

Germany's Left Party reacts to electoral debacle in the East with sharp shift to the right

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The Left Party has reacted to its electoral debacle in the state elections in Saxony and Brandenburg in the former East Germany with a sharp shift to the right. This was underlined by the statements of leading party representatives in recent days.

Dietmar Bartsch, group leader of the Left Party in the Bundestag (federal parliament), announced in an interview on broadcaster Deutschlandfunk on Monday, that his party would be posing “fundamental questions about our strategic focus after such a disaster.” He then made clear what he meant: the continuation of the anti-working-class policies his party has pursued wherever it is in power and the assumption of positions of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), especially in refugee policy.

Asked if the Left Party wanted to be “a protest party and not a ruling party,” Bartsch asserted: “We are a ruling party. And you know, there’s an election in Thuringia in a few weeks and that’s where we’ll provide the state premier.” The question of “governing yes or no does ‘not arise’.” It was “very clear: In all the federal states, the Left Party says very clearly, we are ready to take government responsibility, if there really is to be change.” A “social change is urgently” needed.

Just who does Bartsch think is stupid enough to believe this? Wherever the party is in government at state level with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens—parties of war and austerity—it enforces social attacks, increases the powers of the police and intelligence apparatus and carries out brutal deportations. The party, whose predecessors 30 years ago played the central role in the reintroduction of capitalist property relations in East Germany, thus

bears the main responsibility for the rise of the AfD. In particular, the fact that it has caused a social catastrophe in the name of “left-wing” politics has produced political frustration that is exploited by the far right.

After its virtual collapse in the East—in Saxony, its vote fell from just under 19 percent in 2014 to 10.4 percent and in Brandenburg from 18.6 to 10.7 percent—the Left Party is now openly taking over the anti-refugee slogans of the AfD. “That we are suggesting that as many people as possible should come to Germany, that’s not a left-wing position,” raged Bartsch. “A left-wing position” was “that every child can develop their abilities and skills where it is born.”

This viewpoint is thoroughly nationalistic and right-wing. A “left-wing position” would be that every human being, wherever he lives or must flee due to war and misery, can develop his “abilities and skills” to a very high level. This requires the unification of the working class across all national, ethnic, religious and other barriers on the basis of an anti-capitalist, socialist programme.

That is exactly what Bartsch wants to prevent. Significantly, he called for “a left-wing immigration law”, which he knows is exactly on the AfD line. There are, of course, “those who say that every immigration law is a limitation and thus no longer left-wing”. And there are “others”—among whom he obviously counts himself—“who say, of course, we need order and legal certainty in the circumstances.”

The entire interview makes it clear that Bartsch has no fundamental argument with the policies of the AfD. His only criticism of the far-right party was formulated

from the standpoint of German and European finance capital and corporations. The AfD's protest against "those in Berlin, those in Brussels" had "no future, of course," he said. In addition, "people quickly notice" that this choice "is not necessarily effective" for Germany as an economic location. "Because there are many companies that say, with such high AfD results, I will not go there."

Other Left Party leaders sounded as if they were already members of the AfD, or at least of the arch-conservative wing within the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). "It's not just about our attitude to immigration," said the parliamentary group deputy chair Sahra Wagenknecht in an interview published on Tuesday with the newspapers of the RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland. If you want to reach "people beyond the hip metropolitan milieu," then "we have to take their view of things seriously, rather than lecturing them on how to talk and think."

And further, "For most people, homeland (Heimat) is something very important, they value social bonds, family and social cohesion." "Security" was about "societal security, but also about the protection against crime". The "growing distance to this world of life" can be seen in the dealings of their party "with AfD voters, who are called racists all over, although many of them have previously voted for the left. If we want more popularity again, we have to change."

Wagenknecht's barely concealed call to turn the Left Party into a kind of second AfD in order to gain more votes is no joke. It results directly from the nationalist and pro-capitalist orientation of the formerly Stalinist party. Wagenknecht's "Stand Up" ("Aufstehen") collective movement, which was launched a year ago, was so nationalistic and right-wing that AfD chairman Alexander Gauland and right-wing extremist publications such as *Junge Freiheit* praised it to the skies.

The initiative had "the chance to overcome partisan trenches and could thus finally provide an impetus in the factual discourse from the left side," said Gauland in September 2018. In the same breath, he praised Sahra Wagenknecht as a politician who was able "to put aside left-wing blinkers and to identify the actual concerns and needs of broad sections of the people, beyond pathos and ideology."

Despite Wagenknecht's announced withdrawal from

the group's chairmanship, the entire party is now charting her course and turning into an openly right-wing party. The necessary conclusions must be drawn from this development. The fight against social inequality and the return of militarism and fascism requires a ruthless political settlement with the Left Party and its pseudo-left hangers-on, and the establishment of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the Fourth International as the new socialist mass party of the working class.



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