

After the European elections

Germany's Green Party in government—a balance sheet

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Amid record levels of abstention and large-scale losses for governing parties throughout the continent, the German Green Party was able to increase its share of the vote in the recent European elections. The party won 11.9 percent of the ballots cast, its best-ever showing in a nationwide poll. In a number of cities, the Greens came in second, beating the SPD (German Social Democratic Party), while trailing the conservative opposition—the CDU-CSU. In absolute terms, however, its 3.1 million votes were one million fewer than the party received in the last national elections.

The SPD suffered a devastating defeat. Voters, alarmed and angry at the onslaught waged by the ruling coalition against Germany's welfare state, deserted the party in droves. The Green Party was able to benefit from the SPD's debacle, but it would be very wrong to conclude that the vote for the Greens indicates that the party is widely seen as a left alternative to the SPD or as a political means to ameliorate the drastic consequences of government policy. The European elections expressed the electorate's fundamental opposition to the policies of the SPD-Green coalition government. Nonetheless, the Greens have made it clear that they will continue to press ahead with the dismantling of the German welfare state and attacks on workers' rights.

On a host of social and political issues, the Green Party stands to the right of the SPD leadership. It competes with Germany's liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) in developing the most aggressive forms of neo-liberal economic and social policies aimed at advancing the interests of German big business.

The extent to which the Greens seek to curry favour with the business elite was made clear this week in an attack by party chairman Reinhard Bütikofer on a German trade union leader. While the union bureaucracy has worked closely with the Schröder government in elaborating and executing its programme of drastic social cuts—Agenda 2010—this collaboration has proven disastrous for the unions themselves, expressed above all in a continuous and dramatic decline in membership. Alarmed at this loss of support, the chairman of the Ver.di public service trade union (and member of the Greens), Frank Bsirske, meekly protested this week against the recent initiative by the giant Siemens corporation to turn back the clock and reintroduce a compulsory 40-hour week in a number of its factories.

Using rhetoric designed to win the hearts and minds of the German business community, Bütikofer thundered back: "Should people like Frank Bsirske impose their fundamental type of opposition, then Germany would come to a standstill, and this will lead to a spiral of economic decline." Bütikofer's threat was echoed by Green Party spokeswoman Angelika Beer, who warned Bsirske that he was "sawing away at the branch he is sitting on".

The extent to which the Green Party has abandoned its previous

programmatic positions on issues ranging from social policy to immigration and the environment is without precedent in German politics. This breathtaking shift to the right is demonstrated most clearly in the sphere of foreign and defence policy. Here, one of the founders of the Green Party, ex-student radical and current German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, plays a key role in advancing the interests of German imperialism.

During their two decades in opposition, Green Party leaders spoke frequently of the need to draw the lessons from Germany's belligerent past and develop a political programme broadly based on pacifism and opposition to war. In the course of the first Gulf War in 1991, Fischer spoke at a series of mass demonstrations against the US invasion of Kuwait, proclaiming that there should be "No blood for oil!"

In 1998, shortly before first entering government—in coalition with the SPD—the Greens laid down the basic guidelines of their foreign and defence policy. In its Magdeburg programme, the party declared: "The Greens will not support military interventions or any military operations to impose peace". A party document entitled "The Way Forward for Foreign Policy in the 21st Century" stressed: "The Green Party is ... opposed to the foreign policy of the Conservative-Liberal (CDU-FDP) government, which would have Germany playing the traditional role of a Great Power in international politics." The programme called for "self-restriction in the field of power politics" and "non-military methods of preserving the balance of international interests." It went on to say: "We want to start the de-militarization of international politics right here at home." Then, the Green Party's notion of "de-militarization" included the abolition of the German army and the dissolution of NATO.

Shortly after joining the government, however, the party staged an about-face. Fischer once again evoked Germany's past. This time he warned of a second "Auschwitz" in order to stampede party members into supporting NATO's bombardment of Serbia. Just a few weeks after taking office, 29 Green Party deputies voted in favour of the NATO bombing campaign. Just a few months later, Green votes were crucial in securing parliamentary approval for the first foreign military intervention (in Kosovo) by German troops since the end of the Second World War. At the time, Green politicians at various levels of the party organization argued that the Kosovo War must remain an "absolute exception".

However, just three months after the end of the Kosovo War, the defence spokeswoman of the Green parliamentary group, Angelika Beer, presented a 12-page paper entitled "*Less is More! Proposals for a Security-Policy and Technology-Oriented Modernisation of the Bundeswehr [German Army]*". Far from calling for the abolition of the German army, the Green spokesperson advanced detailed proposals for the abolition of compulsory military service in favour of establishing a powerful professional army that could be deployed swiftly and reliably anywhere in

the world.

In Angelika Beer's opinion, the reform of the German army had to be oriented towards Germany making a powerful contribution to the creation of an independent European defence capability: "NATO defence and crisis management require the restructuring of the German army into an army that can deploy suitable, excellently trained and adequately equipped forces requiring a low level of mobilization time in Europe and its peripheral and neighbouring regions." Beer concluded her paper with a clear declaration of support for German national interests, warning "that we could miss our chance of making a German contribution to the change in international relations".

Following the September 2001 terror attacks, the Green Party echoed Chancellor Schröder's declaration of solidarity with the Bush government and supported Washington's initial measures in launching the "war against terror". Throughout its entire period in government, the German Greens consistently supported United Nations sanctions against Iraq, which led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iraqis. On November 16, 2001, Green Party deputies joined their Social Democratic colleagues in voting overwhelmingly for sending German troops to participate in the US-led Afghanistan war.

This brief résumé of the Green Party in power should make clear that its recent opposition to the US war in Iraq had nothing to do with a principled rejection of imperialist war and militarism.

Along with a broad section of the political establishment in Germany, Fischer was alarmed at the recklessness with which the Bush government went to war with Iraq. As German foreign minister, he has played a leading role in cultivating close relations with regimes throughout the Middle East, including the Israeli and Turkish governments.

The US-led invasion of Iraq threatened to destabilise the entire Middle East, jeopardising economic and political relations carefully nurtured by Germany over decades. This was the political background to the February 2003 NATO security conference in Munich, where Fischer informed US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that he was "not convinced of the case for a war against Iraq".

At the same time, Fischer and the leaders of the Greens honour the debt Germany's ruling elite owes to Washington for bailing out German capitalism after the war. Along with the SPD, Green deputies voted to allow the US military use of its important bases in Germany, as well as German airspace, for the war against Iraq. Green Party policy towards the American intervention was summed up by party leader Rezzo Schlauch, who spoke in the US at a series of meetings shortly after the US invasion.

In April 2003, Schlauch spoke to audiences of American politicians and businessmen on behalf of the so-called "Green Transatlantikers". He told them: "Europeans know that the hard power of military force is sometimes necessary, and that there is only one global hegemon that can truly exercise military power on a global scale in this age. And Europe also knows that in terms of its value system there has never been a great power that has exercised its dominance in more benign ways than the USA. The thought of any other state of this world commanding such power at this moment sends shivers down the spine of a New Transatlantiker."

In the same speech, Schlauch highlighted the role played by German troops all over the world, while declaring that the German government was prepared to take a leaf from the American book on the issue of international law: "...Germans and Europeans may have to acknowledge that there are some problems with international law. If international law gives the cover of state sovereignty for humanitarian abuses and for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to privatized terror networks, then it needs reform. Germany has reacted to these imperfections in the cases of Kosovo and Afghanistan. Maybe the 'emerging doctrine of the limits of sovereignty' is something worth thinking about more." ("On the Future of German-American Relations"—30.04.2003—Rezzo Schlauch,

permanent secretary, German Ministry of economics).

Having initially opposed the war, Fischer, like Chancellor Schröder, has now concluded that the biggest threat to German interests in the Middle East and worldwide would be a humiliating defeat for the US government and the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

As the popular uprising against occupation troops has swelled, Fischer has repeatedly emphasised the common ground between the German and US governments. He recently played an instrumental role in working out a new UN resolution to justify the occupation of Iraq, while at the same time working actively to establish a platform for leading American officials in Europe.

Following increasing levels of casualties in Iraq and after the revelations of US torture of Iraqi prisoners, Fischer travelled to Washington in May to assist in the damage-control exercise being carried out by his colleague and "friend", Colin Powell. In his talks with Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and against the backdrop of the atrocities in Abu Ghraib, Fischer praised "American values". Just one week after his May visit to Washington, Fischer warmly welcomed Powell's attendance at a meeting held in Berlin by European nations to combat anti-Semitism.

Shortly after his May visit, Fischer explained his motives for the trip in an interview with the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel*. After referring to the "moral high ground" and describing the moral ties binding the US as being of fundamental importance to the entire Western world, he stated: "America has to react in a vigorous manner on behalf of the entire West. All political forces in Germany share an interest in ensuring that America re-establishes its essential moral leadership as the normative dominant feature of the West. That is absolutely necessary, otherwise the result will be greater and more enduring damage."

In addition to providing a mask of respectability to the brutal invasion and occupation of Iraq, the German Green Party has also been in the forefront of supporting the systematic dismantling of the German welfare system and the suppression of basic democratic rights in Germany itself.

At its special conference in Cottbus in June 2003, over 90 percent of the Green Party delegates in attendance voted in favour of Schröder's Agenda 2010—the most comprehensive packages of attacks on the German welfare state to be implemented by any government in post-war Germany.

In 1998, the Greens were able to enter government after campaigning against the anti-social politics of the conservative Kohl administration. Just one term later, the party voted overwhelmingly for measures entailing far more dramatic social consequences than anything envisaged by Kohl and his ministers.

During its six years in office, the SPD-Green government has overseen the most extensive re-division of wealth from the poor to the rich in German history—to the tune of 30 billion euros. During this period, the number of euro-millionaires in Germany has soared to 755,000.

Fischer told party delegates to the Cottbus conference that it was necessary to adapt to these economic and social realities. "Slogans such as 'take from the rich and give to the poor' are of little help here", he declared. The Greens, he stressed, were required and willing to make their own contribution to German "economic dynamics".

Arguing that an SPD-Green government is better able to push ahead with anti-terror laws than Germany's conservative opposition, the Green Party has also agreed this month to a legislative package that fundamentally undermines the rights of foreign workers in Germany.

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on May 5, party chairman Bütikofer had already declared: "It is a question of looking ahead and making practical plans regarding policies to be implemented by the government. One example: easier ways of carrying out deportation. The SPD and Greens have been united for a long time over easier forms of deportation for those suspected of terrorism. This can be implemented. Why, instead of acting ourselves, should we merely create a platform for the conservative union to declare that Red-Green is not interested in

security in Germany.”

While the Greens pose as an alternative to the conservative opposition, an internal party document reveals that in the course of their discussions on the latest immigration law, the Greens actually made a total of 92 concessions to the right wing!

Twenty years ago, the Greens emerged from the German student protest movement promising radical alternatives to the encrusted politics of the SPD and the trade unions. Since then, they have rapidly made their peace with the existing order and are today propping up the most unpopular social democratic government in post-war history. Any sober appraisal of the party’s development reveals that nothing remains of its basic programmatic demands for “ecological and social fairness”, and a “society free from violence”, implemented by a party based on genuine “grass roots democracy”.



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