

Germany's Left Party candidate for chancellor supports NATO and European army

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A world without an army was “a wonderful utopia,” Dietmar Bartsch, the lead candidate for Germany's Left Party told an ARD television interviewer recently. A utopia, however, he also made clear, that for him and his party existed only as fiction. Bartsch made unmistakably clear that despite verbal declarations about peace, the Left Party supports foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), the creation of a European army and NATO.

Asked by moderator-journalist Matthias Deiss about his party's election platform calling for the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr “from all foreign missions,” Bartsch replied, “You know, I've never heard anyone in the Left Party say, for example, that the Blue Helmets [NATO troops] should be withdrawn from Cyprus.” Asked about the Bundeswehr's most dangerous current mission, in Mali, the Left leader candidate replied, “I don't want Mali to end up just like Afghanistan, a headlong rush out.”

Bartsch's effort to distinguish between combat missions (which should be rejected) and blue helmet or peacekeeping missions (which should be supported) is already familiar from the experience with the Green Party. When the eco-party still professed pacifism, it endlessly debated the question, as to which helmet colour military missions abroad were permissible—only under the blue ones of the UN or also under the green ones of the Bundeswehr and NATO?

No sooner had the Greens agreed to the Bundeswehr's first combat mission in Yugoslavia in 1998, than this quibble vanished into thin air. In the meantime, the Greens have become among the most vehement supporters of German militarism. The character of a war is not determined by the colour of soldiers' helmets, but by the imperialist interests of the belligerent powers. A “peacekeeping operation,” for example, seamlessly turns

into a combat operation as soon as the people who are to be “pacified” resist the invading troops!

Bartsch took pains not to flaunt his militarism too blatantly. It was good, he remarked, that in the Bundestag (parliament) there was a party, the Left Party, that gave expression to the sentiment, widespread within the German population, “that we should not support Bundeswehr missions abroad, especially combat missions, for many reasons.”

With that, he said more than he would have liked. The Left Party is pursuing the goal of diverting general opposition to militarism and war into harmless parliamentary channels, while in practice supporting military rearmament.

Throughout the interview, Bartsch left no doubt about his determination to form a governing coalition with the parties of war, the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens, who have supported a massive increase in arms spending and numerous war missions in recent years. “We urgently need a change of policy,” he stressed. He added that the Left Party was “capable of governing.” It was the only party “that says with great clarity, we will not form a coalition with Armin Laschet and the CDU/CSU [Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union].”

Bartsch sidestepped all attempts by the moderator to pin him down on specific anti-militarist statements that might affect an alliance with the SPD and Greens. At the same time, he made it clear that the Left Party stands behind the Bundeswehr, NATO and a European army.

Did the Left Party “want to abolish the Bundeswehr or not?” he was asked. “A world without armies is of course a dream ... We say in our election program that we want to significantly reduce the defence budget ... You have to think about whether huge armaments projects are necessary,” Bartsch responded.

“Do we need a European army?” “That can’t be answered with yes or no. After all, our goal is to have as small an army as possible. But the fact is that in the course of the whole European unification we also have to deal with this question.”

Did the Left Party want to dissolve NATO? Bartsch replied, “We have to talk about what a new security structure looks like. That’s where NATO is an element.”

On all other questions put to him, Bartsch also presented himself as a responsible bourgeois politician willing to continue the right-wing and anti-working class policies of the present grand coalition under a future Social Democratic or Green chancellor. He ruled out government participation under a Christian Democratic chancellor only because these parties categorically rejected it. In Thuringia, however, the only state in which the Left Party holds the state premiership, Bodo Ramelow’s government is supported by the Christian Democrats on a vote-by-vote basis.

On financial policy, Bartsch boasted that the Left Party’s concept was the only one to ensure a budget surplus. “If you take the FDP [Free Democrats], there is a deficit of almost 90 billion. With us, there will be a plus.”

He wanted to achieve this, Bartsch asserted, by imposing a wealth tax and raising the top tax rate for the rich, with small breaks for middle-income earners. But this is just window dressing. Based on the experience of the period during which the Left Party and its predecessor, the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), governed in the Berlin state legislature together with the SPD from 2002 to 2011, it is clear how they “solve” budget deficits.

They sold off hundreds of thousands of publicly owned apartments, laid off thousands of public employees, lowered wages, cut spending on public infrastructure and, at the same time, rescued the Berlin Bankgesellschaft (banking firm) with several billion euros.

Bartsch explicitly praised fellow party leader Sahra Wagenknecht, who published a vile nationalist diatribe in the spring that became a bestseller, *The Self-Righteous* (*Die Selbstgerechten*), thanks to media hype. “Sahra Wagenknecht and the entire leadership of the Left Party go into this election campaign together,” he said. “One thing is clear: She is part of the team that is now contesting” the election.

In a guest editorial, “Christian Democrats plans are a slap in the face of high achievers,” which Bartsch and Wagenknecht published jointly on T-Online, Germany’s biggest news portal, the two promoted a major tax reform

that would benefit better-off middle class layers and make the “dream of owning your own little house” achievable again.

The PDS, the predecessor of the Left Party, emerged in 1990 from East Germany’s Stalinist party of state, the Socialist Unity Party (SED). It supported the reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis in 1990 and established itself as the mouthpiece of those representatives of the old East German elites who had trouble continuing their careers in a unified Germany. Their “socialism” never had anything to do with left-wing or truly socialist politics.

Bartsch, born in 1958, joined the SED in 1977 during his military service. He made a career at the party newspapers *Junge Welt* and *Neues Deutschland* and studied for four years in Moscow at the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), where he received his doctorate in 1990 with a thesis on “Distribution Relations under the Conditions of an Intensification of the Socialist Economy.” He then enjoyed a stellar career in the leadership of the PDS, where he was soon considered a member of its right wing. He has been in the Bundestag since 1998 (with a three-year interruption) and has served as parliamentary group chairman since 2015.

Bartsch’s interview demonstrates once again that the Left Party is not an alternative to the other bourgeois parties and differs from them only in nuances. Those who want to fight for socialist policies against social inequality, militarism and the rise of the right must support the election campaign of the Sozialistischen Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and build the German section of the Fourth International as a new mass party of the working class.



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