New faction in the German Green party

# Right-wing young Greens go on the offensive

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The right-wing turn by the Green party is intensifying weekly. At the beginning of July a large section of the so-called "Young Greens" went public with a statement in which they demanded a totally new programmatic orientation for the party.

The statement likens the current program to an attic, and calls for the dumping of nearly everything that has been thought of as essential to Green politics. The authors write: "We think it is time to clean out the attic, to keep what's valuable and get rid of the rubbish."

This was written only two weeks after the NATO attacks on Serbia began. The Green Foreign Minister of Germany, Joschka Fischer, won support for the war from the majority of his party. In addition, Social Democratic Chancellor Schröder's legislation for 30 billion deutsche marks in cuts in the social sector has been carried through with the help of the Social Democrats' Green coalition partners. On the basis of this record one might think that the Green party's metamorphosis was complete.

But this is not so. The Young Greens think that the turn to the right by the party is neither fast nor far-reaching enough. They think of themselves as "second generation" Greens. Their understanding of politics seems to consist in establishing the most effective means for satisfying their own needs. Openly indifferent to the social needs of the majority of the population, they consider such questions solely as cost factors.

They proclaim: "We are fed up with seeing people of our age going in large numbers to the other parties, and then being treated in a patronising manner ourselves when we speak about our activities in the Greens. The time of peace and compromises is over—what is needed is a clear decision over the correct orientation of the party in the future. We stand for a clear, power-conscious, pragmatic position, but also for a partial replacement of the party‘s membership."

One is reminded of the famous saying of Berthold Brecht that the government should elect a new people. The Young Greens, it seems, would like to elect an alternative to their party's weary following.

The Young Greens write about the founding generation of the party—the generation of 1968—and reveal the decaying innards of their organisation. "Put an end to the tales of 1968: we understand very well that the founders have difficulties with the change from a movement to a party.... They achieved a lot. Many thanks. But please, stop getting on the nation's nerves with your stories from way back when, and be more courageous in admitting your own mistakes.

"Yes, you were for another system. Yes, you undertook the valiant but unsuccessful struggle against capital. Yes, for you the employers were part of the Evil Empire. That was false at the time, is still false today, and when it comes down to it, you know it as well as we do. Just admit it, instead of turning your speeches into endless, vain accounts of the mistakes and errors of your youth. Those of us from the second generation, at least, aren't interested in how you made your peace with the market economy. The point is that you have. For us, any questioning of the system arose only for a short period, then it became clear, we are for the system, although we recognise its faults and want to put them right."

This address, authored by two Greens from the German state of Hessen (Jens Köcher and Mathias Wagner) received a positive reception from broad sections of the party. Amongst the initiators were several members of parliament, like Matthias Berninger and Cem Özdemir. The latter pair are political pupils of Joschka Fischer and another leading Green, Rezzo

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Schlauch. They initiated the so-called "Pizza Connection", i.e., regular meetings with the "Young Rebels" (young Christian Democratic members of parliament) in an Italian restaurant in Bonn.

It is not just the Young Greens who openly speak about inheriting that which remains of the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The Green leadership as a whole is competing with the FDP over which of the two parties will represent the "better off" layers of society.

There were, of course, angry reactions to this right-wing declaration, under the banner "The Green Party deserves a second chance," and the caterwauling, so characteristic of the Greens, began again. The "left-wing pragmaticians" complain about the harsh tone and methods used by the right because they fear, with good reason, they could be purged from the party.

In fact, there is no way back to the old days of political consensus and social equilibrium advocated by the "left pragmaticians" in their paper, which is entitled "Turn away from the new centre".

The right-wing offensive of the Young Greens could be compared to a boomerang thrown by the old Greens. The political conception with which the old guard founded the Greens rested on a rejection of the fact that politics are ultimately about conflicting social interests. This did not prevent them from serving the interests of petty-bourgeois layers. Over the past 15 years, however, some of these layers have achieved considerable prosperity and are now raising their own political demands.

Most of the Young Greens come from this privileged milieu, having joined the Greens in the beginning of the 90s. From their point of view the Green Party had two advantages: it was somewhat more modern than the old established parties, and there were fewer obstacles in the way of rapidly making a career.

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