The “depacification” of the German left

Right-wing praise for Green leader Fischer’s foreign policy

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Sometimes, compliments are more devastating than the most damning criticism.

Witness a commentary on the front page of Thursday’s edition of the Berlin daily newspaper *Tagesspiegel* praising the foreign policy of Germany’s outgoing Social Democratic (SPD)-Green Party coalition government and its leaders Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Joschka Fischer (Greens). Through the policies of the SPD and Greens, the newspaper concludes, Germany has once again “become an independent global political factor.”

The commentary deals with the decision taken this week by the German parliament (Bundestag) to extend and expand the mission of the German Army in Afghanistan.

Nearly two weeks after the September 18 federal elections, Germany’s leading political parties are still wrangling over the formation of a new government. But on Wednesday, the Bundestag met, in its pre-election composition, for the explicit purpose of voting on the Army deployment. The decision was carried almost unanimously (535 to 18). All parties except the recently formed Left Party argued that there was no alternative to an extension of the mandate.

The resolution is highly explosive. The German contingent in Afghanistan is to be increased from 2,250 to 3,000 soldiers. Instead of being responsible for the capital of Kabul and the two provinces of Kundus and Faisabad, in future the German Army will assume responsibility for the entire northern region of the country. If required, it can be deployed to any other region.

German Defence Secretary Peter Struck (SPD) stressed that the mission was peaceful and not a war deployment. But the danger of the German Army being drawn into military conflict in an increasingly unstable country can only increase with the extension of the mandate. Already, 17 German soldiers have died since the beginning of the Afghanistan deployment in December 2001.

The deployment takes place in a region where Germany has pursued its geo-strategic interests for a considerable time. In the First World War, Kaiser Wilhelm II secretly sent a delegation to Kabul to find out whether it was possible to counter the British colonial presence. After the war, German engineers flowed into the country, which had gained independence. German schools were developed, and Germany posed as a friend of the Afghans.

These traditions and contacts are being revived today. “Business enterprises are carefully sounding out the market, the Goethe-Institute and political foundations are civilising a society brutalised by 25 years of war. And something has been done to create a feeling of mutual friendship between the respective peoples,” writes the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The US-led ISAF force, within whose framework the German Army operates, serves to support and defend the puppet regime of Hamid Karzai, who was installed in power following the conquest of the country by the US. For Washington, the ISAF mission provides some relief for US military forces already stretched to the limit in the occupation of Iraq. Karzai would be unable to survive a day in power without the support of foreign troops.

Despite all claims to the contrary, the Afghanistan deployment is not aimed at bringing peace and democracy. It serves geo-political interests in a region

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of eminent strategic importance, situated at an interface between the oil-rich Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, between Central Asia and the Middle East.

That this military employment is nevertheless almost unanimously supported by the Bundestag is regarded by the *Tagesspiegel* as a historic achievement—a "lasting inheritance of Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer." The general anti-war mood of the German population, reflected in mass demonstrations against the Iraq war, is completely ignored by the Bundestag.

"A majority of the left who grew up opposing NATO, rearmament and all wars have been depacified," *Tagesspiegel* exults. "The days of the Bonn Republic, when one relieved oneself of such obligations by indulgences, are finally at an end. At that time (prior to German reunification), Germany was accused of being too Swiss (i.e., neutral). This reproach has become groundless, thanks to Schröder and Fischer. They have made the country grow up."

Tagesspiegel criticises Fischer and Schröder for a number of errors with regard to foreign policy. But these were, as far as the newspaper is concerned, teething problems. In the main, they showed themselves to be "faithful to principles, pragmatic and visionary."

The greatest praise, however, is reserved for Fischer, who between clenched teeth posed the question: "What does Auschwitz teach us? Perhaps that soldiers must be used at the right time. It destroyed the deceptively simple morality which maintains that whoever remains neutral cannot be guilty. And in the worldwide fight against terrorism, Germany is playing a leading role today. This is appreciated even by the US government."

After such praise from an established bourgeois newspaper, is any further proof needed that the Greens, whose origins lie to a large extent in the anti-war movement, do not in any respect represent a left alternative to Germany's other bourgeois parties?

The *Tagesspiegel* commentary also makes clear why the autodidact and former streetfighter Fischer was allowed by the German ruling elite to take over the prestigious office of minister for foreign affairs—a post traditionally reserved for trained diplomats or established representatives of the political establishment.

Fischer's foreign policy—which, in his own words, "was not Green" but "German"—could have been carried out by many others. The "depacification" of the left, however, the transfer of allegiance by a generation of 1960s protesters who had become influential and wealthy to the flag of German imperialism—that could have been accomplished only by Fischer.

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