



DIE LINKE.

History

On 16 June, 2007 the German party DIE LINKE (THE LEFT) was founded by a merger of the Left Party.PDS and the Party of Labour and Social Justice (WASG). The two parties with different backgrounds but similar aspirations needed two years to form an all-German alternative left party. DIE LINKE is the only force in parliament fighting consistently for social justice, democracy and peace.

The Left Party.PDS was the result of a deep renewal after 1989 of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party of the GDR. From the very beginning it distanced itself from that party's theory and practice of overall control, its vanguard ambitions, its mistakes and undemocratic policy. This was also made clear by changing its name to Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Over the years the PDS gained broad acceptance as a party working for the daily needs of the people especially in the East of Germany.

Infuriated about the dismantling of the German welfare state by the Schroeder government of Greens and Social Democrats, trade unionists, left-wing social democrats, but also supporters of Christian social teachings founded the Election Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) as an association that was transformed in 2005 to a political party. It was much stronger in the West than in the East of Germany. When in May 2005 it made its first emergence in regional elections in the West German Land of North-Rhine Westphalia, it got 2.2% of the vote – a respectable success.



Unification

The early national elections of 2005 brought the left an unexpected chance. The PDS changed its name to Left Party.PDS and opened its candidates' lists for members of the WASG. The two parties fought a joint election campaign widely welcomed by the people. As a result they got 8.7% of the vote. They formed a common parliamentary group named DIE LINKE which has been serving since as an engine of the unification process.

But the two parties were still separate organisations. In the following months they concentrated on intense preparations for the foundation of an all-German left party. The process was driven forward in a parallel manner on the national and regional levels. In May, 2007 the new coalition for the first time managed to enter a Lander parliament (Landtag) in a federal state of the West. In Bremen WASG and Left Party scored of 8.4% of the vote.

When members' referenda were held in both parties, 96.6% of the Left Party.PDS and 83.9% of the WASG members voted in favour of the merger. Finally, on 16 June, 2007 in Berlin the new party DIE LINKE was founded.



Structure

At present DIE LINKE has 72.000 members organised in 16 Lander and 326 county associations. The women's share among the members is the highest of all parties in Germany. In the first month after its foundation alone, more than 3.000 new members joined the party.

DIE LINKE is led by two chairmen: Lothar Bisky and Oskar Lafontaine. They have three women and one man as vice chairpersons. Together with six more Executive Board members they form the Acting Executive. The party's Executive Board has 44 members, 22 from each founding party. The executive committees at all levels are elected in a democratic way with the number of women having to be not less than 50 percent.

DIE LINKE is represented by seven members in the European Parliament, by 53 MPs in the Bundestag, by 161 deputies in the Landtags of German federal states and about 5.500 deputies in cities, towns and municipalities. 179 elected mayors of towns and villages are members of DIE LINKE. The party has its groups of deputies in all East German Landtags and in the Bremen parliament as well as one deputy in the Landtag of Saarland. Entering more Lander parliaments in the West is one of its most important goals. The federal state of Berlin is ruled by a coalition of DIE LINKE and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

DIE LINKE is a pluralistic party. Its members are allowed according to their interests to join in platforms, tendencies or working groups, inspiring the work of the whole party. Besides, DIE LINKE has a youth organisation called "Linksjugend [solid]" and a students' association named DIE LINKE.SDS.

DIE LINKE is a member of the Party of the European Left (EL) initiated among others by the PDS and founded in Rome in May, 2004. Today, the EL has 27 member parties coming from 21 countries.



The Karl Liebknecht House

The Karl Liebknecht House at Rosa Luxemburg Square in Berlin is the headquarters of DIE LINKE, the site of the party's Executive Board. Originally erected as a factory building in 1912, it has witnessed nearly one hundred years of German history. It was given its name in 1926 being the site of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). When Hitler came to power in 1933 the house was confiscated by the Nazis. After WW II the badly damaged building was given back to the KPD and went over in 1946 to the newly founded SED, which took care of its reconstruction. Since 1977 it is on the state list of protected historical sites. In 1990 the PDS moved in and was confirmed after five years to be the rightful owner.

»By working all day people should be able to earn their living«

Oskar Lafontaine, Party Chairman

A full-time job for a wage too small to earn one's bread and butter is a sad reality for many workers in Germany. Together with trade unionists and social movements' activists the members of DIE LINKE are fighting for a minimum wage guaranteed by law. In April, 2006 the then Left Party.PDS, the WASG and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE in the German Bundestag started a campaign for a minimum wage of 8 Euros per hour.

After its foundation DIE LINKE is joining with creative ideas: In a symbolic action referring to a popular German saying party members are handing out apples and cooked eggs in market places, asking the customers who would be willing to work for a wage worth an apple and an egg? Regional and municipal deputies are handing out symbolic "minimum wage packets" to hairdressers, a badly paid profession, to discuss the problem with them. During alternative city excursions businesses, workshops and factories known for their poor wages are visited. The campaign is showing first effects. The federal government can no longer avoid the issue.



»We have to find a way out of the spiral of violence.«

Gregor Gysi, Chairman of the Parliamentary Group DIE LINKE

The use of German troops in Afghanistan is impeding humanitarian action, needed much more urgently in that country than Tornado aircraft and other weaponry. Until now the German government has spent 2 Billion Euros on war in Afghanistan and only 600 Million for non-military purposes. Instead, the money should be mainly used for civil projects. Together with the peace movement DIE LINKE is organising demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of the German Bundeswehr from Afghanistan, collecting signatures, spreading background information.



»As for direct democracy, Germany is still a developing country in the EU.«

Petra Pau, Vice-President of Parliament

In the name of the "fight against terrorism" the government is justifying massive cuts into basic freedom rights. We want Germany to be a democratic society in all respects. Therefore, we are demanding the democratic control of economic power, referenda also on the national level and a lowering of voting age to 16 years. All actions of the state must be put under democratic control. Files and data of public administration should be accessible for everybody. Supervision by the state is to be limited to the absolutely necessary. Personal data are to be protected.



»The G8 is an outdated close power circle.«

Katja Kipping, Vice Party Chairperson

The G8 is posing as a self-appointed world government without responsibility, instead of fighting climate change, global poverty and HIV/AIDS. 80.000 demonstrators declared their protest during the recent G8 summit in Germany. "Democracy is something different!" Thousands of members of DIE LINKE took part in the anti-summit actions together with social movements, politicians and artists from all over the world. DIE LINKE is participating in the actions of the social movements to change the balance of forces, to create more space for left-wing policies.

»This pension theft must be stopped!«

Lothar Bisky, Party Chairman

In Germany, old age means for many people poverty and fear for one's existence, as pensions are on the lowest level among the OECD countries. Even people having a life long paid their insurance premiums are not sure to receive an official pension above the poverty line. In many cases the now demanded additional private provision is impossible. Old age pensioners must be preserved the chance to take part in social life. DIE LINKE is acting and presenting alternative proposals for a pension law on the basis of solidarity, protecting from poverty in old age.



»The right of education must be written into the Basic Law!«

Sophie Dieckmann, Executive Board Member

Knowledge is the basis of equal chances. Access to education must not depend on the social background and parents' money. DIE LINKE is striving for a socially just education system giving everybody equal chances: from Kindergarten, guaranteed apprenticeship to university studies free of charge. In a modern system children of all origins instead of being early selected should be learning together for a much longer time.



»Climate protection is not a question of party politics, but of the survival of mankind.«

Wolfgang Methling, Executive Board Member

Rising energy prices and unfair conditions of access to electricity and gas distribution systems are showing the existence of uncontrolled economic power in Germany. Climate change and environment destruction have resulted from lacking foresight of the politicians in charge. DIE LINKE is demanding a change of policies in favour of renewable energies, socially just energy prices, the nationalisation of the distribution systems, the support of environmentally friendly transport, and a drastic reduction of CO₂ emissions. Without a thrifty and sustainable use of natural resources we are robbing future generations their basis of life!



»Everybody is to have the right to live in dignity.«

Heidi Scharf, Executive Board Member

The "Hartz"-laws (named after its inventor and drastically worsening the conditions for the long-time unemployed) are the most brutal form of destruction of the welfare state in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. The number of the people concerned has constantly risen and is now about 7.4 Million. Only the better paid and the big companies are benefiting from the current economic upswing, while 17% of the children in Germany are living in poverty. DIE LINKE demands to cancel the Hartz laws. Until then, the allowances must be increased considerably.

Apart from the said above, DIE LINKE is engaged in all relevant spheres of politics. Important issues in such fields as privatisation, the needs of handicapped people or culture are discussed in public conferences.



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