

## Red-Green militarism

# The German government and the war against Serbia

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The ease with which the German SPD-Green coalition government agreed to the NATO war of aggression against Serbia has surprised and angered many. Of all governments, it has been a coalition of social democrats and Greens which has for the first time since the World War II dispatched German troops into war. How often have the functionaries of both governing parties repeated the standpoint shared by all German parties during the last 50 years: "No more war!?" How often have they called upon their members to take part in peace demonstrations and denounced the tradition of German militarism?

And what now?

As the German airforce, together with NATO bombers, began its first offensive over the Balkans SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared in a televised speech: "We had no other choice." First of all, that is not true. No one has forced the German government to participate in brutal military aggression against a small country with less than 10 million inhabitants. Secondly such a statement is a declaration of political bankruptcy. What is one to think of a government which itself creates compelling conditions, and then maintains that these very conditions restrict its room for manoeuvre. It is evident that this government is incapable, and therefore capable of absolutely anything. Its opportunism and lack of principles are almost boundless.

In the same television message Schröder announced that the parliamentary decision for war was "in agreement with the will of the vast majority of the German people." This is also false! The vast majority of the people were never asked their opinion about this war. If, prior to the national elections half a year ago, Schröder had even mentioned that his government was prepared to take part in a war of aggression, ignoring international law and the German constitution, the result of the election would have been very different.

"The German government did not make its decision easily," said Schröder. In fact the government did not think through any of the aspects arising from its actions and has behaved in a completely irresponsible manner. The first night of bombing was sufficient to refute the main argument for the war. Rather

than diminishing the humanitarian catastrophe, the bombing attacks only made the situation much worse.

The incredible cynicism of this government is clearest when one looks at the position of the Greens. Barely voted into government, this party has moved with record speed to carry out policies diametrically opposed to what it had promised in the past. All previous declarations and party decisions have been thrown overboard within the space of a few months. And this from an organisation which at the time of its foundation, 20 years ago, accused all other parties of lacking credibility. The very word "credibility" is a mockery when used with respect to the Greens today.

On the second day of bombing the conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* purred with satisfaction: "The great majority of those in the Green party who are responsible for foreign policy and security questions have, to a certain extent, made their peace with war." Later on the paper wrote: "When Joseph Fischer as foreign minister and vice-chancellor of one of the biggest NATO countries supports the present offensive, then he does not have to worry about any opposition from a significant part of the Bundestag fraction." With the Greens one has to delineate "between programmatic positions and practical politics. If Foreign Minister Fischer supports German fighter planes in the attack on the republic of Yugoslavia, then his position is in crass contradiction to the program of his party."

Absolutely true!

According to their current Magdeburg Programme, agreed upon less than 12 month ago, "The Greens will not support military interventions or any military operations to impose peace". Just a few weeks ago, on March 7--i.e., after the Rambouillet conference--the thirteenth regular conference of the Greens in Erfurt passed a resolution which read: "The Greens fundamentally oppose an exclusive NATO mandate for military operations, thereby insuring that the monopoly of force is retained by UNO ". In future--if there is a future for this party--the Greens should, when voting on such resolutions, also vote on their expiry date.

Just a few hours after the attack on Serbia, as the German

government discussed the issue, the Green fraction, with one exception, stood solidly behind the government. Christian Ströbele was the only Green deputy to call things by their real name, and in a heated contribution accused the government of carrying out a war of aggression--only to be greeted with incomprehension and stern opposition on the part of his own fraction.

The defence speaker for the Greens, Angelika Beer, describing herself as a "moderate left", repeated the arguments of the chancellor and Green foreign minister and maintained there was no other way. She said she had great difficulty herself coming to this decision, as if to demand respect for the fact that as a genuine opportunist she did not break easily with her principles.

This is the end of the Greens! The NATO bombs have hit home in the heart of their party headquarters and done more damage there than anywhere else. What is the use of a party with its origins in the peace movement which declares at its first big test: "There is no alternative to war!"? The *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in its edition of last Tuesday, reports that the regional and national headquarters of the Greens have been bombarded with letters and e-mails from members and sympathisers expressing their anger and disgust, some of the messages beginning with the words: "Never again Green!".

With every new wave of NATO attacks the wave of members resigning from the Green party is growing as well. Anja Kofbinger, a leading member of the Berlin organisation, declared that she has spent the last days persuading depressed members to stay in the party. And the regional organisation in North Rhine-Westphalia urgently called upon the national office to establish a "hot line for wavering members and voters". What's the point, however, of such a mechanism when one has nothing else to say than to repeat the propaganda of the war ministry?

The rapid political decline of the Greens is a repulsive and disgusting spectacle, but at the same time an important political experience. There has been a fundamental change in social relations since the late 70s and beginning of the 80s, which often witnessed anti-war demonstrations and peace marches by hundreds of thousands. In many countries the employers have dispensed with a policy of social consensus and workers have taken painful blows. Social-democratic parties have participated in the destruction of social gains and the trade unions have agreed to wage cuts. The high point of this development took place 10 years ago when the Stalinist regimes took the road of capitalist restoration.

The Greens concluded from this development that any sort of resistance to the existing social order was doomed to failure and began to adapt and subordinate their policies in line with the interests of the market. As long as they were in opposition they were able to disguise this process behind a few radical phrases. Upon coming into government, however, the advanced state of decay of this organisation has become clearer from day

to day.

War accelerates all political developments. It deepens the gulf between the political parties and the political establishment, who are rapidly moving to the right, and the growing discontent of a large part of the population. On the first day of the war, when television teams conducted interviews on the street, treating it as a sort of football match, a number of reporters were themselves astonished at the reaction. Elderly men and women spoke, as if it were yesterday, of the horrors of the Second World War, the loss of relatives and their lives as widowers, widows and orphans. Young people also declared themselves to be concerned and deeply worried by the war.

Up until a short time ago many of them had regarded such a military operation by the German army to be out of the question. Following the bitter experiences of two world wars there exist profound reservations against any form of militarism. The re-establishment of the German army in the 50s was accompanied by mass demonstrations and protests, and many can still remember the resistance to the stationing of nuclear equipped missiles on German territory 20 years ago.

For these reasons, the indifference and superficiality with which the Red-Green government has addressed all serious questions and has blundered into war has shocked and angered many. Another facet of the government has also been demonstrated in this respect. Gerhard Schröder, Joschka Fischer, Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping and Co. are part of a generation of politicians which has assumed power without an apparent political strategy and frequently conducts policy without the least political conviction. They act on the basis of immediate considerations and their future strategy extends, at best, to the next press conference or talk show.

Chancellor Schröder has elevated this type of political improvisation and dilettantism to the level of programme, when he declared that what was important was not political content but presentation. A similar lack of any sort of political imagination is visible in other countries. The latest development--war in the Balkans--is patent proof of the dangerous consequences arising from such a policy.



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