

Germany's Left Party in free fall

Peter Schwarz
20 May 2022

The Left Party is in free fall. Since March last year, it has lost massively in seven consecutive state elections. In western Germany, it is now only represented in the state parliaments of the city-states of Hamburg and Bremen and the state of Hesse, which includes Frankfurt.

In the federal elections last September, the vote for the Left Party fell from 9.2 to 4.9 percent (below the 5 percent hurdle for a party slate) and it only managed to return to parliament thanks to winning three individual mandates. In Saarland, it plummeted from 12.8 to 2.6 percent at the end of March. In North Rhine-Westphalia, it lost two-thirds of its voters last Sunday, falling well short of entering the state parliament with 2.1 percent. Among workers, only one percent voted for the Left Party, although the Social Democratic Party (SPD) also achieved its historically worst result.

The decline of the Left Party is good news. Its claim to represent left-wing or even socialist politics has always been a fraud. Since it emerged from the Stalinist state party of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, formerly East Germany) in 1990 under the name Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), it has professed unreserved support for capitalism and sought to block and stifle any expression of social and political opposition.

In doing so, it worked closely with the trade unions and—since the founding of the Left Party in 2007—with renegade social democrats led by the former Saarland prime minister, SPD leader and federal finance minister Oskar Lafontaine. Wherever it has had the opportunity to put its policies into practice, it has proved to be as anti-social, ruthless and pro-capitalist as all the other bourgeois parties.

Its role in the “Red-Red” (SPD-Left Party) Berlin Senate (state executive) from 2002 to 2011 is notorious. While the SPD and Greens pushed through the Agenda 2010 and Hartz laws—welfare and labour “reforms”—at the federal level, the SPD and PDS/Left Party in Berlin destroyed a third of public sector jobs, cut wages and social benefits, privatised hospitals and sold off 150,000 publicly owned apartments to property sharks. The Left Party's government record in other federal states is similar.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the party has found it increasingly difficult to reconcile its left-wing rhetoric with its right-wing policies. The banks and the rich were “rescued” with billions of euros, while the working class had to foot the bill in the form of falling wages, social cuts and dilapidated schools and hospitals. The Left Party supported all these policies.

In 2009, the party achieved its best federal election result with just under 12 percent. Since then, with occasional fluctuations, it has only gone downhill. Its number of voters and members

declined, internal quarrels increased.

One wing, led by Katja Kipping and the pseudo-left Marx 21 (aligned with the Socialist Workers Party in Britain), turned to identity politics and other hobbyhorses of the affluent urban upper middle class. Another, personified by Sahra Wagenknecht, competed with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) on nationalism and xenophobia. Still others, personified by Dietmar Bartsch, leader of the parliamentary group in the Bundestag (federal parliament), and Bodo Ramelow, prime minister of Thuringia, were interested above all in retaining power and sought the closest possible proximity to the SPD and Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Support for the Ukraine war

The war in Ukraine has now finally exposed the pro-imperialist character of the Left Party. Its founder Gregor Gysi originally even wanted to support the federal government's €100 billion rearmaments programme, but was unable to get his way, for the time being. Parliamentary faction leader Bartsch attacked the “traffic light coalition” of the SPD, Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Greens in the Bundestag from the right, accusing it of failing to enforce sanctions against Russian oligarchs.

On the eve of the North Rhine-Westphalia state elections, federal party leader Jörg Schindler angrily attacked an upcoming event that was mildly critical of NATO. Asked by the moderator of broadcaster ZDF's “Berliner Runde” programme about the “Living without NATO—Ideas for Peace” congress, in which pacifists and bourgeois journalists as well as some members of the Left Party will participate, Schindler indignantly distanced himself from it.

“I can explicitly say that this is not the position of our party,” he stressed. “Our party has a clear position on the issue of the Ukraine war. We criticise and condemn Putin's war of aggression. It is as simple as that, and there is nothing else to say.”

The statement calling for the congress, which takes place in Berlin on May 21, explicitly calls Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine “contrary to international law.” All it advocates is a negotiated settlement and “compromises without loss of face for either side.”

The Left Party has convened a party congress in Erfurt for June 24 to elect a new leadership and—in the name of overcoming the “self-destructive processes and substantive blockades”—to pledge the party to NATO's war course. To this end, the party executive has submitted a lead motion which completely supports NATO propaganda.

For years, Russia had “been pursuing a policy aimed at keeping the post-Soviet states under Russia's influence: By attempting to

establish authoritarian vassal regimes or, where that fails, to destabilise the states,” it reads.

Russia was “one of the geostrategic power centres in fossilised capitalism, in which different actors fight for access to resources and spheres of influence, also by means of war.” The country pursued “an imperialist policy” which was “legitimised vis-à-vis its own population by a nationalist, militarist and autocratic great power ideology.”

The systematic expansion of NATO towards Russia and the coup in Ukraine supported by the US and Germany, which brought a pro-Western regime to power in 2014 with the help of right-wing militias and laid the seeds for the current war, are not mentioned, let alone condemned, in the lead motion.

Instead, the Executive Committee exercises self-criticism. “After the end of the Cold War, the Western states, with their overwhelming economic and military power and NATO, have often (see the Kosovo or Iraq wars) disregarded institutions such as the UN and international law,” it says in the lead motion. This had been the focus of the Left Party’s criticism. “Too little attention was paid to imperial wars beyond NATO, such as Russia’s military interventions in Chechnya and Syria.”

The motion supports economic warfare against Russia, which is a central part of the NATO offensive. Victory over Russia is not to be achieved through arms deliveries, but through tightening sanctions: “Sanctions must be directed against the economic power base of the Putin system, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. The German government must fulfil its responsibility to freeze these assets of Russian oligarchs in the national and European framework.”

In fact, the sanctions and the rearmament of Ukraine—the US alone has approved \$53 billion in military aid since the war began—serve the same goal: to inflict a crushing defeat on Russia and create the conditions for its disintegration and submission to the imperialist powers.

The US media speak this openly. The *Washington Post*, for example, recently condemned the—supposed—efforts of France, Germany and Italy to end the bloodshed through a ceasefire. “The risks of reducing pressure on Mr. Putin before he is thoroughly defeated, and perhaps not even then,” were too high, it says. The desire of Paris, Berlin and Rome “to shorten this destructive war—and thus limit the damage both to Ukraine and to their own badly battered economies,” should not stand in the way of that goal, it continues.

In other words, to “thoroughly defeat Putin” and subdue Russia, NATO is prepared to bleed Ukraine dry in a months-long war and risk a nuclear third world war.

Pacifist phrases

But it would not be the Left Party if it did not try to cover up its support for imperialist war policy with moral appeals and calls for peace addressed to the imperialist powers and institutions responsible for the war.

With a raised finger, the lead motion warns NATO that its attempts to “install a ‘new world order’ had “failed many times, often with disastrous consequences.” The “spiral of worldwide rearmament and the use of war as a means of enforcing hegemonic interests” was “dangerous as hell.” The motion calls for “a global

peace order involving all actors,” to be achieved, among other things, by strengthening the International Criminal Court and the UN.

What a bankrupt perspective! Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union 30 years ago, the US has been waging war almost continuously with the declared aim of defending its position as the “sole world power” and preventing the rise of China. In the process, it and its NATO allies have destroyed Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, as well as numerous other countries, and militarily surrounded Russia.

German imperialism reacts to all this by returning to a great power policy itself and fervently rearming. The Left Party supports this policy while blathering about a new “peace order” in the manner of a priest blessing the cannons while quoting the Sermon on the Mount.

Fortunately, more and more people are seeing through this deception, as the decline of the vote for the Left Party shows. The only way to stop the Ukraine war and prevent a nuclear catastrophe is through an independent movement of the international working class, which is being forced to bear the brunt of militarism.

This does not mean support for Putin and his regime. On the contrary, Putin’s reaction to NATO’s encirclement of Russia is as short-sighted as it is reactionary and plays into the hands of NATO. It is the response of a regime of oligarchs who have plundered the social property of the Soviet Union and are irreconcilably opposed to the working class.

The overthrow of Putin is the task of the Russian working class. The same applies to the right-wing regime and the working class of Ukraine. The Russian and Ukrainian workers need the support and solidarity of workers throughout Europe, the USA, and the whole world in this.

The objective conditions for such a movement are developing rapidly. All over the world, workers are rebelling against the social consequences of the war and the capitalist crisis: inflation, hunger, job losses and growing exploitation—a movement that is increasingly taking open forms against capitalist rule.

This movement needs a perspective that unites the struggle against war, exploitation, and social inequality into a conscious global offensive to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society. This perspective is represented by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party).



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact