

Germany's Left Party leaders pay homage to arch-reactionary Wolfgang Schäuble

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Since Wolfgang Schäuble's death on December 26, politicians and the media have been lavishing praise on the long-serving Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party chairman and Finance and Interior Minister. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) praised him as an "outstanding statesman" and a "stroke of luck for German history," Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) as a "sharp thinker" and "pugnacious democrat" and former Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) as "an outstanding personality with political and programmatic foresight."

Leading representatives of the Left Party are also particularly prominent in the overbearing canonization of the arch-reactionary Schäuble. Dietmar Bartsch, long-standing Left Party Bundestag (parliamentary) group leader, even published a photo on X/Twitter showing him kneeling before Schäuble. In the text accompanying the picture, he celebrates him as an "outstanding democrat."

The founding father of the Left Party and former president of the Party of the European Left, Gregor Gysi, was even more effusive. On X, he praised Schäuble for "his straightforwardness, his discipline and his human decency," which set "standards in federal politics to this day." He continued: "His unbending commitment to Berlin as the all-German capital demonstrated political foresight. I felt his sense of humour several times."

The personal and political reverence of the Left Party grandees for Schäuble is not simply a personal quirk. It reflects the thoroughly pro-capitalist and right-wing character of the Left Party.

Born in Freiburg in 1942, Schäuble was one of the most reactionary politicians in German post-war history and has played a key role in the dismantling of democratic rights, social attacks and the return of German militarism since he entered the Bundestag in 1972.

If Schäuble was "outstanding" in anything, it was in his role as the mortal enemy of the working class. This was most evident over the last decade in the German-European austerity diktats that Schäuble enforced across the continent as finance minister between 2009 and 2017. In Greece in particular, he imposed one austerity package after another with almost sadistic relish, plunging millions into abject poverty and

destroying the education and healthcare systems of an entire society.

The measures were accompanied by massive attacks on democratic rights, which Schäuble aggressively promoted. His anti-democratic outbursts before the 2012 elections in Greece are particularly notorious, with Schäuble ranting about "untimely elections" and demanding written assurances from all participating parties that they would fully adhere to the austerity policies even after the elections. His unreserved support for the dictatorship of finance capital culminated in the demand that Greece must adhere to the conditions of the EU: "The Greeks can vote however they want."

Schäuble displayed the same preference for authoritarianism and a highly armed police state in his role as Interior Minister in Merkel's first cabinet (2005 to 2009). His demands included the deployment of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) at home and allowing the military to shoot down civilian aircraft in the event of terrorism. Schäuble agitated against parliamentary control of the secret services, called for the abolition of basic rights for "terrorists" and advocated the use of statements obtained through torture in the investigative work of the security authorities.

The Greek austerity diktats also had their precursor in German domestic policy under Schäuble. Schäuble was one of the central architects of German reunification on a capitalist basis and the accompanying social counterrevolution. When he first held the office of Interior Minister under Helmut Kohl (CDU) between 1989 and 1991, he dictated the unification treaty for the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, former East Germany) and with it, a social cutback that is unprecedented in peacetime.

The *Treuhandanstalt* wound up a total of 14,000 state-owned enterprises. Some were sold off; most were shut down. Within three years, 71 percent of all employees changed or lost their jobs. Along with state property, the social gains that were based on it were destroyed: the right to work, medical care, education and childcare. In the state of Saxony alone, more than 1,000 schools have been closed since reunification.

The social counterrevolution in the East also served as a lever to massively attack wages and working conditions in the West. Average real wages throughout Germany today are below the

level of 30 years ago. Hourly wages for low earners have even fallen by up to 20 percent in real terms since 1995. If the federal coalition government can now organize the next orgy of cuts in close cooperation with the trade unions in order to collect billions for war and rearmament from working people, it is continuing Schäuble's work.

In the last years of his life, Schäuble was also a spokesman and rabble-rouser for the extreme right-wing and militaristic course of the ruling class. As president of the Bundestag (2017 to 2021), he repeatedly advocated the use of military force and the necessity of paying the "moral price" in keynote speeches and interviews. "The lesson of Auschwitz" could "not be an argument for not getting involved in the long term," he declared provocatively. In other words, Schäuble's lesson from the Holocaust and the criminal wars of German imperialism in the 20th century was: new wars and crimes.

With the same unscrupulousness, he argued for the murderous policy of letting COVID rip through the population during the pandemic in order to secure the profits of large corporations and the fortunes of the banks and super-rich. In an interview with *Tagesspiegel* in April 2020, he declared that it was "not right" that "everything else should take a back seat to the protection of life." The right to life was also not "absolutely" protected by the constitution, he argued. When asked by the newspaper whether we "have to accept that people die from coronavirus," Schäuble barely concealed his answer with "yes."

We commented at the time:

With his repugnant attempt to weigh human dignity against the right to life, Schäuble is underscoring that 75 years after the downfall of the Third Reich, the ruling elite is returning to its fascist traditions. Article I of the Basic Law, "Human dignity shall be inviolable," was adopted in the wake of the Nazis' policies of terror and extermination explicitly to protect fundamental rights, not to undermine them. But the period in which the German ruling elite was forced to grit its teeth due to the defeats in two world wars is long gone.

Thirty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and German unification, it is flaunting all of its ignorance, brutality and inhumanity. Schäuble, the longest-serving member of parliament and the former interior and finance minister, embodies this development more fully than perhaps any other representative of the ruling class.

Behind the posthumous love-fest for Schäuble of a Bartsch or Gysi lie these reactionary processes in the here and now. It is a fact that the Left Party and its predecessor organizations not only passively went along with Schäuble's deeply anti-working-

class policies at the time of German reunification, but actively supported and enforced them. It was the SED, the Stalinist party of state in the GDR, and its immediate successor, the PDS, under Gysi's leadership that initiated the restoration of capitalism in the former East Germany and thus created the conditions for all the reactionary developments since then.

The Left Party also played a key role in the destruction of Greece's welfare state. Its sister party in Greece, Syriza, which headed the government, made a direct pact with Schäuble in order to push through the austerity diktats of the "troika"—the EU Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB)—against the massive resistance of Greek workers. In February 2015, the Left Party parliamentary group—headed by Gysi and Bartsch—voted in favour of Schäuble's brutal austerity package.

The Left Party played, and continues to play, the same active role in the other central plans of the ruling class, which were pushed by Schäuble. It supports the war offensive against Russia in Ukraine, Israel's genocide against the Palestinians and wherever it (co-)governs in the federal states it implements the policy of social austerity, stepping up police powers and attacks on refugees and immigrants. The same applies to the "herd-immunity" pandemic policy.

Against this backdrop, the Left Party leaders' genuflection before Schäuble, who is deeply hated by workers and young people across Europe, also provides clarity. In their fight against capitalist barbarism, workers are not only confronted with the openly right-wing representatives of the ruling class like Schäuble, but also with those nominal "lefts" who are magically attracted to the grimace of reaction, even in death.



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