

German parliament votes for military operations in Kosovo

The Greens' fall from grace

Ulrich Rippert, Justus Leicht
21 October 1998

Last Friday the outgoing German parliament was convened in Bonn for a special session to vote on the activation order for NATO air attacks on Serbia. The parliamentary factions of the incoming government coalition (Social Democrats and Greens) voted by great majorities in favour of German participation in any such operations. The decision had been prepared in advance at a meeting between the incoming Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the designated foreign minister Joseph Fischer (Greens) on the one side, and outgoing Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his foreign and defence ministers on the other. Twenty-nine Green MPs voted 'yes,' nine voted against, and eight abstained.

Opportunism, your colour is green! If medals were awarded for lack of character and backbone, then leading Green politicians would take first place. Has there ever been a party which cast aside all of its earlier declarations and decisions even before entering the government?

Who can still recall the endless resolutions and debates in which the Greens upheld their 'fundamentally pacifist views' and pledged themselves to non-violence? 'Make peace without weapons!' 'UN blue helmets, yes! NATO green helmets, no!' 'Preserve peace, but not by military force!', etc., etc. Their party programme, decided at Magdeburg in March of this year, still said explicitly: 'The Greens will not support militarily enforced peace or combat operations.'

And now?

Hardly have the Greens put their foot on the threshold of power and all their fine words are revealed as pure bluffing.

With their vote in parliament last week, Joschka Fischer and his fellow Green ministers-in-waiting have given the OK for German participation in NATO air attacks on Serbia. Without further ado, they have agreed to what they recently said was impermissible: military action without a proper UN mandate.

Even conservative politicians such as Christian Democratic Union (CDU) deputy Willy Wimmer, a former state secretary in the Ministry of Defence, expressed sharp criticism about the lack of a UN mandate. Wimmer talked of an 'abyss in international law,' and warned of creating 'a precedent, which we will all soon remember with horror.' Klaus Kinkel, the outgoing Foreign Minister, also said he believed there was 'insufficient' UN support for the NATO decision.

However, he 'heaved to', as the *Frankfurter Rundschau* wrote October 15, when Chancellor-elect Schröder, Social Democratic Party (SPD) general secretary and security expert Günther

Verheugen and Joschka Fischer signalled their support for the NATO decision following discussions in Washington.

The question of a UN mandate has far-reaching significance. For some time the Clinton administration has been trying to get around the Russian and Chinese veto on the UN Security Council. Russia has used its veto to block NATO's Balkan strategy so as to preserve at least a minimum of the power it enjoyed during the Cold War. By acting without explicit UN backing, NATO has, so to speak, granted itself permission to intervene. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, this has 'definitively redefined the role of the Atlantic alliance following the end of the Cold War'.

Without discussing a single one of these questions, let alone thinking them through, Fischer voted for German participation in the NATO operation. He justified his position with the most superficial of arguments regarding 'humanitarian aid' and 'minimising the plight of refugees facing the coming winter'.

The majority of the Greens' deputies also signalled their agreement. Ludger Volmer, a member of the Greens executive committee who is seeking a state secretary's post, said the expected abstentions were for 'legal reasons', due to the lack of a UN mandate, but they were 'not in any way politically based'. Volmer had previously demonstrated his readiness to compromise when he merely abstained in a vote regarding the deployment of SFOR (the UN/NATO Stabilisation Force).

The Greens' defence spokesperson, Angelika Beer, who counts herself on the left wing of the party, said in all earnestness that an affirmative Green vote would remain an 'exception'. She insisted it would not influence the red-green administration's future foreign or defence policy.

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic gave way to military pressure at the last minute, but that does not alter the fact that NATO's attack plans received support from the SPD and the Greens. The activation order gave General Clarke, Commander-in-Chief of NATO troops in Europe, the authority to launch an attack at any time after the Saturday deadline expired.

The NATO mobilisation involves 430 aeroplanes, more than half of which are fighter aircraft. The assault force also includes more than a dozen B2 and F117 American stealth bombers. Six B52 bombers capable of delivering up to 20 cruise missiles were dispatched to Britain. Social democratic governments in London, Paris and the Hague have agreed to provide up to 20 aircraft each.

Both the outgoing and incoming German governments decided to place 14 Luftwaffe Tornados and 500 Bundeswehr (army)

servicemen under NATO command. NATO's AWACS planes stationed in Germany are primarily staffed by Bundeswehr officers, and would play a crucial role in any attack. These aircraft are flying command centres that circle above the battlefield to direct air attacks. The Bundeswehr has thus taken on a very important role in NATO's war plans.

However, it is not only aircraft which would be employed in an attack. Cruise missiles could also be fired from NATO aircraft carriers, warships and submarines. The targets have long since been programmed into the warheads, according to military experts, who report that a dress rehearsal for the Kosovo mission was held in August in Albania.

Army soldiers may also be deployed. Last Monday the outgoing Minister of Defence, Volker Rühe, indicated that the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was considering sending forces to protect the 2,000-strong observer corps in Kosovo, who are only lightly armed.

This concentrated military mobilisation is being conducted under the cover of a 'humanitarian intervention'. No one has yet explained how the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Kosovo are to be helped by dropping bombs and rockets on their destitute country, with their villages and antiquated industrial facilities attacked from the air by the most modern military hardware.

In the past the Greens stressed that politicians should never lose sight of the laws of negotiation, and that the 'freely elected parliament' must decide all military options. Joschka Fischer, the future Foreign Minister, has agreed to the biggest military attack, and the old parliament has been convened in a special sitting with just one purpose, to sanction in advance the actions of the military.

Trying to disguise the opportunism of the Greens, Fischer said, 'We confronted a situation which we could not influence but which we now have to deal with.' Until the new parliament meets, the future coalition is not the 'subject of government but its object,' Fischer claimed.

What hypocrisy! Every government inherits the burdens of its predecessor, but what forces it to continue the same policies? With the switch from the opposition to the government benches, the Greens are determined to discard all their previous beliefs and adapt to the 'political necessities' with the least resistance possible. Ever since election night, Fischer has continually stressed that a Green Foreign Minister must personify 'continuity in representing German interests'.

Die Zeit, the influential weekly newspaper edited by former SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, writes, 'Anyone who wants to observe the rapid process of transformation of Green opposition politicians into statesmen will be satisfied by what is happening in Bonn.' The paper continues, 'the fact the SPD and Greens have to share political responsibility for what has, formally, been decided by the outgoing government provides the Greens, above all, with a smooth transition into their new role.'

Another point about 'humanitarian aid': When the fighting in Kosovo escalated at the end of February, the Greens demanded in the federal parliament a halt to the deportation of Albanian Kosovans from Germany. However, not a single red-green state parliament has implemented such a ban, despite reports that Albanian refugees were killed shortly after their deportation to

Kosovo.

Amongst the refugees in Kosovo are also many Serbs, who comprise some 10 percent of the region's population. Thousands have been forced to flee by Albanian nationalists. For many this is their second exodus. Milosevic forced them to settle in Kosovo after they had been driven from their original homes in the Krajina and western Bosnia as a result of NATO air attacks in 1995. These bombings could with justice be characterised as the most extensive example of 'ethnic cleansing' in the Bosnian war.

The German government, which now tries to play the role of saviour of the Albanian Kosovans, bears the main responsibility for the bloody conflicts that have claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians throughout the Balkans in recent years. After German reunification in 1990, the government chose the Balkans as the first area to exercise its new role as a would-be world power. Its support for the separatist movements in Slovenia and Croatia set off the process of civil war which has found a new climax in Kosovo.

At all of the decisive turning points, the Greens supported this policy. They share responsibility for it. While originally criticising NATO and rejecting any use of the German armed forces, they supported the stationing of UN troops and defended the NATO air attacks three years ago as the 'logical and terrible consequence of the latest massacres of civilian Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs' (Greens Executive Committee statement, August 30, 1995).

They also voted for the dispatch of German troops as part of the 60,000-strong NATO force sent to Bosnia to impose the Dayton accords.

While Fischer never tires of stressing the continuity his term as foreign minister will represent, he fails to see the significant break that it really is. From Gustav Stresemann, foreign minister in the Weimar Republic, to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who held the office at the time of German unification, the ministry had a tried and tested politician or high-ranking diplomat at its head. Even the outgoing minister, the colourless Klaus Kinkel, had been a top-level government official before he took office.

Joschka Fischer, who has not seriously studied a single social or historical problem, is characterised above all by political ignorance. His appointment is an expression of the political crisis and disorientation that prevail within the ruling circles of Germany.

The old, traditional strategies of the post-war period no longer work. New ones do not yet exist, and the attempts to establish a German *weltpolitik* based on Europe are met by difficulties at every turn. This transitional period, in which various new paths will be tested against one another, calls for a politician who is, above all, without any principles. For the German bourgeoisie, what makes the Greens so interesting is their lack of any political backbone. No other party can be so easily manipulated and utilised to suit any purpose.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact