

Germany's Left Party: A party of militarism and war

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The Left Party is attempting to present itself in Germany's federal election campaign as a party of peace and an opponent of militarism and war. Its campaign expresses "the desire for social justice and peace," it states in large type on its election website. One of its election posters declares, "Peace. Disarmament! Stop weapons exports!" The party's candidates regularly portray themselves in Sunday speeches as opponents of foreign military interventions and German militarism.

A recent interview given by lead candidate Dietmar Bartsch to the German Armed Forces Association (DBwV) makes clear how such claims should be viewed. The very fact that Bartsch gave an interview to the DBwV shows that the Left Party, like all of Germany's capitalist parties, is fully integrated into German militarism and is playing a central role in Germany's return to an aggressive foreign policy.

The DBwV considers itself to be "the independent unit and leadership organisation to represent to parliament, government, society, and the public in Germany and throughout Europe the general, spiritual, social and professional interests of all active and former soldiers in the German armed forces, the army's civilian employees, the reserves and military volunteers, as well as their relatives and surviving family members."

The association bases itself on an explicitly militarist identity and tradition, and was founded in 1956 by officers who had served in the Wehrmacht, the German armed forces under the Nazis. The first director of operations was Lieutenant Colonel Karl-Theodor Molinari, who was involved in horrific war crimes during the Second World War. Shortly after allied forces landed in Normandy, soldiers under Molinari's command shot 100 imprisoned French Resistance

fighters in a forest near Les Hauts Buttés in the Ardennes.

Although Molinari was condemned to death by a French military tribunal in Metz on 13 April 1951, the DBwV continues to honour him as its founding father to this day. It maintains the Karl-Theodor Molinari Foundation, which, like the DBwV as a whole, is currently led by Lieutenant Colonel André Wüstner. Wüstner is one of the key figures in the militarist shift in German foreign policy and constantly appeals for a major military build-up. He has called for the defence budget to be increased to "at least €45 billion" immediately after the election and for raising the number of soldiers to 198,000. The troops are currently "only conditionally ready for defence and deployment," he claimed.

Bartsch described the Left Party in the interview with the DBwV as a party which would firmly represent the soldiers' interests. Asked "why should soldiers vote for the Left Party?" Bartsch answered, "Because we have the best programme and the best personnel." The Left Party has "always backed the soldiers who came back and are still coming back damaged from foreign deployments. We advocated for their legitimate demands and will continue to do so, just as in general we stand up for the social needs of soldiers."

Bartsch did not put forward a principled opposition to the army's combat interventions at any point. On the contrary, when asked "do you see positive contributions from the soldiers, especially in foreign interventions?" he answered, "Soldiers certainly accomplish individual positive achievements—the saving of those shipwrecked in the Mediterranean is one example. We don't question that they want to do 'good'."

But the question is "not a moral one, but political: Is

it right to burden soldiers with rescue operations for which they are not trained? Or to put them in the hopeless position in Afghanistan of trying to mediate on the local level, even though they are seen as part of the NATO war party?”

Bartsch’s comments speak volumes about the Left Party’s pro-militarist character. Like Germany’s governing parties and the Greens, he portrays the armed forces as a “humanitarian peace army,” which “saves” and “mediates.” Yet the Left Party knows full well that the Bundeswehr, like its predecessors—the Heer under the Kaiser and the Wehrmacht under Hitler—is an imperialist interventionist army, which attacks countries in pursuit of definite geopolitical and economic interests, and commits horrific war crimes.

Bartsch’s main fear in Afghanistan is an intensification of the resistance against foreign occupation. For example, he claims that the latest terrorist attack on the German embassy in Kabul shows that “German soldiers on foreign deployments are ultimately not seen as saviours, mediators, or well-diggers, but often as something different.” On the “home front,” Bartsch is concerned by growing popular opposition to war. If the “Franco A. affair”—i.e., the uncovering of neo-Nazi terrorist networks in the armed forces—is “not completely cleared up” and “personnel consequences” do not follow, this will damage “society’s trust in the army’s democratic composition.”

Bartsch left no doubt that as part of a red-red-green coalition led by Social Democrat Chancellor candidate Martin Schulz, the Left Party was ready to secure the “trust” in the army and assume military responsibility. “If after the election a coalition without the CDU/CSU is mathematically possible, we will be available for talks,” Bartsch pledged. “The better the result achieved by the Left Party in the election, the stronger our mandate for a different foreign and defence policy.”

The programme concealed behind this “different” or red-red-green foreign and defence policy can be seen in the interview Schulz gave to the DBwV. “We need an army in which the best minds take decisions and troops prepared for crises are ready to deploy. For this, we have to better equip the army with personnel and material,” stated the Social Democrat candidate, with whom Bartsch is so keen to form a coalition. It is clear that “the army will need more money, in the billions,”

Schulz added.

All of the Left Party’s phrases about “peace” and “disarmament” cannot conceal the fact that the party supports this massive rearmament programme. “The focus has to be putting the army in a position where it can fulfill its obligations according to the Basic Law, national defence,” Bartsch cautioned. But the securing of “national defence” is the code word for the major military build-up planned for the coming years!

According to the Defence Ministry’s “Preliminary conceptual guidelines for the Bundeswehr’s future capability profile,” the main focus should be “a radical turn away from the Bundeswehr’s past focus on foreign interventions,” one article on the DBwV website states.

The tasks should be “directed mainly to national and alliance defence.” Concretely, this means “that the Bundeswehr, in the areas of the army, air force and navy must expand substantially to be equal to the new demands. According to the paper, these should be comprehensive defence capabilities on land, at sea, in the air, in space and cyberspace.”



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