

The Left Party: Swinging between NATO war policy and German militarism

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2 March 2023

The Ukraine war is revealing how right-wing and militaristic the Left Party is. With the party in an advanced stage of political decay, its leading members are engaged in bitter disputes, and a breakup seems only a matter of time. There is no progressive side to be found. Some unconditionally support NATO's proxy war against Russia, while others reject the war in the name of German great power politics conducted independently of the United States. In between, there are all sorts of combinations and variations.

But no one in the Left Party is advocating an anti-war policy worthy of the name. Nor is it possible, because such a policy must mobilize the working class, the only social force that stands in irreconcilable opposition to capitalism, the cause of war and militarism. It must unite the workers of all countries behind a socialist program and—following Karl Liebknecht's motto, "The main enemy is at home"—direct the struggle against one's own government.

The Left Party categorically rejects such a class-based, internationalist perspective. It and its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), have served as pillars of the capitalist order in reunified Germany for three decades. They bear responsibility for massive social cuts and the oppression of the working class in the federal states and municipalities.

Last weekend, the dispute in the Left Party could be seen on the open stage in Berlin. On the anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine, no less than 16 rallies took place in the capital, two of which attracted several thousand participants.

The first, which moved from Alexanderplatz to Brandenburg Gate on Friday, was a pro-government war demonstration. Organized by Green politician Ralf Fücks' "Centre for Liberal Modernity" and "Vitsche," an organization of ultranationalist exiled Ukrainians, it gathered almost the entire leadership of the Green Party as

well as top representatives of the Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (FDP). The closing speech in front of a blue-and-yellow-lit Brandenburg Gate was given by Franziska Giffey (SPD), the mayor of Berlin.

The appeal for the rally described the Russian attack on Ukraine as a "war of extermination," putting it on a par with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. It demanded further arms deliveries to Ukraine ("The delivery of Leopard tanks is an important step, more must follow") and called for "massive financial and technical aid" and prosecution of Russian war crimes.

The second, much larger rally, called by Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht and feminist Alice Schwarzer, took place Saturday in front of the Brandenburg Gate. It called for an end to arms deliveries to Ukraine and the start of peace negotiations.

The thrust of this rally, however, was not anti-militarist, as the WSWs has pointed out elsewhere. The initiators exploited opposition to the NATO war to promote a nationalist and militarist agenda. They criticized the US, but not the massive rearmament of Germany's Bundeswehr (armed forces).

They spoke for representatives of the ruling class who want to end the alliance with the US as quickly as possible and pursue their geopolitical interests independently as a "European leading power." That is why retired Brigadier General Erich Vad, a convinced militarist, was invited as a speaker to the rally, and right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Peter Gauweiler was an initial signatory of the accompanying petition.

Nevertheless, the Wagenknecht-Schwarzer rally met with hysterical hostility from the governing parties and media, which was also shared by some sections of the Left Party. The very fact that they dared to question NATO's war policy—the appeal was also signed more

than 700,000 times on change.org—was considered unacceptable.

Although the Left Party did not provide its own speakers at Friday's pro-war rally, it had organized its own protest outside the Russian Embassy in Berlin a few hours earlier. There, Culture Senator (Berlin state minister) Klaus Lederer spoke in favour of arms deliveries and against a diplomatic solution to the conflict. He said he had to acknowledge that Ukraine would not exist today if only humanitarian aid had been provided. "Yes, ultimately negotiations are needed. But the occupation of Ukraine makes negotiations obsolete," Lederer said.

Leading members of the Left Party participated vociferously in denouncing Wagenknecht's demonstration, attacking her not from the left, from the standpoint of anti-militarism, but from the right, as defenders of NATO. Katina Schubert, Berlin state chairwoman of the Left Party, which has co-governed the capital together with the SPD and the Greens since 2016 and fears for the continuation of the present "red-green-red" (SPD-Green-Left Party) coalition after the disastrous election results in February, was particularly aggressive.

In her speech, Wagenknecht had called Foreign Minister Baerbock and the Greens *Panzerarren* (tank fools) and said, "We don't want German tanks to shoot at the great-grandchildren of those Russian women and men whose great-grandparents were actually murdered by the Wehrmacht [Hitler's army] by the millions in bestial ways." Schubert therefore accused her of a "consistent perpetrator-victim reversal" and an "inconceivable relativization of fascism."

These accusations are unsurpassable in terms of cynicism. NATO—and Schubert herself—support a regime in Kiev that erects monuments to Nazi collaborators and mass murderers and names streets after them; that bans and suppresses parties and media that do not unconditionally support NATO's war policy. The war demonstration by Schubert's Berlin coalition partners was accompanied by a sea of Ukrainian flags and the fascist battle cries *Sláva Ukrayíni* (Glory to Ukraine) and *Heróiam sláva* (Glory to Heroes).

Schubert and Lederer are not the only leading Left Party politicians who unconditionally support the NATO war. Among many others, Thuringia's state Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow has explicitly spoken out in favour of arms deliveries to Ukraine. Party co-leaders Janine Wissler and Martin Schirdewan also distanced themselves from the Wagenknecht rally in advance and made it clear

that they also support arms deliveries.

The Left Party's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation promotes organizations such as Sozialnij Ruch in Ukraine, which justify the NATO war and Ukrainian nationalism with pseudo-left phrases and had called for the Berlin pro-war demonstration.

Support for the NATO war policy on the one hand, and "liberation of Europe from the military tutelage of the US through an independent European security and defence policy" (the formulation comes from Oskar Lafontaine) on the other—is the extent of the spectrum within which the politics of the Left Party swings. It is fitting that the party is perishing on its feet.

The struggle against the pro-war policies of the US and NATO, which are directed not only against Russia but also against China and threaten to lead to a nuclear catastrophe, requires the building of a party rooted in the traditions of socialist internationalism—the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the Fourth International.

Unlike numerous pseudo-left groups that joined the PDS and then the Left Party following the collapse of the former GDR (East Germany) in order to make a career for themselves, the SGP never had any illusions about the reactionary nature of these forces, which emerged from the GDR's Stalinist party of state and supported the introduction of capitalism in 1990. The SGP has consistently defended a historically based, socialist program.

The significance of this principled work is now becoming apparent: the international socialist program of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is coinciding with a powerful upsurge in the class struggle, while the Left Party and its pseudo-left appendages have transformed themselves into deeply reactionary and militarist forces.



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