

Responding to mass protests against police brutality, Germany's Left Party appeals for a police state

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Germany's Left Party has responded with open hostility to the mass protests against police violence that have spread around the world following the brutal police murder of George Floyd. In Berlin, where the Left Party is part of a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens in the state government, the police ruthlessly cracked down on mass protests on June 6, part of demonstrations that attracted hundreds of thousands of people across Germany.

Ever since, leading members of the party have justified the police crackdown and advocated the further militarisation of the police. The clearest statement was made by Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch to the Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND).

"It is wrong to make the blanket accusation that all police officers are racist and thus discredit the entire profession," he said. "Drawing a parallel to the situation in the United States is not justified. The police do not deserve less, but rather more social recognition and personnel, especially on the streets."

At a press conference on June 8, Left Party federal head of party affairs, Jörg Schindler, spoke along similar lines. He also stated that it was impermissible to place the police under "generalised suspicion."

He defended the ruthless clampdown on protesters by the police, commenting, "I think it is important that as far as these demonstrations that took place, the police to a large extent made them possible. Because anything else would have led to greater dissatisfaction among the population and would also have caused further accusations against the police." The actions taken were "appropriate and right," he added.

In other words: the only reason the SPD/Left Party/Green coalition-controlled police did not crack down more violently against peaceful protesters was fear of a social explosion. The approach recalls the "double strategy" being pursued by the ruling class in the United States.

While President Trump seeks to crush the protests and has

even threatened a military coup, sections of the Democratic Party fear that this could provoke a revolutionary upsurge of the working class. They therefore demand "reforms," which are also aimed at strengthening the police and preparing for them to be deployed against the population in a worst-case scenario.

At the press conference, Schindler claimed that the police were a "reflection of society." He said, "In the police, just as among the population, there are people who act on the basis of racist convictions, unconscious racists, and explicit anti-racists." He then suggested a series of cosmetic reforms: an end to racial profiling, a registry for complaints against the police, and an identification number for every police officer.

The goal, according to Schindler, is to "strengthen trust in the constitutional state." The police, "an institution equipped with several special powers so that it can protect the population," must "rise above suspicion in all of their actions," he continued.

In reality, the police are not a "reflection of society," but rather "special bodies of armed men" (Friedrich Engels) tasked with protecting the property, wealth and power of the capitalists. The growth of racist and right-wing extremist tendencies in their ranks is not a subjective problem, but rather arises objectively out of the police's social function. The more the social tensions and the class struggle deepen, the more the capitalist state apparatus and all its defenders, including the Left Party, shift to the right.

The cynicism of Schindler's claim that his party intends to "strengthen the institutions so they act decisively and clearly against racism" is difficult to exaggerate. In reality, the Left Party is fully responsible for the policies the protesters are opposing—the growth of police brutality, the strengthening of racism and right-wing extremism, the vast gulf between rich and poor, the misery and death confronting refugees, and the return of German militarism. To suppress mounting popular opposition, the Left Party is also building up the police and aligning itself with the far right.

As a party of government in the states of Berlin and Brandenburg, the Left Party has voted in favour of new police laws that grant the police sweeping powers of surveillance and repression. In addition, together with the SPD and Greens in Berlin, the Left Party permitted the state secret service to spy on the climate change movement Ende Gelände (End of the Road), and thus indirectly on its own youth movement.

In Thuringia, where the Left Party heads the state government, Minister President Bodo Ramelow used his vote in the state parliament to secure a prestigious parliamentary vice presidential position for the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD).

In the course of the coronavirus pandemic, the Left Party has shifted even further to the right. In March, the party voted in the federal parliament in favour of the coronavirus bailout package. Subsequently, with Ramelow in Thuringia, the Left Party spearheaded the easing of coronavirus restrictions so that big business could resume extracting profits from the exploitation of the labor of workers in order to back up the hundreds of billions of euros in bailout money that flowed overwhelmingly to large corporations, big banks and the super-rich.

To enforce the policy of placing private profit ahead of human life, which is provoking mass popular opposition, leading Left Party figures, including the deputy leader of the parliamentary group in the federal parliament, Andre Hunko, participated in far-right protests against anti-coronavirus social distancing and confinement policies.

Individuals like Bartsch and Schindler instinctively sense how explosive the current situation is. The murder of George Floyd has triggered an international mass movement because workers and young people around the world are coming to the same realisation. The overwhelmingly young demonstrators are not only angered by a police murder in the United States, but by a social order that has no future to offer them. In Germany, many of the demonstrations were attended by 10 or 20 times more people than the organisers had expected.

The Left Party is alarmed by the size of the protests. The party fears that it could coincide with a radicalisation of the working class directed against the capitalist profit system. The hostility with which the Left Party has responded to the mass protests against police brutality is rooted in its fear of the intensification of the class struggle. Despite its name, the Left Party is a right-wing bourgeois party committed to the defence of private property and the bourgeois state by all means necessary.

The support for a police state is contained within the Left party's DNA. The party's roots are in the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Stalinist state party in the former East

Germany, which ruthlessly suppressed working class opposition to the ruling bureaucracy with a vast apparatus of police and spies. During the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, the Left Party assumed the task, in the words of the last SED Minister President Hans Modrow, of "ensuring the governability of the country to prevent chaos." It followed the "path of (German) unification...with decisiveness," which Modrow considered "unavoidably necessary."

Once the catastrophic social and economic impact of capitalist restoration was revealed—14,000 businesses dismantled, 71 percent of the population laid off—the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), as the SED had rebranded itself, assumed its old role as a party of state order, only this time in defence of the capitalist state.

Thirteen years ago, the PDS fused with sections of the SPD, the trade union bureaucracy and a range of pseudo-left tendencies to form the Left Party on an explicitly pro-capitalist basis. During the European elections in 2014, the Left Party campaigned with placards bearing the slogan, "Revolution: No thanks!"

Today, the party's pro-police state character is so obvious that some members of the party executive have felt compelled to distance themselves from Bartsch's open partisanship for the police. These statements are just as dishonest as Trump's recent promise to "reform" the police in the United States. Growing numbers of workers and young people are coming to the realisation that in their struggles they confront all of the established parties as representatives of the ruling elite. The central issue is to draw the key political lessons from this fact.

The struggle against racism and police brutality requires a settling of accounts with the Left Party and all pseudo-left tendencies that defend the capitalist state and the entire apparatus of state repression. It must be fused with the international struggle of the working class against inequality, exploitation, war, authoritarianism and the capitalist profit system. This requires a socialist programme based on the fight for the transfer of political power to the working class and the restructuring of economic and social life.



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