

German Left Party announces federal election candidates

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The Left Party will take part in the federal elections in 2017 with its two parliamentary faction leaders, Sahra Wagenknecht and Dietmar Bartsch, as leading candidates. According to a press statement on Sunday coauthored by Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, this decision was reached by the party leadership with only one dissenting vote.

Previously, there had been tensions between the different factions in the party over the question of candidacy. Kipping and Riexinger had repeatedly announced their intentions to run as candidates, but had to convince the two faction leaders. Nevertheless, they emphasized that there will be a four-person “top team” including Wagenknecht and Bartsch. Federal Chairman Mathias Höhn will be the election campaign manager.

Under conditions of a sharp political and economic crisis in Europe and growing instability in Germany as well, the party is moving increasingly to the right. With the pair of candidates Wagenknecht and Bartsch, the Left Party is preparing for possible participation in government in a coalition and is at the same time cultivating an oppositional image with a mixture of social demagogy and economic nationalism.

Wagenknecht, the figurehead of the party and a member of the Stalinist Communist Platform for many years, has long held political and theoretical positions similar to those of the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Last year, she repeatedly expressed her hostility to refugees, for which she was applauded by AfD vice chair Alexander Gauland.

Her recent book *Riches without Greed* is a plea for a policy of national isolation and a strong state. Wagenknecht argues that the market economy needs a strong national state that isolates itself from the outside and is linguistically and ethnically homogenous. Wagenknecht now views the election victory of Donald Trump in the US as an opportunity to implement her right-

wing program.

In her speech at the beginning of the last general debate in parliament at the end of November, she argued for the adoption of parts of Trump’s economic program instead of “business as usual.” She praised his nationalistic economic policy, and, addressing the grand coalition government, said: “Evidently even Donald Trump is more capable when it comes to economic policy than you. At least the man has understood that state-led industrial policy is better than low-wage service sector jobs and that budget-cutting does not help crisis-ridden and collapsing infrastructure, but only a well-funded programme of public investments.”

In a previous article, we wrote that these remarks recall the argument that Hitler’s policy was not so bad in the beginning, because he built highways and financed other public investments. In reality, Hitler’s job-creation schemes from the start served the needs of war preparation and were inseparably bound up with military buildup and the destruction of the workers movement.

The programme of investment that Trump promised during the election campaign is reactionary through and through. It would not benefit workers, but only the military, Wall Street bankers and the multimillionaires whom the president-elect has drawn into his administration. With her support for Trump’s “programme of public investment,” Wagenknecht only underscores that the priority for the Left Party is not the social problems of workers, but rather the arming of the state and the defense of capitalist and imperialist interests.

The second figure of this leading pair, Dietmar Bartsch, advocates this course with special vehemence. He is a member of the Democratic Socialism Forum, a right-wing current of the party that openly advocates foreign military deployments and a more aggressive German foreign policy. One of its most prominent spokespersons, Stefan Liebich, is one of the 50 politicians, journalists,

academics, military and business representatives who worked out the foundation for the return of German militarism in the SWP strategy paper “New power, new responsibility.” Now he advocates the building of a European army.

Bartsch himself is one of five Left Party parliamentary representatives who voted in April 2015 for a military deployment of the German army. He has long advocated a ruling coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens, the parties of Hartz IV and war. After an exploratory meeting in parliament at the end of October that received a lot of media attention, Bartsch rejoiced at the growing interest of all three parties in building a coalition. “I perceive a decisive change in the SPD, in the Greens and also in us, which can make possible a three-party coalition: the will for it.”

Bartsch’s “will” for a coalition was never lacking in the past. Even prior to the last federal election in 2013, he had supported the red-green federal government under Schröder and Fischer. In a Cologne Economic Institute (IW) “debate” sponsored by large corporations, he said that the Schröder government had “done a lot wrong, but not everything.” The Agenda 2010 brought about “not only negative things.” To claim otherwise would be “absurd,” he insisted.

It is not an accident that Bartsch both supported coalition policies that led to mass poverty and now demands a massive arming of the state security forces. In the debate over the budget that was recently passed, he accused the federal government of being “responsible for a mistaken personnel and austerity policy.” It made the police “into a victim of austerity” in the past few years, and, since 1998, “17,000 jobs were cut in the police.” He insisted that a “state that is more capable of action” was necessary. This includes “well educated and equipped personnel in public service, especially in the police,” he maintained.



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