

# The new leadership of Germany's Green Party: A toxic mixture of militarism and identity politics

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On January 29 an online conference of the German Green Party elected a new leadership. Ricarda Lang and Omid Nouripour replace Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck, who have taken over the posts of Foreign Minister and Economics Minister respectively in the new federal government. Lang received 76 percent and Nouripour 82 percent of the 800 delegate votes. There were no opposing candidates.

The task of the new leadership duo will be to provide protective cover for the government, a so-called “traffic light coalition” of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). In the words of Nouripour to the *taz* newspaper, the job of the new leadership is to act as a “hinge” between the party and the government “communicating why we made certain compromises and what is our perspective.”

In just a few months in office, Germany's new government has adopted a bellicose policy towards Russia and confrontation with the working class. This is evident not only in its pandemic policy, where the government is pursuing a ruthless course of mass contagion, but also in foreign and environmental policy—two spheres where Green Party ministers bear direct responsibility.

Annalena Baerbock is one of the main agitators in the current campaign against Russia. Not a day goes by without the foreign minister threatening Moscow with “harshness” and “massive consequences,” while emphasising unity with the US, which is risking a third world war with its warmongering against Russia.

Economics Minister Habeck, who is responsible for the conversion to clean energy, Greens' main policy plank, is subordinating it to the geopolitical and profit interests of big business and is passing on the costs onto the working population.

At the online party conference both Habeck and Baerbock made a direct connection between climate change, Germany's geopolitical interests and military build-up.

Climate protection is, “of course, both a foreign policy and geopolitical issue as well,” Habeck said. “We are dependent on energy imports, we are dependent on a different geopolitical world situation. ... That's why it's super and terrific that we have Annalena as our foreign minister.”

Baerbock added, “When we talk about security policy, we must always talk about energy and climate policy as well. ... We will create strategic sovereignty by making ourselves independent of fossil energy in the coming years.”

Coronavirus has made clear that “the failure of supply chains can bring economic nations, industrial nations, but also all other countries to their knees much more than cannons could in this situation.” That is why it is so important that the German government and the Greens “make it very clear now: We stand by Ukraine, on security, on defence, but above all on the question of maintaining economic stability.”

The costs of climate change are high. It is obvious that the urgently needed reduction of CO2 emissions cannot be achieved without attacking the high profits of the companies and the billions in assets of the crisis profiteers. The Greens adamantly reject such a solution. Under their leadership, climate protection measures will accelerate the rise in the cost of living and impoverishment of the population.

*Der Spiegel* magazine has calculated that up to 800,000 homes will have to be renovated annually by 2030 and millions of oil and gas heating systems replaced in order to meet legal requirements. The cost is reckoned to be around 175 billion euros.

Property companies will pass on most of these costs to their tenants, drastically increasing the financial burden of the 18 million households in rented housing. Already, one in seven renters spends more than 40 percent of his or her income on housing.

Added to this burden are the rising costs for heating and energy, which are exploding along with the escalating Ukraine crisis. Already last year, the price of gas almost doubled, and a price increase of 40 percent is expected for gas heating this year.

The Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir (Green Party) is also pursuing an environmental policy on the backs of the poor. One day after Christmas, he announced in *Bild am Sonntag*: “There must be no more junk food prices, they drive farms to ruin, inhibit animal welfare, promote species extinction and pollute the climate.” For the affluent clientele of the Greens, the rise in food prices is not a problem. It is, however, a major concern for the millions dependent on minimum wages and Hartz IV welfare recipients, for whom the standard rate provides just 5.19 euros daily for food.

Habeck's plan to cover the whole country with wind turbines has also antagonised Green Party members whose dreams of a quiet house in the country cannot be reconciled with the prospect of conspicuous and noisy turbines with their 50-metre-long rotor blades.

## Omid Nouripour

Under these circumstances, the new leadership of the Greens has a crucial role to play in shielding and defending the government.

Membership of the party has increased sharply in recent times. From around 50,000 in the late 1990s, when the Greens first entered a federal government, and 60,000 in the mid-2010s, membership has risen recently to 125,000. With almost 7 million voters, the Greens also achieved their best ever federal election result in 2021. The new members and voters include conservative and middle class layers who support the Greens

because of the party's right-wing policies, as well as many younger people under the illusion the Greens would pursue a more consistent environmental policy.

The Nouripour-Lang duo is attuned to keeping this diverse clientele together.

Omid Nouripour belongs to the right-wing, so-called "realo" wing of the party. For many years, he has been one of the party's leading advocates of unrestrained militarism and fully supports Baerbock's aggressive foreign policy.

Born in Tehran in 1975, his family emigrated to Frankfurt am Main when he was 13 years old. There he completed his A-levels and joined the Greens in 1996. In 2006, he was elected to the Bundestag as Joschka Fischer's successor and focused on security and foreign policy issues.

As foreign policy spokesman for the Green parliamentary group, Nouripour advocated the participation of the Bundeswehr in air strikes against Syria in 2014. He rejected the German government's deliveries of weapons to the Iraqi Kurds on the grounds that if the responsibility to protect within the framework of the United Nations was to be taken seriously, it would be more consistent to dispatch German soldiers.

In the same year, Nouripour advocated economic sanctions against Russia because of the Ukraine crisis and an EU accession perspective for Ukraine.

Nouripour is chairman of the German-Ukrainian Parliamentary Group and a board member of Atlantic Bridge—a network of 500 leading personalities from finance, big business, politics, media and academia advocating close German-American cooperation.

The chairman of Atlantic Bridge is former Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD), who took over in 2019 from Friedrich Merz, now the leader of the Christian Democratic Union. In addition to Nouripour, the board also includes ex-Springer boss Kai Dieckmann, German trade union (DGB) boss Reiner Hoffmann, FDP politician Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, James von Moltke from Deutsche Bank and the former head of the Munich Security Conference Wolfgang Ischinger. Max Otte, head of a right-wing faction in the CDU and the candidate of the far right Alternative for Germany for the post of Federal President, is also a member of this network.

Nouripour continues to this day to defend the Hartz welfare laws, which were introduced in 2003 by an SPD-Green coalition government—laws which have since led to the creation of a huge low-wage sector and widespread poverty. When the *taz* asked him shortly before his election as party leader why he supported Hartz IV, Nouripour replied: "Because the intention itself was not wrong. And the dynamisation of the low-wage sector was also fundamentally a right idea. ... It was a well-intentioned idea that has simply been poorly implemented to its full extent."

## Ricarda Lang

Ricarda Lang is responsible for accommodating young supporters of the Greens who are not so openly in favour of militarism and the Hartz IV laws. Aged 28, Lang, a law school dropout, is the youngest leader in the party's history and has rocketed to the top. She joined Green Youth in 2012, was federal spokesperson of the Green students organisation in 2014, federal spokesperson of Green Youth in 2017, deputy federal chair and women's policy spokesperson of the Greens in 2019, before moving into the Bundestag in 2021.

Whenever Lang appears in public or gives an interview, she invariably emphasises her social commitment and her origins from a poor background. "I know about this from my own history," she told the *taz*. "I grew up with a single mother who worked as a social worker. I know what

it's like to work 40 hours or more and still struggle to make ends meet."

All this is simply lip service. Lang fully supports the anti-social, right-wing policies of the "traffic light" coalition and stresses her close cooperation with Nouripour, with whom she speaks on the phone at least five times a day even prior to the leadership election.

Asked by the *taz* whether a dual leadership consisting of a "realo" and a representative of the left would not automatically lead to more tension, she replied: "In the end, we are all professionals. What we can achieve politically now is above individual issues." She said she had "an interest in having a strong cabinet, in our people doing a good job there. I also have an interest in having a strong parliamentary party. We will all have to play together as a team."

Lang specifically uses identity politics to suppress class issues. She parades her bisexuality and is actively involved in the milieu of LGBT politics. *Der Spiegel* compares her to Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who also uses identity politics to support President Biden's right-wing policies.

"Lang has made the fact that she is fat into her brand, reinterpreting perceived weakness as strength," writes *Der Spiegel*. "Many female politicians of her generation do the same: For example, the young congresswomen in the US around Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who refer to their origins in socially disadvantaged backgrounds, or to their hair loss. They've become icons of an authenticity that especially meets the zeitgeist of young female voters."

Such forms of identity politics have nothing to do with rejecting social discrimination and inequality, which can only be overcome in the struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation. Instead identity politics is used by petty-bourgeois layers to gain privileges and divide the working class.

In an interview she gave to the *Tagesspiegel* on October 2 last year, Lang demonstrated the type of reactionary alliances possible on the basis of identity politics. She enthused about the common ground existing with the FDP, the party that is most associated with big business and whose trademark is social ruthlessness.

"We have a lot of overlap with the FDP when it comes to queer politics, and I hope we can use that," said Lang. A unifying element is that "many young people want a modern social policy that prioritises self-determination and the individual."

This fixation on the individual, which Lang shares with the ruthless careerists of the FDP, stands in direct contrast to the interests of working people, who can only defend their interests collectively as a class.

The Greens emerged from the student protests of 1968. Influenced by the theories of the Frankfurt School and postmodernism, the rebellious students rejected the struggle for a socialist perspective in the working class. When the Green Party was founded in 1980, environmentalism, pacifism and grassroots democracy were at the centre of its programme; there was no place for socialism.

The Greens' transition into the camp of militarism and attacks on social programs is directly linked to the material rise of the social milieu upon which they rely. The stock market and real estate boom of the past three decades has provided them with unexpected levels of wealth, while poverty has swollen at the other end of society.

Supporters of the Greens have the second highest average income of all parties after the FDP. Of its members, 68 percent have a university degree, 45 percent are civil servants or clerical workers—more than in any other party. They fear the social opposition of the working class because it threatens their privileges. That is why they are responding to the growing social antagonisms, which have come to a head in the pandemic, with another lurch to the right.

The toxic mix of militarism and identity politics that characterises the new leadership of the Greens is an expression of this development. It will invariably bring the Greens—and the "traffic light" coalition as a

whole—into sharp conflict with the working class.



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