

Germany's Green Party demands a powerful professional army

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In the course of the current debate in Germany over the future of the country's conscript army, the Green Party has emerged as the most vehement proponent of the re-emergence of German militarism and advocate of a professional army.

In a thesis paper published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Winfried Nachtwei, who represents the Greens in the Defence Committee of the German parliament, declared that for its international military interventions (in the jargon of the Greens: "multilateral crisis-resolution") the German army requires "highly professional" and "rapidly deployable forces". Current requirements can no longer be satisfied by a conscript army, they argue.

To recall: in its election programme for the last elections in 1998 the Greens declared that their policy remained: "The de-militarising of politics—up to the disbanding of the army and dissolution of NATO". This position was adopted entirely from the standpoint of the single individual who would no longer be required to undertake compulsory military service. Today leading members of the Greens unscrupulously combine demands for the abolition of conscription with the call for the construction of a powerful and reliable professional army capable of rapid international deployment.

In his thesis paper, Nachtwei declares triumphantly: "The mood has changed! For a long time, with its demand for the abolition of conscription, the Greens confronted a broad coalition of those advocates who positively idealised and even dogmatically defended this type of army. After changes of position by the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, successor party to the East German Stalinist SED) and in particular the tactical change by the FDP (liberal Free Democratic Party), in the meantime high ranking (former) military personnel such as ex-army chief of staff Willmann have articulated fundamental doubts regarding a conscript army. They speak for a growing number of active officers."

As if German history had not demonstrated the results of the ill-fated tradition of militarism—from the Prussian military to fascism—now "a growing number of active officers" confirm Green policies.

Formerly the Greens argued against the military budget and maintained that the money would be better spent on resolving social or environmental issues. Now Nachtwei is concerned at the costs involved with the effectiveness of army deployment. "Whoever clings to conscription causes an implosion of the military budget or aims to force its explosion—with corresponding consequences for the deployment of the German army." Further on in his thesis he attacks the SPD: "In the early summer of 2000 the Greens pleaded for an all-round reform in favour of a voluntary army of around 200,000 soldiers. If these proposals had been adopted at the time by the

chancellor and the cabinet, then significant billions would have been available for the modernisation of the army."

Professor Reiner Huber from the Military University in Munich confirmed the standpoint of the Greens in a report dealing with the various concepts for the army put forward by different parties. Under the prevailing financial conditions, he concluded, the concept put forward by the Green parliamentary fraction was best suited to maximise deployment and assure the qualitatively best troops.

In many of his arguments Nachtwei finds himself on common ground with the general chief of staff of the German army, Harald Kujat: "'Thanks' to conscription—from the total of 293,000 German soldiers (February 2002) approximately 83,000 conscript soldiers and a third of management personnel, approximately 110,000 (37 percent) are not available for international deployment. In the case of the army as the main instrument for interventions in crisis situations as many as approximately 90,000 of 202,000 soldiers (44 percent) are not available. Together with personnel and finances, property and machinery, conscription absorbs billions in terms of costs."

Nevertheless Germany's highest ranking officer does not want to do away with conscription altogether: "Without conscription it would not be possible to recruit either the ranks necessary for intervention nor secure the new blood required for the regeneration of long-time serving and professional soldiers. It is not possible through other means to acquire the enormous potential of wide-ranging knowledge and abilities brought to the services by young recruits."

Most of the thesis put forward by the Greens, however, takes up the central question: how is possible to improve the image of the German army in the population as a whole? Or to put it another way: what is necessary to "free the army from existing taboos"? (*Frankfurter Rundschau*)

Evidently the Greens realise that there is a broad feeling of mistrust and hostility towards the German military—a feeling which is now completely alien to the Greens themselves.

"For years ... the annual report by young officers in the army has referred to the low level of acceptance for conscription among young people.... The continually growing numbers of KDV [conscientious objectors] are to some considerable extent an answer to the lack of plausibility of conscription. The number of conscientious objectors has doubled since 1989/90. In 2001 this figure was the highest ever, at 182,420." This growing individual rejection of "serving under arms" is together with the justifiable anxiety of being drawn into combat in some foreign country an expression—even though not fully politically articulated—of a growing opposition to the foreign and military policy of the German government.

At the same time there is evidence that in the case of long-term

voluntary serving soldiers (FWDL) the army often attracts the most backwards elements. Nachtwei commented on the repeated incidents of criminal acts by extreme right-wingers in the German army as follows: “It is unquestionable that conscription also enables undesirable elements to find their way into the army. An internal report by the army concedes ‘the estimation widely held by soldiers that conscript soldiers no longer represent typical modern youth.’ The report comments on the recruiting practice of the FWDL conducted by local offices as follows: ‘they tend to shop for social dregs.’”

Two years ago German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping (SPD) justified the maintenance of a limited form of conscription and declared that without conscription only right-wing youth and those lacking any other chances because of their poor performance in business and research would apply to join. “Then we just end up with idiots and skinheads.”

While the defence ministry and the military brass regard a limited form of conscription as part of the necessary framework for a professional army, it is above all the Greens who strive for an exclusive professional army and ignore the fact that general conscription has traditionally served in the past as a means of maintaining a certain degree of social control over the army.

It was the French Revolution which overturned traditional forms of conducting war and first introduced general conscription to defend the republic against feudal reaction. Previously the bloody business of war had been carried out by de-classed and social outcasts under the command of aristocratic officers. After the outbreak of the revolution the population as a whole was called to arms. A return to a professional or mercenary army was traditionally regarded as backwards oriented and politically reactionary. In this respect, the socialist movement had always supported “General conscription. A popular army in place of the standing army” (Gotha Programme of the SPD, 1875, Point 3).

Nachtwei has also ignored the particular experience made by Germany. Following the First World War Germany was forbidden from introducing general conscription by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The consequence of this ban was above all the uncontrolled re-emergence of militarism and the development of the army into a “state within the state.”

Nachtwei completely ignores this history. Instead he proposes to strengthen the “internal leadership of the army”. He counters those who defend conscription and raise the lack of proper training for soldiers in the professional armies of France, Great Britain or the US by claiming that the latter “ignore the fact that most other allied armies, in particular the French, British and American—and especially those of the former Eastern Bloc—have a completely different military culture and do not recognise such a thing as internal leadership.”

Anyone with the least knowledge of German history is forced to rub his eyes in disbelief. Not only does Nachtwei deny the long tradition of aggression by Prussian and German militarism at the hands of its caste of professional soldiers, he also rules out any critical questioning of his own proposal for “internal leadership”.

The concept of “internal leadership” was developed by Wolf Graf Baudissin, who in 1951 took over the department of “internal construction” in what was known at that time as the “Amt Blank”, the predecessor of the German Defence Ministry. Following the horrific crimes of the German army in the Second World War, the concept of “internal leadership”, based on the example of “citizens in uniform”, was regarded as indispensable for the reconstruction of German armed forces.

Born in 1907, Baudissin was the son of the Prussian president, Theodor von Baudissin, and an aristocrat who joined the German army at the age of 17. After a break to study agriculture, Baudissin rejoined the military in 1930 and proceeded to further his career under the Nazis. Promoted to captain in 1939 he went on to fight on the front as a member of the Africa general staff. This was the man who after the war was given the job of reforming the German army’s internal leadership structure.

Having revived Baudissin’s concept, Winfried Nachtwei even goes so far as to offer some words of advice to German generals: “In order to enable the army to choose the best recruits and not be forced to rely on the less qualified or would-be Rambos, army service must be attractive and competitive in terms of the job market. This is not just a question of pay and promotion, however. A decisive aspect is played by working conditions, the internal promotion of the army achieved by satisfied co-workers [i.e., soldiers] as well as the relevance of qualifications gained in the army for later use in civil professions.”

The campaign currently conducted by the Greens for a powerful and efficient professional army is a reaction to growing social and political polarisation taking place not just in Germany but world-wide. Representing a small proportion of the German petty bourgeoisie which had improved its fortunes in the ’90s, the Greens react instinctively to any threat to their privileged position from impending social eruptions by calling for a stronger state—represented abroad by the German army.

The next stage in this debate is already becoming clear: the deployment of the German army at home, against the domestic enemy. It is already possible to detect the first indications of this turn. In an extensive strategy paper the former chairman of the CDU, Wolfgang Schäuble, also calls for the intervention of the army for purposes of “internal security”. Prior to Schäuble’s remarks, and following the terror attacks of September 11, General Chief of Staff Harald Kujat also reflected on the advisability of deploying the army domestically. There can be no doubt that the Greens would also be in favour of such measures to strengthen the state for the purposes of maintaining “law and order”.



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