

The reactionary role of Germany's Left Party in the fight against fascism and war

Johannes Stern
6 March 2025

After Chancellor-designate Friedrich Merz openly joined forces with the Alternative for Germany (AfD) at the beginning of February to harshen refugee policy, hundreds of thousands, mostly young people took to the streets to protest against the far-right party and the political establishment's shift to the right. The return to fascism and militarism in Germany is meeting with fierce opposition in view of the horrific crimes of German imperialism in two world wars and the barbarism of the Nazis.

In the elections, Die Linke (Left Party) in particular benefited from this growing mobilisation, as it publicly criticised the aggressive campaign against refugees and presented itself as an anti-fascist force. Before the mass protests began in January, it was lying at 3 percent in the polls, but it then received 8.8 percent in February's election. Among voters under 25, it even achieved the best result of all parties with 25 percent, the same as the prospective governing parties, Merz's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU, 13 percent) and the Social Democrats (SPD, 12 percent) together. The Left Party also won in the capital Berlin with 19.9 percent, ahead of the CDU (18.3) and the Greens (16.8).

Young workers and students who want to fight against fascism, militarism and social cuts face very fundamental historical and political questions and tasks. They need a clear understanding of the Left Party, which in reality does not represent their interests and goals, but rather plays a key role in implementing social cuts and the deportation of refugees, and also fundamentally agrees with government policy on the question of war.

"There is a huge discrepancy between the hopes that young people associate with the Left Party and what it actually is. The former want to oppose the fascists, they reject the refugee agitation, and they want reasonable incomes and affordable rents. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) wrote in its first statement on the election result: "But the Left Party has no program to counter the shift to the right by those in power. It is spreading the illusion that the main parties of the ruling class can be persuaded to change course through a combination of parliamentary opposition and pressure from the streets."

And further: "The Left Party claims it is possible to reform capitalism, not abolish it. But that is a dangerous illusion. The ruling elites' turn to the right is not simply the product of mistaken policies that can be corrected by a bit of pressure. The ruling class everywhere is resorting to dictatorship and war because it is confronted with the deep crisis of its social system. As in the 20th century, capitalism is again leading to fascism and war."

The Left Party after the federal election

While the SGP is fighting to develop the resistance into a conscious

movement of the working class against the entire ruling class and capitalism, the Left Party is reacting to its own completely unexpected election success with a further lurch to the right.

It fears nothing more than that the outrage over fascism, social inequality, anti-refugee agitation and pro-war policy could thwart the formation of a government, escape the control of the trade union bureaucracy and take on independent forms. That is why it is not lifting a finger to organise and develop the opposition. Its leaders have abandoned all criticism of Merz's alliance with the AfD and are downright fawning over him, ready to support his government coalition with the SPD and its militarist and anti-working class policies.

On the evening of the election, Left Party leader Jan van Aken declared that his party was "willing to talk" about cooperating with the new government on matters such as proposed legislation. What is at stake is clear. At the centre of the exploratory talks is a reform of the so-called "debt brake," which requires the federal government to limit annual borrowing to 0.35 percent of GDP. This is in addition to the tightening up of refugee policy and the massive attacks on all remaining social and democratic rights. Such a reform is now considered necessary by the ruling class in order to massively increase military spending and to launch new "special funds" for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces).

The Left Party leaves no doubt that it is ready to help, especially if the government's current efforts to organise a majority for its plans in the outgoing Bundestag (parliament) fail. "A new government needs a two-thirds majority to amend the constitution, such as to reform the debt brake or to create special funds. It cannot get around the Left Party. Or it will accept votes from the AfD. It is their choice, not ours," wrote Left Party co-chair Ines Schwerdtner on X shortly after the election.

In an interview with broadcaster ARD's morning show last Friday, Schwerdtner reemphasized this position: "It is the CDU's decision whether they want to risk the votes of the AfD again for their projects or whether they start talking to the Left Party." This alone underlines how far the party is willing to go. Merz did not "risk" the votes of the AfD when he relied on its votes to push through his anti-refugee motion in parliament, but deliberately made a pact with the fascists in order to push through his "project."

Despite all the protestations that her party merely wants to enable more "investment," Schwerdtner signalled that it is also prepared to help launch the "project" of a new multibillion special fund for the Bundeswehr—provided it is involved in the concrete planning. The federal government should "first show what we need for defence capability," Schwerdtner demanded. "Where did the money from the old [€100 billion] special fund go? I cannot agree to a new special fund if we do not know where the money is going at all, what it is needed for at all."

The Left Party fully agrees with NATO's war course against Russia in Ukraine. "I believe that Ukraine has the right to defend itself, of course. And that it was therefore right for them to do so." At the same time, "we have been saying from the outset that we need peace negotiations," and

Germany in particular “must initiate peace negotiations.” That had not been done so far, and now there was “a situation in which Trump is making dirty deals with Ukraine, seizing the rare earths and exploiting Ukraine.”

Obviously with the aim of not simply leaving the “rare earths” and the “exploitation” of Ukraine to the US, Schwerdtner did not rule out the deployment of “peacekeeping forces.” In her opinion, however, they should be “normal [UN] blue helmets, that is, real peacekeepers.” “We stand for peacekeepers,” she affirmed when asked, and the Left Party was “ready for debates on this.”

What Van Aken and Schwerdtner are publicly promulgating is the declared policy of the entire party leadership. Its March 1 decision states: “Trump is in the process of massively damaging international law and relying solely on the law of the jungle. The German government and the EU must respond with a—long overdue—clarity.” The party executive demands “debt relief for Ukraine” and “a suspension of the debt brake ... to free up sufficient funds for financial civil support for Ukraine.”

This is in line with the policy of the leading European powers, who are responding to President Donald Trump’s threats to conclude a “deal” with Russia over Ukraine with even stronger support for Kiev and an armaments and war offensive. Under the false guise of a supposed “peace policy,” they are feverishly working to militarise the continent and make it independent in order to continue the war against Russia and, if necessary, enforce their imperialist interests against the US.

A recent WSWS commentary on the subject stated:

A defeat in Ukraine would be a major blow to the European powers, as would the US gaining a stranglehold on mineral deposits vital to the continent’s economies. Even more alarming to the European powers is the prospect of a broader US-Russia alliance, which they see as an existential threat. This is the real reason why the UK, France and other countries are now considering deploying troops to Ukraine, risking direct war with Russia—with or without US support.

The Left Party supports this dangerous escalation. And it plays a key role in disguising the return of Europe—and above all Germany—to aggressive imperialist great-power politics with democratic phrases. In a post on X, the party’s founding father, Gregor Gysi, writes:

The US fears that China will become the world’s number one power, which is why it believes it must become more authoritarian in order to act more efficiently. This forces us to fight seriously for our freedom, our democracy and the rule of law—against both internal and external threats. We must agree—from the CSU to the Left Party, but also with trade unions, churches, business associations, artists and scientists—that we must defend our fundamental principles of democracy, freedom and the rule of law together ... [W]e must finally realise that Europe as a whole must be capable of acting. The nation states alone have no chance against the world powers.

In fact, European world power politics, which Gysi wants to support by forming a war front of all government parties, capitalist associations and trade unions, requires the destruction of all social and democratic rights and the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Europe itself. As in the 1930s, great power politics and the preparation for war mean the abolition of “democracy, freedom and the rule of law” and a turn towards fascism

and dictatorship. This is also the reason why the ruling class and Merz, whom the Left Party is now so insistently courting, are strengthening the AfD and making ever more direct pacts with the fascists.

The history of the Left Party

The militarism of the Left Party is rooted not only in its right-wing leaders, but in the political and social orientation and history of the party as a whole. Despite its name, the Left Party has never been a socialist or even left-wing party. It has always been a bourgeois organisation representing the interests of the state apparatus and a wealthy upper-middle-class strata, defending German capitalism and imperialism and being rewarded for this with ministerial posts and state subsidies running into the millions. It was founded in June 2007 through the merger of two bureaucratic apparatuses, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (WASG), both of which had decades of experience in oppressing the working class.

The PDS was the heir to the Stalinist state party of the former East Germany, which in 1990 helped organise German reunification on a capitalist basis and immediately thereafter took over law-and-order functions in the new eastern federal states. The WASG was initiated by long-standing SPD and trade union officials with the aim of diverting the social anger over the SPD-Green government’s Agenda 2010 policy of welfare cuts, introduced by the then Schröder-Fischer government. The initiative for the merger came not only from Gysi, but also from Oskar Lafontaine, one of Germany’s most experienced bourgeois politicians, who had previously held leading positions in government and the SPD for 40 years. He and his wife Sahra Wagenknecht have since quit the Left Party and founded the extremely nationalist and anti-refugee BSW (Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance).

Unlike pseudo-left tendencies such as Marx21 (previously part of the International Socialist Tendency), the SAV (previously part of the Committee for a Workers International) or the Pabloites and Morenoites, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei has regarded the Left Party as an opponent of socialism and the working class from the outset. This is now openly visible. A party that takes such an aggressive stand on the side of imperialist great power politics has nothing progressive about it but is a thoroughly pro-imperialist force.

The Left Party and the return of German militarism

This has become increasingly clear, especially over the last 12 years. In 2013, the Left Party, with its former foreign policy spokesperson Stefan Liebich, was directly involved in drafting the infamous strategy paper “Neue Macht—Neue Verantwortung” (New Power—New Responsibility). The paper was the blueprint for Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign and power politics, which the then Foreign Minister and current Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), his predecessor Joachim Gauck and the then Defence Minister and current EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) publicly announced at the Munich Security Conference in early 2014.

When Washington and Berlin, supported by fascist forces such as the Svoboda party and the Right Sector, organised a coup in Ukraine in February 2014 in order to install an anti-Russian regime there, this was supported by the Left Party. Above all, the pseudo-left groups within and around the party celebrated the right-wing coup as a “democratic

revolution.”

At the same time, the Left Party backed the aggressive foreign policy of the then CDU/SPD grand coalition. After NATO’s war in Libya, it also supported the regime change war in Syria and the intervention of German imperialism in the Middle East.

In April 2014, several Left Party members of the Bundestag voted in favour of sending a German frigate to the Mediterranean to destroy Syrian chemical weapons. And in October 2014, 14 leading Left Party politicians published an appeal titled “Save Kobane!” calling on the German government to launch a massive military intervention against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

In early 2015, the then chairman of the Left Party, Bernd Riexinger, for example, “explicitly welcomed the diplomatic offensive by Chancellor Merkel and French President Hollande.” After Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine, which NATO consciously provoked by systematically encircling Russia, Merkel herself admitted that the Minsk Agreement served to gain time to rearm Ukraine.

The Left Party’s support for the current escalation of the war by the European NATO powers against Russia is the continuation of this policy. Shortly after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the Left Party closed ranks with the federal government and NATO. Since then, it has repeatedly called for a tightening of sanctions against Russia and even the deployment of German soldiers to Ukraine. It explicitly backs Western arms deliveries, and the youth wing of the Left Party even called for donations for the Ukrainian army, which is riddled with right-wing extremists.

The Left Party plays the same reactionary role in its support for the genocide against the Palestinians. It shares political responsibility for the deaths of tens of thousands of mostly women and children and the near-total destruction of Gaza and large parts of Lebanon. Immediately after the start of the Israeli campaign of annihilation in October 2023, a pro-Israeli resolution from the then governing coalition parties, SPD/Greens/Liberal Democrats (FDP), and the opposition CDU was passed in the Bundestag with the votes of all (!) of the Left Party’s MPs. The party’s then parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch celebrated the motion as a “contribution by Germany in the fight against terror.”

Heidi Reichinnek, the lead candidate of the Left Party in the federal election campaign, also aggressively backed the genocide in Gaza. In a speech in the Bundestag on March 12, 2024, she repeated the official atrocity propaganda of the “massacre by Hamas,” whose “brutal violence against children and sexualised violence against women” could only be “compared to a few events.” She said that Hamas “are not freedom fighters, but terrorists who must be disarmed. We must all agree on this here.” Israel, she said, “of course has the right to defend itself.”

Die Linke: A party of social counterrevolution

The attempt of the Left Party to present itself as a “peace party” despite this record is just as dishonest as its phrases about “social justice” and “democratic rights.” In fact, wherever it governs or has governed at the state level with the SPD and Greens—the parties that introduced the Hartz IV labour market “reforms” introducing a massive low-wage sector, and waged war—it aggressively enforces a policy of social austerity, mass deportations of refugees and stepping up the repressive powers of the state.

This has been most evident in the capital Berlin. Between 2002 and 2011, the Left Party and its predecessor, the PDS, together with the SPD and its right-wing extremist finance senator Thilo Sarrazin, had organised

severe social cuts and attacks. Among other things, public sector wages were cut by 10 percent, jobs were cut on a massive scale, and municipal housing was sold off to real estate speculators.

These policies were then intensified by the Left Party between 2016 and 2021 in alliance with the SPD and Greens. In Berlin, new deportation camps for refugees were set up, deportations increased and the powers and equipping of the police, who repeatedly brutally cracked down on protests, massively escalated.

The Left Party is organising similar attacks in all federal states where it is in government. In Bremen, governed by an SPD-Left Party-Green coalition, the Left Party Health Senator (state minister) Claudia Bernhard is playing a key role in implementing the reactionary hospital reforms of federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) and closing down hospitals.

In Thuringia, the only Left Party state premier to date, Bodo Ramelow boasted, even before taking office in 2014, he would be more investor-friendly than the CDU. What followed was one of the most right-wing state governments in the history of post-war Germany, characterised by a particularly large number of brutal deportations, the reckless “herd immunity” mass infection of the population during the pandemic, the expansion of the state surveillance and repression apparatus and the strengthening of the fascist AfD.

In 2020, Ramelow, who played a prominent role in the election campaign as the direct candidate of the “Mission Silberlocke” (Silver Locks Mission), helped AfD representative Michael Kaufmann to be elected to the office of vice president in the Thuringia state parliament. And in the parliamentary committees of the state parliament, the Left Party, together with the other parties, also helped AfD members to gain influential positions and worked closely with them. In Saxony, the Left Party also supports the integration of the AfD into the work of the CDU-SPD minority state government through regular “consultations.”

Thus, the Left Party is responsible in several ways for the rise of the far right, which it claims to be fighting. First, it has been centrally responsible for the social catastrophe that is driving many workers, especially in the eastern German states, to despair. Secondly, pursuing right-wing capitalist policies in the name of a “left” party is creating the political frustration that the AfD fascists can exploit. And thirdly, it is itself willing to make deals with the far-right and its supporters in the ruling class and implement an anti-refugee and anti-working class programme.

This role is not limited to Germany. In Greece, Syriza, the sister party of Die Linke, in alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks (ANEL), has enforced the brutal austerity dictates of the troika of the European Central Bank (ECB), the EU Commission and the International Monetary Fund. The Left Party actively supported this historic assault on the Greek working class. In early March 2015, it first voted in favour of the austerity dictates in the Bundestag and then defended Syriza’s treachery in implementing them.

The essentially counterrevolutionary character of the Left Party and the pseudo-left tendencies operating within or around it emerged particularly clearly in Egypt. Driven by the fear of social revolution, it supported the counterrevolutionary developments orchestrated by the Egyptian military and its imperialist backers after long-term dictator Hosni Mubarak was overthrown by mass struggles of the working class in early 2011.

The pseudo-left forces associated with the Left Party in Egypt played a key role in first directing the mass protests, which in 2013 also developed against Mubarak’s successor, Islamist President Mohamed Mursi, behind the military, and then in defending the generals’ brutal repression in the name of a “second revolution.”

The Left Party actively supported and defended these policies, which led to the establishment of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s bloody military dictatorship. After the military coup, a strategy paper of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, reprinted in the Left Party newspaper *Neues*

Deutschland, stated that it was now “about finding a way to introduce social justice in a way that the military leadership can live with.”

The Left Party’s demand at the time to come to terms with the military government in Egypt corresponds to its current line of working with Merz and the new federal government. It is precisely under conditions of enormous political crisis and a turn to the right by the ruling class that the thoroughly reactionary and anti-working class character of the Left Party is most sharply revealed.

During the 2008 financial crisis, the Left Party enabled the adoption of the €500 billion bank rescue package by agreeing to the emergency procedures. It played the same role during the pandemic, when it again supported massive handouts to the big corporations and banks. And now, the Left Party is standing at the ready to enable the largest German rearmament spending since Hitler, and to control and suppress the growing resistance to it.

There is only one way to stop this development. Workers and young people who want to fight fascism and war and the associated policy of social devastation must politically settle accounts with the Left Party and its pseudo-left environs and build the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. As the German section of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, the SGP is the only party that confronts the right-wing conspiracy of war, and arms the growing opposition among workers and youth with a socialist strategy and perspective.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact