

How Germany's Left Party paved the way for Friedrich Merz to become chancellor

Johannes Stern
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Following its electoral success in the Bundestag (Federal Parliament) election, the Left Party is attempting to present itself as a social, anti-fascist and anti-militarist organisation at its party conference in Chemnitz, which began Friday. In its main motion entitled “We are the hope,” the party describes itself as a “driving political force for such a solidarity-based alternative.” The Left Party “plays a central role in the protest against rearmament, social spending cuts, climate destruction and the shift to the right” and pursues the goal of “further developing itself as a socialist membership party.”

These are all outright lies. Young workers and students who want to fight against fascism, militarism and social cuts and who voted for the Left Party in the Bundestag election are faced with fundamental historical and political tasks. Above all, they must develop a correct understanding of the role of the Left Party. It does not represent their interests and is not a left-wing or even a socialist party. In fact, it plays a central role in social spending cuts and the deportation of refugees and also agrees in all essentials with the government's policy on the issue of war.

This was particularly evident in the election of Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) as the new federal chancellor in the second round of voting in parliament a few days ago. The Left Party's support was decisive in enabling Merz to take office—a politician who openly works with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) on key issues and supports the interests of finance capital, aggressive militarism and an authoritarian state like almost no other German politician.

After Merz failed in the first round of voting in parliament, this triggered feverish nervousness among all Bundestag parties. An open political crisis was brewing that threatened to shake the stability of German and European capitalism and imperialism. To prevent this, the parliamentary fractions agreed on the same day to hold a second round of voting—with the consent of the Left Party, whose deputies' votes were needed to reach the two-thirds majority necessary to adjust parliamentary rules so the second vote could go ahead.

Shortly before the second vote, the notoriously right-wing head of the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) parliamentary fraction, Jens Spahn, bluntly explained what was at stake. The whole of Europe, perhaps even the whole world, was watching this election, he said, because Germany is needed. He then

thanked everyone who had made a second round of voting possible so quickly—above all the Left Party. Its leaders had assured Merz immediately after the failed first vote that they would make a second election possible.

Bodo Ramelow, former minister president of Thuringia and current vice president of the Bundestag, assured: “As the Left Party, we will also help to ensure that the two-thirds majority is achieved.” And after the election, he praised the decision with the words: “We did not elect Friedrich Merz. But we made the ballot possible in order to protect democracy.”

Former parliamentary fraction leader Dietmar Bartsch celebrated his party's statesmanlike role with the words: “Chaos was prevented today!”

In summary: In a historic moment of political instability, the Left Party played the key role in making Merz's chancellorship possible and paving the way for his extreme right-wing government. Its reaction to its surprising electoral success in the recent federal election—it achieved the best result of all parties among voters under the age of 25 with 25 percent of the vote—was a sharp lurch to the right.

The Merz government is undoubtedly the most reactionary and anti-working class government since the fall of the Nazi regime 80 years ago. Its central aim is to remove the last restrictions imposed on German militarism as a result of its unprecedented crimes in the Second World War. With the adoption of war credits amounting to €1 trillion, it has already laid the foundations for a massive military build-up.

The new coalition of the conservative CDU and CSU, and Social Democrats (SPD) is not only rearming like Hitler once did—it is also preparing an unprecedented austerity programme and is pushing ahead with the establishment of an authoritarian police state. This is intended to secure the funds for rearmament and suppress growing resistance among the population. Domestically, it is adopting the refugee policy of the fascist AfD and opening the door to its nationalistically charged “cultural policy.”

This did not stop party chairwoman Ines Schwerdtner from appealing to Merz for permanent close cooperation with the new government immediately after his election as chancellor. “I expect the CDU/CSU to get in touch not only when the house is on fire, but also for other political decisions when a

two-thirds majority is required,” she declared.

The significance of such a statement is unmistakable. The Left Party sees itself as part of the new government and is ready to push through its right-wing program in the face of enormous popular opposition.

According to a Deutschlandtrend poll published on Wednesday, the new coalition is even more unpopular than the previous government, which included the SPD, Greens, and Free Democrats. According to the poll, only a third of the population think Merz is a good choice for chancellor. Only 4 percent of respondents think the new government is “very good,” 38 percent think it is “good,” 29 percent think it is “less good” and 24 percent think it is “bad.”

The Left Party’s solidarity with Merz and his hated government is no mere coincidence. It is a direct result of its social and political orientation. It is a party of the state whose primary goal is to defend capitalism and the bourgeois order. In doing so, it is prepared to cooperate with openly right-wing and militaristic forces and help them impose their policies.

Just a few weeks before Merz’s election, the Left Party already approved war credits amounting to over €1 trillion in the Bundesrat (Federal Council)—the largest rearmament program since Hitler. The party’s support was not only voluntary, since their votes were not required to pass it, but was also politically justified by leading members. Party chairwoman Schwerdtner and lead candidate in the federal election Reichinnek repeatedly declared that they were not against rearmament, but merely wanted to help shape it efficiently.

At an event titled “Why did the Left Party agree to the rearmament madness?” the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) explained what lies behind the militaristic and essentially right-wing bourgeois agenda of the Left Party:

The militarism of the Left Party is ultimately not simply a product of its right-wing leaders, but is rooted in the party’s political and social orientation and history. ... It has always been a bourgeois organisation representing the interests of the state apparatus and wealthy middle classes.

We explained that its Stalinist predecessor organisation, the Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (SED/PDS), supported the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany and thus prepared the ground for the return of German militarism; and that wherever it governs or has governed together with the SPD and the Greens at the state level, it organises and enforces the most violent social spending attacks.

The Left Party’s argument that its support for Merz serves to “protect democracy” and fight against the AfD is also a fraud.

In fact, it is responsible for the rise of the far right in several ways.

Firstly, it has played a central role in causing the social catastrophe that is driving many workers into despair, especially in the eastern German states. Secondly, the fact that it is pursuing right-wing, capitalist policies in the name of a “left-wing” party creates the political frustration that the AfD fascists can exploit. And thirdly, the party is also prepared to make pacts with the extreme right and its supporters in the ruling class so they can put their anti-refugee and anti-worker program into practice. Its alliance with Merz is only the clearest expression of this to date.

Since its foundation, the Left Party has in fact played a central role in defusing crises in the political system and neutralising resistance to right-wing politics. It does not advocate a socialist transformation, but wants to “reform” capitalism—a project that leads to open cooperation with reaction under conditions of war, social polarisation and the strengthening of the state’s repressive apparatus.

In foreign policy, too, the Left Party supports German imperialism on all war fronts. This applies to the NATO war offensive against Russia in Ukraine as well as to Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians and the development of a German-European great power policy. When Gregor Gysi, the figurehead and founding father of the Left Party, opened the new Bundestag in his capacity as honorary president for his length of parliamentary service, he declared: “If the European Union really worked,” it could become “a kind of fourth world power alongside the US, China and Russia.”

All those who want to stop the rise of the fascists, militarism and the associated social spending cuts and who voted for the Left Party for this reason must settle political accounts with this party. Contrary to the claims of numerous pseudo-left tendencies within and around the Left Party, there is no “left-wing” of the party that can be reformed and no “base” that simply needs to rebel against the warmongers within its own party.

There is only one clear conclusion: Those who want to fight against war and fascism must consciously turn to an internationalist and socialist perspective and build the Socialist Equality Party, the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, as a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.



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