

Germany: PDS changes attitude in relation to military interventions

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Barely a year has elapsed since the war in Kosovo and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) has changed its attitude to military interventions and to the *Bundeswehr* (German Army). It is reacting to the aggressive German foreign policy, which accompanied the first military intervention of the German army since the defeat of Hitler's armed forces.

Both the parliamentary faction of the PDS and the party executive committee passed unambiguous resolutions in this regard. At an internal conference at the end of October, Gregor Gysi, chairman of the parliamentary group, submitted a discussion paper recognising the UN's monopoly of force and agreeing to military interventions "under certain conditions". A majority of the PDS *Bundestag* faction supported this point of view.

On November 1 this position was also adopted by the executive committee. With regard to future military interventions, the party leadership will "decide on a case-by-case basis whether to support or reject the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council," the resolution states. At the same time, the executive committee resolution tries to pacify PDS members: "case-by-case decisions" did not mean "automatically agreeing", but a "careful weighing up" and in individual cases also refusal.

However, no matter how these seemingly harmless formulations are interpreted and used, they cannot hide the sharp change of course that has taken place in the PDS. Whatever the various reservations may be, the simple fact remains that in the future the party will "under certain conditions" agree to military interventions within the framework of the UN. Previously it had strictly rejected this. At the Magdeburg party congress in 1996 the party still maintained that it did not accept under any conditions the military resolution of conflicts, even in the context of the UN Charter.

Now the PDS has begun the same type of fake discussion that took place within the ranks of the German Green party; where the evolution from pacifism to militarism took place beneath a torrent of ludicrous arguments. They argued about the colour of the military helmets worn (UN blue or *Bundeswehr* green), or whether these were "peace-creating", "peace-preserving" or "peace-enforcing" measures. In the end, it only served to agree the first military intervention by the *Bundeswehr* since end of the Second World War.

Party leader Gregor Gysi tried to calm down the members with sophistry. Among other things he claimed that acknowledging the UN's monopoly of force was the same thing as accepting the *Bundestag* (parliament) as the only legislator. Acknowledging the

legislature did not mean that every law was considered correct. Gysi also referred to the fact that the beginning of the parliamentary group's resolution stressed a "strict No to international military operations by the *Bundeswehr*".

But this is pure eyewash. If a military intervention by the UN were held to be "politically and morally" correct, then there can be no serious reasons to oppose *Bundeswehr* participation. Underneath the yes to UN operations is hidden their yes to military intervention by the *Bundeswehr*.

Opponents of the new war policy in the PDS constantly stress that nothing has been decided so far. No one should be fooled by this argument. The adoption by the parliamentary group of a resolution evaluating a matter of principle in a completely different manner than the current party program, then the executive committee passing this reorientation on the nod, with party members only finding out about this from the press, says far more about the PDS's understanding of democracy than the discussion that follows, in which each grouping expresses what it likes within the party. Such discussions are only rearguard actions. The decisions have already been taken.

The following episode is interesting in this context. The state convention of the PDS in Berlin in mid-December regarding this reorientation saw violent arguments. The next morning, *Neues Deutschland*, the PDS's own daily paper, appeared with the headline: "PDS Puts on Blue Helmet". Some congress delegates protested in readers' letters and interviews that the congress had only agreed to hold "a broad discussion in the party regarding anti-militarist, pacifist positions". The *Neues Deutschland* correspondent at the congress, Wolfgang Rex, represented the newspaper in Bonn for many years and is a confidante of Gregor Gysi. He knows all about such games.

Above all, the present debate shows one thing: Nobody in this party—which calls itself "socialist" and sometimes even "communist" or "Marxist"—approaches the question of war and militarism from a principled point of view.

Some functionaries, like the European Parliament deputy Yvonne Kaufmann, speak out vehemently against the new orientation and against a glorification of the UN, but their criticism remains extremely limited. It does not exceed pacifist positions, beyond the rejection of any form of violence as an ethical and moral principle.

The crucial question is which social interests does the *Bundeswehr* serve? Is it a politically neutral instrument that can be

used both in the interests of peace and for aggressive purposes? Or from its entire history, structure and ideology is it directed to represent and implement the interests of the dominant elite at home and abroad against the internal and external enemy?

The war against Yugoslavia answered these questions unambiguously. In the course of the war, the "humanitarian" arguments—prevention of genocide, protection of the civilian population, etc.—officially used to justify it, were revealed as pure propaganda. The real motives became ever clearer: The strengthening of Germany's position and that of the great powers on the Balkans, not least of all in regard to the strategically important regions in the south of the former Soviet Union.

Marxists have always held the view that a bourgeois army like the *Bundeswehr* cannot be deployed in the interest of the working class, i.e., the vast majority of the population. The passage of resolutions in parliament or international bodies like the UN does not change this in the slightest. They do not legitimise the army, but characterise the parliament and the UN.

In these questions, the PDS relies on the hopeless confusion that Stalinism created. Since the mid-30s, Stalinist organisations have continually joined so-called popular front alliances with bourgeois parties and within this framework supported bourgeois armies. Usually this policy served to strangle revolutionary movements, as in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-37. A more recent example is Chile under the government of Salvador Allende. This government was supported by the Communist Party, which glorified the army as a "democratic institution" and the "people in uniform"—until it seized power in 1973 under general Pinochet and organised a bloodbath.

The PDS also relies on old Stalinist arguments about the United Nations, and has behind it the time-served cadre from the former East German ruling party, which still constitutes well over 90 percent of the membership. For many years the German Democratic Republic fought for its UN membership, and when it was finally acquired in 1973 it was celebrated as an acknowledgement of the GDR under international law.

The claim that a UN mandate, or the recognition of a UN monopoly of force, offers security against the interests of the great powers and guarantees humanitarian intentions and aims, is completely contradicted by reality. Since its establishment in the summer 1945, the UN was never more than an alliance of states, in which the strongest imperialist powers set the tone. Numerous crimes can be ascribed to the UN, from the establishment of the State of Israel on the backs of the Palestinians, the Korean War, and their involvement in the CIA murder of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo in 1961.

The Gulf War in 1991 was blessed by a UN mandate, to which both Russia and China gave the green light, either by their agreement or abstention in the UN Security Council. The sanctions against Iraq were prepared by the UN and have had a devastating effect on the country. Over 1 million people have fallen victim to these measures and the child mortality rate in Iraq is one of the highest in the world. Even before the NATO bombing Yugoslavia was economically strangled for many years by UN sanctions.

To many, it seems to be a contradiction that the PDS, which eight months ago was the only party in the German parliament to

vote against participation by the *Bundeswehr* in the Kosovo conflict, is now changing its attitude to the question of war. But this contradiction resolves itself, if one takes into account the political changes that took place with the war in Yugoslavia.

Since that time, nationalist tones clearly became louder in both foreign and domestic policy. Media commentaries can frequently be heard saying that Germany should lend its economic and strategic interests more force and self-confidence. In order to carry these through in the worldwide struggle for raw materials, markets and spheres of influence, one's own house must also be brought to order. The austerity program of the Schroeder government, including its drastic cuts for the unemployed and socially weak, was declared to be a national task.

It is by this nationalist wind that the PDS is now setting its sails. Insofar as the party still speaks about a change or an improvement in society, the interests of the fatherland are put in first place by a long way. Ever since the Social Democrats agreed to the Kaiser's war credits in 1914 little has changed in this argumentation.

In addition, the market value of the PDS in the general business of politics is rising. Protest votes about domestic affairs are accumulating on the party's account. In foreign affairs, it is closer than other parties to the changed interests of German policy, which is gradually cutting itself loose from the Atlantic alliance, because it was never particularly closely connected with the US, but traditionally had good relations with Russia.

Gregor Gysi and other PDS leaders are reacting to this changed situation by taking clear steps toward becoming an establishment party. Thus the present debate about the UN initiates a further sharp rightward turn by the PDS. In an interview some weeks ago, Gysi said almost in passing that the party must bid farewell to "old models of socialism" and undertake "realisable politics". Everyone should understand that it was no longer a matter of a "change from capitalism to a completely different system".

However, in order to be allowed to hold the real levers of power, the German ruling class demand that the PDS, like the Greens before them, unambiguously acknowledge the power of the bourgeois state. They will not tolerate any fooling about on this question, and Gregor Gysi knows it. Hence the genuflection by the PDS before the army.



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