

Germany's Left Party hails new SPD leadership and grand coalition

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The election of Norbert Walter-Borjans and Saskia Esken as leaders of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) has prompted a celebratory response from the leadership of the Left Party.

Katja Kipping, the co-leader of the Left Party, issued an official statement declaring, "I congratulate Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans for winning the contest. You confront the task of putting the good old lady that is Social Democracy back on her feet." The country needs a "social and economic change of course" and that can only be achieved by "majorities to the left of the CDU/CSU."

Other Left Party leaders spoke along similar lines. Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch wrote on Twitter, "Congratulations to Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans! All the best to you and the SPD in this new era! Make it count, comrades!"

The former parliamentary group leader and prominent spokesperson for the party, Sahra Wagenknecht, commented in an interview with the right-wing daily *Die Welt*, "I was happy, because the result shows that there is still life in the SPD and that its members are not prepared to look on as it alienates large sections of its voting base due to the lack of a profile and the wrong policies."

She noted her hopes "that under the new leaders, the SPD will return to classic social democratic policies. That means adopting policies for the middle class threatened with social decline and the poor, for more social cohesion and less inequality. Then, the SPD would have the chance to win back voters who have turned their backs on the entire left-wing camp over recent years."

The Left Party's effort to present Esken and Walter-Borjans as fighters for a "left-wing camp" that will introduce a new era of social democracy are patently

absurd. Today, the SPD is a right-wing bourgeois party which is associated, more than almost any other, with social cutbacks and military rearmament, and is therefore deeply despised among workers. The SPD's party congress made clear that this will not change under the new leadership.

Although Walter-Borjans and Esken declared in their campaign speeches that they would renegotiate the grand coalition agreement with the Christian Democrats and Christian Social Union, and that they would even end the coalition if the CDU/CSU was not prepared to make concessions, they declared their full support for the grand coalition government and its anti-working-class, militarist policies at the party congress. Late last month, the SPD and CDU/CSU adopted the budget presented by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (SPD), which includes historic increases in military spending and deep social spending cuts.

In contrast to the official propaganda, Esken and Walter-Borjans have always endorsed this course.

As finance minister in the SPD-led state government in North Rhine-Westphalia between 2010 and 2017, Walter-Borjans oversaw a major assault on the working class. To maintain compliance with the debt brake, he enforced wide-ranging austerity measures, including a reform of the salary scale for public sector workers considered unconstitutional.

The Verdi trade union member Esken, who enjoyed a lengthy career in local politics in Baden-Württemberg, has shown herself to be a hardline militarist since entering the federal parliament in 2013 by voting for every foreign military deployment of the German army.

The open embrace of the new SPD leadership by the Left Party speaks volumes about its true character as a bourgeois party, which does not represent the interests of the workers, but of privileged sections of the middle

class and the capitalist state. Kipping, Bartsch, Wagenknecht et al. support Esken and Walter-Borjans not despite, but rather because of their right-wing policies. Wherever the Left Party holds office at the state level, it deports immigrants just as ruthlessly as the other parties, imposes spending cuts and privatizations, and strengthens the police and security apparatus. On questions of foreign policy, the Left Party has long been one of the most aggressive proponents of German imperialism.

Since the US House of Representatives voted to impose sanctions last Wednesday on companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 oil pipeline, the Left Party has been incessantly demanding a harder line towards Washington. “For us, it is an unprecedented and illegal intervention by the US into the policy of Europe and Germany,” Bartsch said in a press release on Thursday. From his point of view, the German government “should not ‘bow’ to these demands and must resist this ‘blackmail.’”

What this means was made clear by Oskar Lafontaine, Wagenknecht’s husband and the founder of the Left Party, in a comment on his Facebook page: “Germany must have a sovereign and independent foreign policy, which means protecting German interests, imposing limits on the United States, and insisting to Russia that mutual trust and respect for the law are preconditions for the establishment of a European security architecture that includes Russia and for close economic cooperation.”

In another post, Lafontaine declared his solidarity with French President Emmanuel Macron. His demand, borrowed from Charles de Gaulle, for a foreign and security policy independent of the United States is “correct,” he said. Ultimately, NATO is certainly “no longer a defence alliance, but rather an instrument for the US to enforce its imperial policies with the encirclement of Russia and China, and the military conquest of raw materials and markets,” wrote Lafontaine.

There can be no doubt that the United States is preparing for war with Russia and China to secure markets and raw materials, but European and German imperialism are not one jot better. Macron made clear already last year the historical tradition associated with his call for an independent European foreign policy. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the end of

World War I, he described it as legitimate to honour the World War I general, fascist dictator and Nazi collaborator Philippe Petain.

It is now clear that the construction of a European Union of militarism and war will be directed against mounting internal social and political opposition. Significantly, Lafontaine praised Macron’s foreign policy as the latter mobilised heavily armed police against striking workers and youth in France. As a party that emerged out of the Stalinist state party in the former East Germany and disgruntled SPD and trade union officials, the Left Party fears every independent movement of the working class like the plague. The growth of the international class struggle and the fear of strikes and protests are driving the Left Party ever more openly into the arms of the SPD, and thus the grand coalition and German militarism.



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