

German Greens conference supports eastward expansion of European Union

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The party conference of the German Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), which convened in the city of Dresden last weekend, passed a manifesto and decided on its candidates for the European elections next June.

The European Parliament has only limited powers in relation to the EU Commission, the executive organ of the European Union. Nevertheless, the elections in 2004 are of special significance. Scheduled only a few weeks after the accession of 10 new member countries, which will take effect on May 1, the elections in 25 European countries are designed to lend the appearance of democratic legitimacy to the undemocratic policies of the EU and to conceal—behind a sophisticated public relations campaign—the brutal social attacks bound up with its expansion.

This is the precisely the task the Greens conference set out to fulfill. As expressed by the conference motto “Make Europe Wider,” the Greens fully support the eastward expansion of the EU and press for its further enlargement—targeting not just Bulgaria and Romania, which are scheduled to join in 2007, but the Balkans as a whole.

Reading their election manifesto calls to mind the “flourishing landscapes” that Chancellor Helmut Kohl promised to the East Germans in 1990, should they decide in favour of joining West Germany. At that time, Bündnis 90 (the newly founded Green organisation in East Germany) supported reunification on the basis that capitalism could be organised in such a manner as to assure social justice and progress. Today, despite its utter failure, the same strategy is being transferred onto eastern Europe.

Eight of the ten accession countries belong to the former Stalinist bloc: the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. (The remaining two are Malta and Cyprus.)

The Greens, who took pains to find candidates of “eastern” (East German and Czech) origin, are now intoning sweet songs about securing a “more tolerant, social, ecological and democratic” European Union through eastern enlargement.

The same tune runs through the “Common Preamble of the

European Elections Manifesto” that was passed by the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP) in Luxemburg on November 8. This preamble to the national manifestos of 24 Green parties in Europe clearly bears the handwriting of the German Greens, the largest and most influential of the federation.

In typical Green fashion, the manifesto combines support for the basic strategy of European capital with a sundry compilation of modestly progressive demands, which can never be fulfilled under these political preconditions and which the Greens will sacrifice to their brand of *realpolitik* with absolute certainty.

This has been the regular pattern of their participation in a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) for the past five years. Nothing has remained of the promises that go back to the social protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when the Green movement originally formed. The demand for more social justice has given way to the Greens actively participating in the brutal dismantling of social services. The demand for peace and non-violence has been realised in the form of the first out-of-area combat operations of the German army since the end of World War II. The protection of the environment has been reduced to symbolic acts.

The Greens are now preparing to repeat the same fraud on a European level. The European Federation of Green Parties fully supports the European Union and its enlargement, while claiming that they will be able to give this process a human, social and democratic face: “A strong Green presence in the European Union is the best guarantee for a European commitment on better governance of globalisation. Economic and trade rules must be put at the service of environmental and social objectives... We want a social Union built on the basic principles of equality and solidarity and a European Union that strives for sustainable ecological development for the whole continent.”

In practice, the German Greens—who appear to be the main authors of this document—have been acting in diametrical opposition to these proclaimed aims. This glaring

contradiction between words and deeds points to the fundamental class issues on the rejection of which the Green Party was founded more than 20 years ago.

Social justice and equality can only be achieved in a struggle against the European Union. The EU is a project of the European banks and corporations, and is designed to strengthen the position of European capital in the fight for global markets and spheres of influence. Its strategy of expansion means a massive destruction of jobs and small businesses in the accession countries and will be used as a lever to attack the living standards of workers in old, western Europe. The only way to fight these plans lies in the mobilisation and unification of broad layers of working people throughout Europe in opposition to the EU, and in defence of social and democratic rights.

The Greens are hostile to any such social mobilisation. They represent the interests of a privileged elite and have every reason to fear resistance from below. When, in early November, 100,000 people protested against the social cuts of the Schröder government in Berlin, the chairwoman of the German Greens, Angela Beer, denounced the protesters as “politically incompetent” and “lacking any ideas.” This was aimed specifically at the Attac movement, whose political conceptions are, in fact, quite similar to those of the Greens. Still, the Greens stay clear of Attac when the latter takes to protests “on the streets.”

The recent protests against the EU in Poland—in particular by small farmers, who face total ruin—were ignored by the Greens and not mentioned during their convention.

The fundamental position of the Greens on the side of the ruling elite means that all their talk about a Europe of peace and justice becomes so much nonsense, and that large parts of their manifesto merely illustrate the German saying that “paper is patient.” Still, in the central fields of defence and labour market policy, their real orientation does express itself.

The election manifesto calls for a “broadened security conception for Europe.” After long passages about a “strengthening of the global legal system,” the “realisation of human rights,” the “active prevention of conflicts” and the “consolidation of peace,” they conclude: “However, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen are also conscious of the fact that the application of violence, legitimised by national and international law, cannot be excluded for all cases. The EU should elaborate its own strategic concept, including a definition of the tasks and areas of commitment of its Rapid Reaction Forces...”

The Greens reinforce their commitment to the strategy of developing Europe into a world power that can compete with the US: “Europe has the potential to take up a self-conscious and self-defined role on the international plane. However,

we need a common European foreign policy worthy of the name.”

Under the headline “Guaranteeing and Renewing Social Security,” the manifesto gets tangled into some twists and turns, given the unmistakable role of the Greens in the destruction of the welfare state in Germany. (At this point, even their grammar gets into a muddle.) “All countries of Europe are united in the European tradition of the welfare state. We want to secure and modernise this tradition in a sustainable manner,” but: “We neither need a standardisation of social policies in Europe nor competition for the lowest social standards. What we need is an active elaboration of social policies in the EU. Still, there should be no race in Europe for the worst social standards.” They conclude with the standard formula for the ongoing redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top of society: “We must modernise the welfare state in order to save it.”

The same double-speak runs through the entire Green manifesto. While the borders of the European Union are being sealed and the EU is being turned into a veritable fortress against immigrants—a policy actively promoted by the Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer—the Greens proclaim: “The enlargement of the European Union must not result in new borders across the continent.” While schools and universities in Germany are being deprived of money and staff and face increasing difficulties to keep up even elementary functions, the Greens, who share responsibility for these cuts, happily carry on to fantasise about “investments in education, research and culture.”

The phoney election campaign of the German and European Greens illustrates the necessity of a new social movement that bases itself on the lessons of history, is able to differentiate between opposing class interests, and counterposes to the European Union a democratic and social Europe of the working people.



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