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Germany's Left Party approves military mission in Afghanistan

One month before Germany's federal elections, the Left Party is swinging towards open support for imperialist military operations by the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). On Wednesday, for the first time, the parliamentary group did not reject a mission of the Bundeswehr by a majority but abstained from voting and made no secret of its agreement in principle. There were only differences over the concrete goals of the military action, but not over the mission itself.



Dietmar Bartsch defending the lefts party position at the German parliament

Five of the Left Party's parliamentary deputies—Klaus Ernst, Matthias Höhn, Alexander Neu, Helin Evrim Sommer and Kersten Steinke—even voted for the deployment of 600

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Bundeswehr soldiers throughout Afghan territory “to evacuate German nationals, international community personnel and designated persons from Afghanistan.” Seven voted against.

However, leading representatives of the party and parliamentary group made it clear that the 43 abstentions of its deputies also meant a vote in favour of the intervention. Group leader Dietmar Bartsch already declared at a press conference on Monday that his party was in favour of the Bundeswehr intervening militarily and saving “as many people as possible,” namely “all those who have committed themselves to Germany, to the Bundeswehr, to the police there.”

He repeated the same position in his speech in the Bundestag on Wednesday. He expressly thanked “all the forces of the Bundeswehr who are currently saving the lives of others at the risk of their lives.”

Party chair and lead candidate in the elections Janine Wissler also declared at a press conference on Tuesday that her party agreed with the military deployment. She justified her abstention only by saying that not enough local forces would be saved, so the deployment would not go far enough. “Of course, we are not against it and we do not oppose it, but we cannot agree to this kind of implementation—because too few people will be rescued because the words local forces do not even appear in the text of the mandate,” she explained.

The deputies who voted yes expressed themselves even more repulsively. In a statement, the defence policy spokesman of the Left Party, Matthias Höhn, justified his vote in favour by saying that Germany was in a situation where “military support is unavoidable.”

One of the federal spokespersons of the youth organisation Solid, Carla Büttner, supported Höhn. She said the obsessive pacifism disgusted her. “Nazi Germany wasn’t defeated with human chains and peace doves either, was it?” the politician declared, comparing the two decades long neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan to the Soviet Red Army’s fight against German imperialism.

The absurdity of these claims can hardly be surpassed. In Afghanistan, it is not a war against a fascist and imperialist country that is being waged. Nor was there a “war on

terror” or an attempt to “export democracy,” as Bartsch claimed in his speech. From the beginning, the Afghan war was a brutal imperialist campaign aimed at subjugating a completely impoverished and underdeveloped country with murder, torture, and terror to strengthen the geopolitical position of the Western powers.

The mission that has now been decided is also in no way about humanitarian considerations. On the contrary, the whole EU is being systematically sealed off against refugees from Afghanistan fleeing the humanitarian catastrophe created by the occupiers. Every land route leading to Europe is systematically shut off against refugees by fences and barbed wire, and the sea routes are controlled by patrol ships.

The military operation is about bringing out of the country some of those who have collaborated with the occupying regime, the so-called “local forces.” They are not selected based on humanitarian criteria but based on their usefulness. Above all, the aim is not to jeopardise cooperation with local forces in current and future operations, such as in Mali. So, this military deployment is about nothing other than making further war operations possible and more effective.

The Left Party’s approval of the military deployment and its pseudo-humanitarian justifications are therefore of great significance. Just as the Greens threw all their pacifist phrases overboard in 1998 by agreeing to the Yugoslav war and became ardent propagandists of military interventions, now the Left Party has crossed the Rubicon and discarded even its purely verbal criticism of war deployments.

This commitment to German militarism is in no way surprising. Leading representatives of the Left Party, such as Gregor Gysi and Dietmar Bartsch, have announced for years that they would approve of war missions. The party that organised the restoration of capitalism in the former East Germany and German reunification 30 years ago as the Stalinist party of state (SED) and its successor (PDS) has always had both feet in the camp of German imperialism.

When Germany’s ruling circles proclaimed the end of military restraint in 2014, the Left Party’s Stefan Liebich was involved in drafting the blueprint for it, the strategy paper “New Power—New Responsibility.” In April of the same year, five of the party’s

deputies voted for a German military intervention for the first time, namely the deployment of the German navy to destroy Syrian chemical weapons.

Then, in October 2014, twelve of its Bundestag members called on the German government not only to supply weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga in northern Iraq but to intervene militarily on a massive scale in Syria and Iraq to fight ISIS. Two years earlier, prominent party representatives had mobilised for the proxy war of Islamic militias against the Syrian government.

In this respect, there could be no doubt about the militaristic orientation of the Left Party. But until now, at least in words, it had rejected militarism and voted against Bundeswehr missions in the Bundestag. The fact that the party now no longer rejects such deployments in the Bundestag, although its votes do not matter in the outcome, is closely linked to the intensification of the class struggle.

The party is responding to the growing opposition to social inequality and the return of German militarism. The debacle in Afghanistan has brought home to millions the criminal nature of the war. The fact that even the highly equipped Afghan army was not prepared to defend the puppet regime in Kabul shows how hated the occupation was, based on brutal warlords and criminal methods.

In this situation, the Left Party seeks to ensure that the massive popular rejection of war operations finds no expression in official policy. The more openly and brutally the character of militarism becomes visible, the closer the Left Party closes ranks with all other parties to suppress any opposition.

This underlines the importance of the election campaign of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP). The SGP opposes German militarism and gives voice and a socialist perspective to the widespread opposition to it. Against the all-party coalition of war, it counterposes the mobilisation of the international working class. We call on all those who oppose war to vote SGP on 26 September and actively support our electoral campaign.

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