

Ex-Stalinists oppose NATO bombing but back UN intervention

The German PDS and the war in Yugoslavia

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The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) is the only party in the German parliament to have voted as a fraction against the war in Yugoslavia and German participation in the bombing. Since officially making known its opposition, the chairman of the PDS fraction, Gregor Gysi, has called for an immediate stop to the NATO bombing on a number of occasions.

Following his controversial trip to Belgrade and personal talks with Slobodan Milosevic, Gysi was vigorously attacked in the parliament by representatives of all parties and accused of acting as a “Fifth column for Belgrade”. He defended himself by stating he would not be gagged or prevented from carrying out an independent line, heatedly declaring: “There is one fact which you cannot deny: not a single one of the bombs dropped on Belgrade has served to ameliorate the suffering of a single Albanian.” Instead, during his trip to Yugoslavia, he said he saw “many casualties, factories and living quarters, which have been destroyed, and bombed out power stations. We must finally put an end to this madness and replace the lunacy of war with reason!”

Whoever has followed the politics of the PDS for some time could be led into thinking that a fundamental change of course has taken place inside the party. For a number of years now the PDS has sought to adapt itself seamlessly to the political establishment in Bonn and Berlin. Speakers for the party have again and again emphasised that the party had to become “ready to carry out politics”, that is win recognition from the other parties. In this respect their rejection of the war seems to make them more isolated and despised than ever.

It is, however, worthwhile to look more closely at the position of the PDS.

On the 5th of April the chairman of the party, Lothar Bisky and fraction chairman Gysi presented a “five point peace plan”. Apart from point 1, “the immediate halt of NATO war activities”, there are in fact definite similarities between the peace plan of the PDS and the so-called Fischer plan of the German Foreign Ministry. The PDS also calls for the withdrawal from Kosovo of the Yugoslavian army, police and security forces and expressly calls for the implementation of the Holbrooke-Milosevic Agreement from October last year. The 2,000 observers from the OSCE (the 50-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which includes Russia) should also immediately return to Kosovo.

The PDS leaves open the question to what extent the implementation of this plan should be secured by “a robust mandate from the UN” or other forms of troops. Instead in point four of the plan it states: “Under the sovereignty of the UN secretary-general immediate peace discussions will take place in the understanding that the UN Security Council takes over responsibility for the creation of a fair deal securing its implementation in way decided by it.” In addition the PDS calls for a plan for reconstruction as well as material assistance for the return of the refugees.

The PDS emphasises that all the aims, which are being worked out at present, could have been reached without war. Their central argument

against the war is that it was not ratified by UN. Instead NATO had overreached UN and thereby violated international law and the NATO treaty.

The PDS stands by no means alone with this kind of criticism.

Already one day before the beginning of the bombing of Yugoslavia, the deputy chairman of the parliamentary council for the OSCE, Willy Wimmer, a German Christian Democrat, spoke out about a “very great mistake”. With a majority of nearly 90 percent, the parliamentary council of the OSCE had repeatedly made clear that a mandate from the UN Security Council was necessary for military action. In an interview for *Deutschland Radio Berlin* Wimmer stated that “the interests of the United States and Great Britain lead in a diametrically opposed direction”. Since then he has repeated on a number of occasions his opinion that the American government deliberately went ahead with the military offensive in order to counter the influence of the Europeans in general and Germany in particular.

Since then critical articles have appeared in a number of newspapers and magazines making the American government responsible for the military escalation. The former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD) published a contribution in *Die Zeit* under the title “NATO does not belong to America” in which he accused the American government of attempting with their new NATO to “make sure that the Europeans are also led by Washington in the coming century”.

Another critic of the war is Egon Bahr (SPD), regarded as one of the architects of the detente policies of the seventies. He worked out the treaties between East and West Germany. Bahr not only vigorously opposes the intervention of ground troops, he also warns that new tensions between east and west could develop as a result of the war. In his opinion the current US-led war could ruin all the initiatives towards Europe developing its own greater, independent role in world politics.

A similar line is pursued by Hermann Scheer, one of the few SPD deputies to openly oppose the war. In a contribution to the SPD party conference in Bonn he drew attention to the reasons for the difficulties of arriving at a peace plan which included UN General Secretary Annan and Russia: “Any resolution of the conflict with the help of Russia and the UN would amount to the failure of the attempt by the US to establish its predominance over the UN and of a US-led NATO over the OSCE”.

The war in Kosovo revives the old conflict in German politics between “Europeans” and “Atlanticists”. Even prior to its foundation fifty years ago the unrestricted axis between Germany and the West pursued by Chancellor Adenauer drew considerable criticism from both the ranks of the conservative Christian Social Union as well as from the SPD. Adenauer's political counterpart Kurt Schumacher, in his role as SPD chairman, vehemently advocated a more independent role for Germany in world politics. In the years immediately following the Second World war he favoured Berlin as the capital of Germany, refused to recognise the Oder-Neisse border with Poland and called for the re-establishment of Germany inside the borders which had existed in 1937.

Schumacher was not able to realise his plans and for years German politics was dominated by the politics of the Cold War. But already by the 1970s cross trade between East and West Germany expanded widely within the realms of the “New Eastern Policy” and since German reunification in 1990 a cross section of opinion has recommended a stronger, more self-conscious stand by Germany in world politics.

The position of the PDS in the present war has to be examined in this light. The party's criticism of the NATO bombing is intimately bound up with the fact that America's military domination in NATO could prevent, or at the very least restrict, an independent role being played by both the European and in particular German governments.

Gysi has considerable support inside the PDS for such a position. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, initiatives towards the reunification of Germany and for an independent German foreign policy were a tradition inside the SED, the Stalinist forerunner of the PDS. This was in fact official SED policy up until 1952. Secondly, the GDR (German Democratic Republic—Stalinist-ruled East Germany) maintained the closest economic and political relations with eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the former East Germany there exists the widespread fear that the ruthless activities of NATO could not just economically and politically destabilise the whole region but could also lead to a direct confrontation with Russia with incalculable consequences.

The PDS uses the fear of an uncontrolled outburst of American militarism in order to propagate the merits of a counterweight based on German-Russian collaboration—as if the creation of a Berlin-Moscow axis would serve as a sort of partnership for peace. This standpoint is false for a number of reasons.

The days of the Cold War, when Russia posed as a “peaceful power”, are long gone. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the introduction of market economy relations the most influential functionaries from the old Stalinist *nomenklatura* have made off with various parts of the national wealth, enriching themselves enormously. In the process the country has been plunged into ruin. This layer of new Russian capitalists are more and more insistent that they have a say in world politics and so constitute a significant factor for growing international instability.

It should be noted anyway that the Gulf War in 1991 was prepared in close collaboration between the United States and the government in Moscow. A key role was played at that time by the joint statement issued by the US Secretary of State James Baker and his Soviet counterpoint Eduard Shevardnadze.

The PDS is not the only party urging a closer collaboration between Russia and Germany. On the initiative of Egon Bahr (SPD) the Russian General Lebed was invited to Wiesbaden and decorated with the prestigious “Karlspreis”, and a few days before the Kosovo war began Edmund Stoiber, the chairman of the arch conservative Christian Social Union, hurried to Moscow and on his return warned of the danger of an escalation to a Third World War.

While the PDS rejects NATO attacks, the party has a completely different position with regard to military interventions with a UN mandate and is prepared to support such interventions. At the moment and away from the cameras there is a vigorous debate over such an option taking place in the executive committee of the party. “Under a UN mandate some PDS politicians would be prepared to support not only peace-keeping blue helmet missions but also peace enforcement missions” according to a report in the *Berliner Zeitung* based on the statements of the foreign policy speaker of the PDS parliamentary fraction, Wolfgang Gehrcke.

The paper quoted Gehrcke with the words: “That follows from the logic of the discussion”. The paper further reported that a part of the PDS leadership apparently had no fundamental opposition to NATO and no longer calls for its dissolution. In this connection they quote a controversial internal paper of the party in which the PDS calls for a

German foreign and security policy which, inside the existing alliance, resist its transformation into a “new NATO” (i.e., led by America). The demand which still appears in the party programme for the dissolution of NATO is, according to Gehrcke, “straight out of cloud cuckoo land.”

Any idea that a UN mandate offers security against the Great Power interests, and guarantees humanitarian aims and ambitions, flies in the face of reality. The Gulf War in 1991 was sealed with a UN mandate, supported at the time by both Russia and China. The sanctions against Iraq were imposed by the UN. They have had enormous consequences for the country. Since then over a million lives have been lost because of these measures and the sanctions have led to the highest death rates amongst children in the world. In a similar manner Yugoslavia has been throttled for years by UN sanctions.

In this glorification of the UN the PDS bases itself heavily on the policies of the GDR. For years the GDR state fought for UN membership and upon reaching its goal celebrated its recognition by the international community. At the time the SED chose to ignore the crimes of the UN—from the establishment of the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, to the Korean war and the murder of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo.

An examination of PDS policy on the Kosovo war makes abundantly clear the gulf existing between the party's position and a genuine socialist orientation. While the PDS proceeds from the best possible representation of German interests, a principled opposition proceeds on the basis of uncovering the class character of the war and the economic and political interests of the ruling elites. From this follows the necessity to bind the struggle against the war with a mobilisation against the government pursuing the war. The PDS does exactly the opposite and tries to establish an ever closer collaboration with the SPD, using its positions of influence to support policies aimed at cuts and savings in the realm of social welfare.

The question remains: Why was Gysi attacked so aggressively in Parliament when the PDS represents a standpoint in relation to the war which remains well within the boundaries of bourgeois politics, the central axis of which is shared by a whole range of politicians? Gysi himself provided the answer. Following a number of interruptions to his speech in parliament by Foreign Minister Fischer and others he skilfully retorted to Fischer: “I think that for you and deputies Schlauch and Struck (SPD) it has less to do with the PDS. It is much more the case that you are trying to resolve problems in your own ranks at the expense of the PDS.” Absolutely right! The PDS has been made a scapegoat! In reality the attacks on the PDS are aimed at silencing and intimidating all and every opposition.



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