German Green party backs Balkan war

Ute Reissner
15 May 1999

The delegates to the special conference of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens) have backed the policy of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. The government's war policy against Yugoslavia has thus become the official policy of the Greens.

The sole issue at the conference, held May 13 in Bielefeld, was the war in Yugoslavia. Protected by a massive force of police and security service personnel, the delegates agreed the resolution tabled by the party executive, which had been drawn up in consultation with Fischer. There were 444 delegates who voted for the resolution. An alternative motion proposed by Christian Ströbele and Annelie Buntenbach (both Green party parliamentary deputies) received 318 votes.

The main difference between the two resolutions was that the executive's motion called for a limited cessation to the NATO bombing, whereas the alternative called for an indefinite halt to the air attacks. Both made Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic solely responsible for the war. Both supported the diplomatic actions of Fischer, and both agreed to a continuation of the coalition government with the Social Democratic Party.

The theatricals--the much intoned "disunity" of the government members, an attack on Fischer with a paint balloon, and occasional catcalls and whistles--more or less exhausted the extent of the differences in the content, scope and framework of the debate. The size of the differences was completely exaggerated and blown out of proportion in the media. Over a dozen cameras caught every interruption and banner being waved by those at the back of the hall.

In a similar fashion in 1989, every television station had featured every tiny group of people waving the (West) German flag during the mass meetings in the East preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall. This media manipulation has a definite purpose as well: to create a safety valve for the widespread opposition in the population to the war. It is supposed to give the impression that the Greens are still a party where such opposition to the war can find a place.

According to the media presentation, the majority of the party only reached its decision to support an unavoidable war against a genocidal dictator after much inner strife, while their internal opponents have clung firmly to their consistently pacifist views. This was the source of the violent arguments. Thus both sides had a difficult time, but were able to conduct their democratic dispute in a supreme example of mutual respect. And in the end, they could all say that they shared the same aim--peace--by supporting the German government in war, as the German people should also do.

However, the party conference actually revealed the opposite. It is the culmination of the transformation of the Greens from a social movement into an unscrupulous tool of an oppressive power. It also illustrates the readiness of those Greens who hold office, like Foreign Minister Fischer and his Minister of State Ludger Volmer, to ruthlessly trample on democratic rights. It was no accident that there was a tight police cordon thrown round the conference hall, as previously only seen at anti-nuclear demonstrations.

The decision whether delegates supported a limited or unlimited NATO cease-fire had little practical relevance. In other words, the "opposition" was getting verbally excited about things over which they had no control--the concrete war strategy that NATO follows. They blustered about the war as such and peace in general, instead of undertaking something which could have had an effect, if they were ever really seriously concerned about putting an end to the war: ending Green party support for the SPD, expelling their members in government responsible for the war, calling for mass demonstrations against the bombing.

The whole thrust of the discussion and argument was

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aimed at hiding this simple fact. The motto "reconcile peace and human rights" was emblazoned over the head table. The representatives of the executive explained that this was a concrete case of a "conflict of aims". One could either support the human rights of the displaced Kosovar Albanians through the NATO bombing, or make peace with Milosevic at their expense. Their critics argued that there was another way of putting pressure on Yugoslavia, for example by implementing sanctions. They claimed this course had not been really exhausted.

It was as if in the run-up to World War One, all the various conflicting interests of the imperial powers could have been ignored, and the whole issue revolved around whether Austro-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia was a proper response to the murder of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The pretext for the present war--the fate of the Kosovar Albanians--was treated by all the delegates as good coin. The question of the real war aims was never put.

In this way, the entire debate at the conference became an embellishment to cover up the war propaganda. The discussion revolved exclusively around the axis of the war policy as laid down by the German government. Those individual Green members who really wanted to see an end to the bombing were correspondingly full of despair.

Each side tried to outdo the other in their denunciations of the misdeeds of Milosevic. Although many delegates noted that the bombing had only worsened the situation of the Kosovars, not a single one drew the obvious conclusion from this that the whole exercise could have been motivated from the start by quite different aims than humanitarianism. The question of whose interests and for what reasons the war against Yugoslavia was really being pursued was the biggest unmentionable at the conference.

Why was this question not touched on? "If the war is being pursued for aims other than those which are officially given, then the moral high horse on which the Greens like to sit, is revealed to be nothing more than an old nag full of malice and artfulness. The claim that this war is being conducted for human rights collapses" (from a leaflet of the *World Socialist Web Site* German edition, that was distributed to the delegates to the conference).

The critics of the bombing displayed the absolute impotence of pacifism, which leaves the fundamental interests of the belligerent powers untouched and restricts itself to the call, "put down your weapons". It was a grotesque sight to watch the display of angry war hysteria by Green leaders against these critics.

In response to heckling from the back of the hall, Fischer shouted loudly: "Yes, now you're coming, I've been waiting for you: 'warmonger, here speaks a warmonger,' and Mr. Milosevic will be nominating you for the Nobel Peace Prize next." Ludger Volmer described the regime in Serbia as a fascist one that could not be opposed by peaceful means. And Daniel Cohn-Bendit demagogically attacked the supporters of the Ströbele-Buntenbach motion, calling them cowards because they shrank back in the face of violence. According to Cohn-Bendit, Milosevic would be pleased with their proposal.

Ströbele himself noted, correctly, that a democrat should not argue by saying that every criticism of the conduct of the war by one's own government only aids the enemy. This was the argument of a authoritarian regime in war.

All opponents and critics of the US and NATO's war policy should be on guard against this party, and especially its ministers! There is little to which they would not stoop.

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