party voted unanimously in parliament. The party has also organized deep cuts to social programs on the state level.

It is this double role that makes Wagenknecht indispensable for the right wing of the party. According to reports in the *Berliner Zeitung*, Bartsch supporters made a huge effort to convince Wagenknecht to head the fraction jointly with him.

The head of the right-wing Forum for Democratic Socialism, Stefan Liebich, had already said that it “would be helpful if the wing that is critical of the government would include Mrs. Wagenknecht in the leadership, and if she would also take over responsibility for discussions with the SPD and the Greens.” Liebich added, “Mrs. Wagenknecht would then play another role.”

Numerous “reformers” also welcome Wagenknecht's candidacy. “I hope that the fraction takes a unified

stance and follows the advice of the party leadership by a broad majority,” said Ramelow to the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*. He added, with regard to the parliamentary election, that “the Left Party has to be prepared for all contingencies in 2017.”

Wagenknecht hesitated before publicly accepting this role. In March of this year she was still saying that she was no longer available for the post of fraction head. She brought up the agreement of her fraction to a government motion that continued the Greek aid credits and that “linked itself positively with the catastrophic policy of constraints and demands for cuts.”

In order to get the Left fraction to agree to the lengthening of the aid credits, it backed Schäuble’s austerity demands in Greece that are now being implemented with full force. The Left Party has in no way distanced itself from these measures, but has instead made ever more determined moves to enter the government.

The party congress was a milestone in this development. The main proposal of the congress abandoned all the “red guiding principles” the party had previously stipulated as its conditions for a ruling coalition. Gregor Gysi used his farewell address as fraction head to make foreign interventions by the German army the explicit task of the fraction. The party must rule even “if we don’t get every soldier in the armed forces brought back from abroad,” Gysi said.

With such formulas, Gysi offered up the Left Party as a reliable partner in government and promoted himself for the post of foreign minister at the same time. This behaviour is a reaction to the growing instability of the coalition government.

The strict austerity course in Greece has led to an unprecedented social catastrophe and, at the same time, brought into question the future of the European Union and the common currency. The aggressive course against Russia and the broadly announced “end of German military restraint” could lead quickly to a conflagration and encounter massive popular opposition.

Under these conditions, a growing chorus of voices in ruling circles are calling for the integration of the Left Party into government to carry out these policies in the face of growing opposition. For this reason, Sahra Wagenknecht has decided to take her part in the spectacle and to work in tandem with Dietmar Bartsch

in preparing the fraction for this task.



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