International delegates at US Green Party convention defend Kosovo War

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The US Green Party held its nominating convention in Denver on June 23-25 and selected Ralph Nader as its presidential candidate in the 2000 elections. The convention attracted widespread media attention, as opinion polls showed sufficient support for Nader in some pivotal states to impact the campaign of the presumptive Democratic candidate, Al Gore.

The World Socialist Web Site *posted two on-the-spot reports from the Green Party convention by Jerry White:* Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader courts Buchanan supporters *and* Green Party elected officials stress their mainstream political credentials *, as well as* A reply to US Green Party supporters.

Beginning today, the WSWS *will post periodic articles on other significant aspects of the convention, as well as material examining the Green Party's platform, history and international experiences.*

On June 24, during the US Green Party convention in Denver, a press conference was held featuring leading representatives of Green parties in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Throughout the world there are approximately 95 national organizations associated with the Greens. They have their widest influence in Europe, where the Greens have 230 sitting MPs in 18 national parliaments and share power in five coalition European Union governments, including Germany, Italy and France. The Greens also hold ministerial posts in Eastern Europe and some African nations.

In countries where the Greens have gained a share of governmental power they have rapidly dispensed with their radical and pacifist pretensions and proved themselves dependable defenders of the "national interest," i.e., the economic, military and geopolitical aims of the ruling elite in their respective countries. Nowhere is this clearer than in Germany, where the Greens formed a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1998. Within months the Greens abandoned their anti-militarist and anti-big business rhetoric and gave full support to the war against Yugoslavia. At the same time they have participated in the slashing of social benefits and attacks on the rights of asylum-seekers. The German Greens also dropped their demand for an immediate end of the use of nuclear power, and agreed to an eventual phase-out over 30 years.

During NAT0's war against Yugoslavia the German Greens—whose founders emerged from the anti-war and anti-nuclear protests of the 1960s and 1970s—played a key role in the German military's first combat operations since World War II. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer—a Green leader and self-described "revolutionary" in his youth—was among the most vociferous propagandists of the war, repeating the distortions and outright lies used by NATO to support the claim that the US and its European allies were motivated purely by humanitarian concerns.

At the June 24 press conference—from which representatives of the German Greens were notably absent—this reporter asked the European representatives to comment on the role of the Greens during the war. After quite a bit of discussion among the various representatives, Franz Floss, an Austrian member of the European Federation of Green Parties, stood up to respond.

"We had a lot of debate on this," Floss said, "and differing opinions." Then Floss reiterated the justifications used by Fischer and others, centering on the claim that NATO intervened to prevent genocide against the Kosovar Albanians. "It was a very difficult situation for us, in a region only a few hundred kilometers away. You have a very dangerous situation, the threat of genocide and the dictatorship of Milosevic, who was threatening to kill a lot of people there. So one part of the Green parties in Europe decided under these conditions—of the threat of genocide—it could be possible that the Greens also support the military intervention in the name of humanitarian aid."

Floss continued, "The majority of the Green parties were very skeptical, because we know that a lot of wars started in the name of humanitarian aid. During the NATO intervention in Kosovo, more and more the Green parties criticized the way the intervention was done. It was not done for the people; it was a massive air bombing."

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But these reservations did not lead the German Greens to quit the government. On the contrary, the parliamentary representatives voted to send German troops and this decision was endorsed by a party convention.

"At our last meeting," Floss said, "together with our German friends, we stated that there could be very exceptional cases where the Greens would support military intervention. It would be after every effort to prevent conflict—by the Greens, by the international community—had failed. And then it would have to be done with the mandate of the United Nations, with the decisions of the European parliament and the national parliaments."

Floss's defense of the war against Yugoslavia, shame-faced though it was, caused consternation among some of the delegates at the press conference. Joan Russow, chairperson of the Green Party of Canada, rose to say that her party had denounced the Kosovo War from the very beginning. But Ms. Russow's anti-militarism was tentative at best. She said the Canadian Greens would never support military intervention, *unless* it had the support of the United Nations. When this reporter pointed out that the UN had backed the war against Iraq and the ongoing sanctions against that country, Ms. Russow said, "Yes, and that's the worst thing they have ever done."

At an earlier press conference, featuring Greens elected to local office in the US, Mike Feinstein, a council member from Santa Monica, California, defended the role of the German Greens in the crassest terms. Speaking of the situation in Germany, he said, "When it came to whether we should stay in a coalition and try to modify the policies of the SPD or leave and have them go into coalition with the Christian Democrats, and have a far more militaristic policy, we decided to try and stay and influence the government."

Feinstein's claim that the German Greens have used their position in the coalition government to oppose or retard the growth of militarism is belied by the facts. The main lesson the Greens drew from NATO's attack on Yugoslavia was the necessity for Germany to build up and modernize its military to prepare for similar interventions in the future.

Other issues emerged at the June 24 press conference underscoring the manner in which the Greens' nationalist and opportunist politics have lined them up behind sections of big business. This was particularly evident in the positions of the Green parties in Latin America.

In his remarks, Arnold Jager, the Coordinator of International Relations for the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico, said the party was supporting the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and its candidate Vincente Fox in the national elections. Jager justified this by noting the repressive character of the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), and claiming that the election of Fox—a former top Coca-Cola executive—would bring democracy to Mexico.

A similar position was taken by Alex Gonzalez, a representative of Peru's Green Alternative Party, who said his party supported Alejandro Toledo—a US-trained economist and World Bank adviser—in the recent elections. Gonzalez justified this alliance on the grounds that the Fujimori regime, like the PRI in Mexico, was repressive.

In light of Nader's denunciations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and the Green candidate's alliance with the US Teamsters union bureaucracy against Mexican truck drivers entering the US, this reporter asked the Mexican Green representative what he thought of Nader's call to terminate NAFTA.

Arnold Jager responded, "We are not for that. From the Mexican side, from the folks' side, we don't believe in terminating NAFTA. It has brought positive things and negative things. Our major income comes from the maquiladora factories on the US border. I don't think we are taking away jobs. The transnationals are coming for cheaper labor, but it is generating jobs. In a few months Mexican trucks will be able to come to the US. That is part of the NAFTA agreement and they [the US] will have to honor it. That is the thing the three countries signed. Our party feels they must fulfill the agreement."

Jager's response illustrated the sharp divisions along national lines between many of the parties that are supposedly united in the Green federation. Because the Green parties are nationally oriented and see their role as influencing big business and its representatives, they are incapable of maintaining any genuine independence from the economic and political setups in their own countries, and lack any principled basis for international collaboration.

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