

Germany's Left Party sets its course for government and NATO

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The Left Party is participating in the September 26 federal elections with its parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch and party leader Janine Wissler as lead candidates. This was announced by party co-chair Susanne Hennig-Wellsow at a press conference on Monday. The party's executive committee had "expressed confidence in two strong candidates with almost 87 percent" support, she explained. The two embodied "our claim to break out, to change this country. A progressive majority to the left of the Union [Christian Democrats, CDU/CSU] is possible."

The party's right-wing, pro-capitalist orientation could not be formulated more clearly. The Left Party is avowedly seeking a government alliance with the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens—parties of war and austerity—at the federal level. Such a coalition would not pursue "progressive" or even "left" policies but continue to advance the policies of social attacks, stepping up the repressive powers of the state at home and abroad and the murderous pursuit of "herd immunity."

A glance at the leading candidates of the SPD and the Greens is enough to prove this. The SPD's candidate for chancellor, Olaf Scholz, (currently federal finance minister), is the architect of the billions handed over to the big corporations and banks and the massive military spending of recent years. Only a few weeks ago, under his aegis, the defence budget was increased by another 5 percent, to now over €50 billion. At the SPD party conference last weekend, he defended the political course of the grand coalition with the Christian Democrats, whose "profits before lives" policy has already led to more than 85,000 deaths in Germany from COVID-19.

The Greens' candidate for chancellor, Annalena Baerbock, is in no way inferior to Scholz. She is also an outspoken militarist who calls for more aggressive action against Russia and China in nearly every interview and beats the drum for strengthening NATO, building a European Army and higher defence spending. "We have to be honest about that. Yes, in some areas you must invest more to make guns shoot," she told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The phrases about social solidarity Bartsch and Wissler spouted at the press conference cannot hide the fact that the Left Party is pursuing a thoroughly reactionary and anti-working-class policy. Wherever it governs at state level

together with the SPD and the Greens, it cuts social spending, pushes through privatisations, arms the state apparatus and brutally deports refugees and migrants.

Against this background, Bartsch's claim that the Left Party was "the advocate" of "nurses, educators and teachers, the parcel carriers, the supermarket workers" and the "millions who have to slave away on low wages" can only be described as a cynical provocation. To give a current example: In Bremen, amid the pandemic, the SPD-Left Party-Green state government is planning to cut more than 400 full-time jobs at the Gesundheit Nord hospital group. The health senator (state minister) Claudia Bernhard who is organising the cutbacks is a member of the Left Party.

The right-wing, pro-capitalist character of the Left Party has become increasingly overt since the coronavirus pandemic began. In March 2020, it voted in the Bundestag (federal parliament) for the "Coronavirus emergency packages" launched by Scholz and the grand coalition, which tossed hundreds of billions down the throats of the big corporations and banks. Since then, it has pursued a ruthless policy of opening up the economy wherever it is in government, to recover these gigantic sums from the working class.

Leading Left Party politicians, such as the Thuringia state Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow, have explicitly backed the murderous strategy of "herd immunity." Others, above all, former federal parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht, are stirring up nationalism in the style of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and agitating against immigrants and refugees.

This course is supported by the lead candidates for the general election. At the press conference, Bartsch praised Wagenknecht's book *Die Selbstgerechten* (*The Self-Righteous*), which was celebrated by the AfD, saying: "Ms. Wagenknecht has certainly written a book that is exciting in many ways." He said she would "play an important role in this election campaign" as the lead candidate in North Rhine-Westphalia. She addressed "strategic issues that are worth talking about," and he was happy "if she engages in this election campaign with enthusiasm."

Bartsch, like no other, stands for the reactionary orientation of the Left Party. He was a member of its precursor

organisation, the SED/PDS, when the Stalinists reestablished capitalism in East Germany 30 years ago. Subsequently, as the party's federal treasurer (1991–97) and executive director (1997–2002), he helped launch the first government alliance with the SPD in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. This led to massive social attacks and the privatisation of state-owned and municipal institutions. It served as a model for all further government participation by the Left Party.

In his role as parliamentary party leader in the Bundestag, Bartsch has played a key role in the return of German militarism in recent years. In April 2014, he was one of the five Left Party members of parliament who voted in favour of sending a German frigate to the Mediterranean to destroy alleged Syrian chemical weapons. During the last Bundestag elections in 2017, in an interview with the German Armed Forces Association (DBwV), he presented the Left Party as consistently representing the interests of soldiers.

Now, Bartsch is dropping all pretence in the election campaign and signalling his party's support for the ruling class on the central issues of foreign and war policy. In his first TV appearance as a lead candidate on the Tagesthemen news broadcast on Monday evening, he said that possible coalition negotiations with the SPD and the Greens would "not fail" on the question of NATO.

Asked by presenter Ingo Zamperoni whether "NATO could persist, with the Left Party in government," Bartsch replied: "Everyone in the world knows that the Left Party will not wait until NATO is dissolved before it sits down at the table. That's absurd to accuse us of that."

In her first extensive interview as a leading candidate with Deutschlandfunk radio on Tuesday morning, Wissler also immediately made clear that the alleged "red lines" in the party and election programme were not worth the paper they are written on. Asked if she was "really quite clear" that "for us, there is only a coalition without NATO," Wissler replied: "I'm certainly not saying that for us there is only a coalition if and when [Germany quits NATO], but the Left Party is going into the election campaign with our positions." Her party did not want "Germany out of NATO." It wanted to "dissolve" NATO and replace it "with a collective security alliance."

That is unmistakable. For Wissler, too, an SPD-Left Party-Green federal government would not fail on the question of NATO. At the same time, a new "security alliance" would not be a peace project, but the framework within which German imperialism would pursue its geostrategic and economic interests more independently. Such plans have long been discussed in foreign policy circles. The demand was "nothing that the Left Party invented," Wissler stressed. "These debates" had also taken place "precisely at the beginning of the 1990s," whether it "was necessary to have a new security alliance."

It is no coincidence that alongside the reformed Stalinist Bartsch, Wissler plays the leading role in bringing the Left Party onto a course for government and war in the election

campaign. She comes from the pseudo-left grouping Marx21, which, contrary to occasional claims in the bourgeois media, does not stand in the tradition of Trotskyism, but in the anti-Trotskyist tradition of "state capitalism" and the International Socialist Tendency (IST) founded by Tony Cliff.

Cliff had already broken with the Fourth International shortly after the end of the Second World War and described the Soviet Union as "state capitalist" despite the socialised property relations created by the October Revolution. Like other varieties of "state capitalism," Cliff's position concealed a "left" form of anti-communism and an accommodation to imperialism. At least since the reintroduction of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the state capitalists, and wealthy middle-class layers whose interests they articulate, have been openly in the camp of imperialism.

This is particularly visible in Germany. Christine Buchholz, one of the best-known representatives of Marx21, has sat on the defence committee of the Bundestag for more than a decade and is thus directly integrated into German war policy. Together with the Defence Minister, she visits German troops in the theatres of operations in Africa. The imperialist offensives in the Middle East and against Russia were and are also supported by Marx21.

Among workers and young people, the right-wing policies of the Left Party are hated. In recent election polls, it currently stands at only 6 percent, down from 9.2 per cent in 2017.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is fighting to arm the growing anger and opposition to all Bundestag parties with an international socialist programme. Only through the independent intervention of the working class can social and democratic rights be defended, the pandemic brought under control and the return of militarism, fascism and war halted.



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