

The role of the German government in the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan

Ute Reissner

25 February 1999

Four months ago, when the coalition of Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens took office in Bonn, Joschka Fischer, the Green party foreign minister, stated that there was no such thing as "Green foreign policy," but only "German foreign policy".

The behind-the-scenes intrigues by which Abdullah Ocalan was arrested and abducted to Turkey have made clear how deadly serious this statement was.

In the events leading up to the arrest, the German government played a key role. The Green foreign minister bears the main responsibility for the delivery of the Kurdish leader to his Turkish hangmen.

The German government had continually indicated to the PKK leadership that it was ready to work together to find a solution to the Kurdish problem. Officials in Bonn announced that the German government would take the lead in moving an initiative within the European council in the interests of the Kurds. But at the decisive moment the government denied Ocalan asylum, and thereby gave the signal that was to be followed by all other European governments. If ever the word "betrayal" was applicable, it was here.

In the past, delegations of Social Democrats and Greens had travelled to Turkey and Kurdistan. They drew attention to the war of destruction undertaken by the Turkish government against the Kurdish people and denounced the support given for this repression by the previous German government of Helmut Kohl. Here are just a few examples:

When in October 1992 some 20,000 Turkish soldiers marched into northern Iraq to hunt down the PKK, the SPD and the Greens protested in the German parliament against the massacre of the civilian population and demanded an immediate halt to the delivery of weapons from Germany to the Turkish government. They denounced the 580 million German marks which flowed into Turkey in the form of weapons sales in the 1980s and condemned the use against the Kurds of idle military hardware from the National Peoples Army (NVA) of the former East Germany.

On December 18, 1992 the present German environment minister, Jürgen Trittin, demanded in the upper house of parliament an end to the deportation of Kurdish refugees after the TV program "Monitor" documented the use in the Kurdish region of German grenades (type M438 X, produced in Liebenau, Germany) and NVA tanks.

"It is well known that under the pretext of fighting the PKK the Turkish government has allowed a massacre of the Kurdish civilian population to take place," Trittin stated.

After a four-day visit to Kurdish communities in Turkey, a leading Green spokeswoman, Angelika Beer, declared in an official party press release:

"The German Republic is a war party.... It is not a spectator to the war in Turkey--that would be bad enough--but is actively participating in the form of regular military co-operation and arming of the Turkish military....

"We call upon the German government:

"Immediately make public and end in a demonstrable manner all co-

operation with the Turkish government in the realm of NATO support, armaments support, support and training of secret police as well as collaboration at the level of Interpol;

"To declare an immediate halt to the deportation of all Kurds in Germany;

"To freeze economic collaboration--in particular the German-Turkish co-operation Council--until Turkey demonstrably respects human rights."

In 1994 the "Network Peace Co-operation", with substantial participation by the Greens, put the following demands to the government:

"For the calling of an international conference of Kurds, as soon as possible ... on the basis of the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people in Turkey....

"For an end to every form of military and police collaboration, as well as economic and political support, for Turkey, and the imposition of an immediate armaments embargo within NATO."

Even the SPD fraction in the German parliament, which in its "Principles of Social Democratic Policy toward the Kurds" of February 1994 clearly differentiated itself from the PKK, declared unequivocally that the Kurds constitute an oppressed people in the Middle East, and stated:

"The intensification of the acts of state violence leads to increasing numbers of peaceable Kurds being driven into the arms of the PKK. It must be doubted whether Turkey can resolve the problem of the PKK through an intensification of the Anti-Terror laws."

In response to a statement of the PKK chairman in 1995 announcing an armistice, representatives of the SPD and Greens responded with renewed calls to "use the opportunity" and seek a negotiated settlement.

On January 18, 1996 the European parliament, in a "Resolution on the Situation in Turkey and the Offer of an Armistice by the PKK", called upon "all affected parties in Turkey to seize the present opportunity to investigate means and ways to introduce a national dialogue, through which it would be possible to find a political and peaceful resolution of the problems in the southeast of the country".

The European parliament took this step in view of specific evidence of numerous incidents of abuse of human rights by the Turkish authorities, including the arrest of deputies friendly to the cause of the Kurds, and having acknowledged its "shock over the revolting pictures published by the European press of Turkish soldiers swinging the heads of beheaded Kurds".

Just over seven months ago, at the beginning of July 1998, a conference of the Socialist International in Vienna attended by social democratic deputies of the European parliament declared in favour of a "Solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey" through a "direct dialogue between the representatives of the Turkish authorities and representatives of the Kurds in Turkey".

Under the heading "On the way to Europe--the Future of the Kurdish Question for Turkey and its Neighbours", the conference demanded in Point 20 of its closing statement that: "the EU grasp the international and

political initiative, to demand and make possible the creation of an atmosphere in which a constructive dialogue can take place".

However, no sooner was the question concretely posed, than the European social democrats and the Greens made a turnaround of 180 degrees.

What had changed? Certainly there was no easing in recent months of the persecution and repression of the Kurds. Quite the opposite. And with regard to the PKK, Ocalan himself made concessions to the Europeans on every point, and promised to fulfil practically all of the demands made upon him.

"Europe demanded an armistice by the PKK, and a one-sided armistice was declared for the 1st of September 1998. Europe demanded recognition of the indivisibility of Turkey, and according to the Seven Point Plan and many statements of the PKK chairman, this demand was also met," declared a statement of the Kurdistan Information Centre in Cologne on February 17.

The armistice declaration of the PKK of August 28, 1998 began with the words: "For a considerable time the European parliament and some peace initiatives in Turkey have expected the PKK to make the first moves for a political solution. Bound up with this are the hopes for a positive result. This position is encouraging."

Following his arrival in Rome on November 12, 1998, Ocalan appealed in a press statement to the Italian and German governments to accept him and allow him to stand before an international court of justice, where the question of the Kurds could be dealt with. At the end of November the press reported that at a meeting between the prime minister of Italy, Massimo D'Alema, and the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, in Bonn there was talk of such an international court.

The European spokesman for the PKK, Kani Yilmaz, quoted his general secretary in a press conference on November 14 in Rome with the words: "I demand that clarity be immediately established over my political status. Italy should not use Germany as a pretext if it sees any obstacles to awarding me such a status." Yilmaz went on to say, "The PKK chairman said that in such a case it should be considered whether to go Germany."

One would think Ocalan could go no further in humiliating himself. But even so, the PKK leader was stabbed in the back. The hesitations and manoeuvring of the Italian, German, Dutch, Belgian and Greek governments created the conditions whereby on February 15 Ocalan was kidnapped from the Greek embassy in Nairobi, Kenya and abducted to Ankara.

In the process the Kurdish people have been declared fair game for the Turkish army. An unprecedented wave of arrests has taken place in the towns and villages of Turkey. In Istanbul alone, according to the Turkish human rights organisation IHD, at least 400 members of the legal pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party have been arrested. The monstrous campaign of chauvinism unleashed in Turkey following Ocalan's arrest speaks volumes. For days the PKK chairman was shown on television gagged and bound.

If there were and remain today any sincere advocates of the Kurds in the Green party, they would have to be enraged over the role of Foreign Minister Fischer. The admittance of Ocalan into Germany would have prevented this renewed outbreak of state terror. If innocent women and children are massacred now in Kurdish villages, a large part of the responsibility lies with the leading politicians of the Greens.

The previous Christian Democratic governments made a policy of repeatedly pulling the question of human rights and the Kurdish question out of the hat when they wanted to put pressure on Turkey. They would use it as a lever to ensure their own influence in the region, and then drop the issue as quickly as they had raised it.

It is clear that Fischer pursues the same policy. As he said, "There is no Green foreign policy, only a German foreign policy."

German foreign policy has traditionally used the Kurdish question to

advance its own interests. But bearing this in mind, the issue is more than a form of diplomatic security or a means of exerting pressure in the relations between the imperialist states. It is a very real historical problem, which bears within it an enormously explosive social force.

The war in the Kurdish areas of Turkey is closely linked to the increasingly brutal oppression of the Turkish workers and impoverished masses. A profound social crisis, expressed in numerous government crises and points of political conflict, is seething throughout the Middle East. The working class has grown into a powerful social force. The Kurds themselves are no longer a backward, naïve, peasant nation which can easily be taken for a ride. Millions of Kurds are today living in exile, in industrialised centres of the world.

To respect Ocalan's right of asylum would have meant drawing this mesh of historical and social contradictions to Europe. This would no longer have been a question of mere diplomatic intrigues. It would have meant, irrespective of Ocalan's own concessions, standing up for the justified wishes and demands of millions of oppressed people. For this task the valiant Greens lacked the courage. As for the Social Democrats, their perfidy goes without saying.

The two-faced character of German policy up to now, i.e., to arm Turkey on the one hand and, on the other, make overtures to the Kurds, who could possibly be useful at a later date, could hardly have been sustained and hidden any longer from the eyes of a broad world public.

What, moreover, would have been the repercussions? A public trial of the PKK leader in Europe would have been an open affront to the designs in the Middle East of the United States, which stands uncompromisingly behind Turkey. The Social Democrats, not to speak of the Greens, did not dare take such a stand.

The response of Foreign Minister Fischer to the abduction of Ocalan has been a deafening silence. Not a word of criticism. This does not bespeak a lack of chauvinism on the part of the SPD and the Greens. They certainly seek to maintain the interests of German imperialism in the Middle East, and privately grumble over the posture of the US, which acts as world policeman, staking out its territory all over the world by means of military force or the threat of force.

They have capitulated nevertheless to American pressure because open opposition to Washington would have unleashed a Pandora's box of social protest in the Middle East. Opposition by Germany to the American-led pursuit of Ocalan would have established a rallying point for all those whose interests are being trampled upon.

Where might that have led! Even had it been possible to agree on the political terms to transform Ocalan along the lines of Arafat and Mandela, that would not have solved the Kurdish problem. The desperate situation of ordinary people in South Africa and in the autonomous Palestinian areas is all too apparent.

Allowing Ocalan to enter Germany could have led to a mobilisation of the Kurds in Europe, the consequences of which would be difficult to predict. The demand for justice would have spread to other layers under conditions where numerous European governments, in particular Germany, are planning extensive attacks on social conditions. No, it was better simply to clamp down.

To provide the PKK chairman with a modicum of protection from his persecutors, if only to save him from the death penalty, would have been an act of fidelity to democratic principles of which the present government is incapable.

The actions of the European governments, and in particular the German, with regard to the Kurdish question make very clear how the Social Democrats and their repentant Green offspring will react to the democratic and social concerns of their own people: with growing repression. The measures taken against protesting Kurds in Germany, who have been arrested in large numbers, hastily tried and convicted--with some deported--is a warning to the entire population. German Interior Minister

Otto Schily (SPD) has cracked down with greater severity than his notorious predecessor in the Kohl government, Manfred Kanther.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact