

Greens vs. Lefts

Germany: a revealing debate on Sudan military deployment

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The debate in the German Bundestag (parliament) on December 16 over the German army's (Bundeswehr) deployment in the Sudan cast a revealing light on the role of the so-called parliamentary opposition. While the governing coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) constitutes 73 percent of all deputies, the three opposition parties—the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Left Party and the Greens—provide, at best, a pseudo-democratic fig leaf.

With 487 votes for and only 39 against, the Bundestag agreed to extend the Bundeswehr's operation in the Sudan. Up to 200 armed soldiers are to provide logistical support to the African Union's "Amis" mission. The Bundeswehr's main mission will be to transport armed forces and materiel via air transport from the African Union to the Sudan.

Sudan holds enormous geopolitical significance for Germany. The country occupies a strategic position between the Middle East and Northern Africa and currently produces around 250,000 barrels of oil per day, with output increasing.

Only the Left Party voted against the extension of the operation, and this was only because the party's current program still rejects any form of foreign intervention by the German armed forces.

Echoing the debates that took place in the Green Party ten years ago, this policy has been questioned by party members. According to the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*, in a trial vote conducted inside the parliamentary fraction, nearly one third of all Left Party deputies voted against rejecting foreign interventions by the armed forces. Only 39 of the 54 deputies voted to reject foreign interventions, with the

rest voting in favour.

There can be no doubt that the Left Party will give up its opposition completely as soon as it sniffs the chance of participating in a federal government. Back in 1998, the Greens secured their place in a federal coalition government with the SPD by agreeing to support the NATO war against Yugoslavia. It is an open secret that both of the Left Party's chairmen, Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine, aspire to a coalition with the SPD and Greens, should the present coalition under CDU chair Angela Merkel split up prematurely. "Those who stand in elections," explained Gysi, "must be prepared for both kinds of responsibilities: in government and in opposition." The party's election campaign manager Bodo Ramelow was somewhat more explicit: "We have to be ready for government—also on the federal level."

After representatives from all parties had spoken in parliament, applauding one another, government representatives settled back in their chairs while the Left Party's Norman Paech argued his fraction's case against extending the army's stay, even though, he said, the decision was not an easy one for its members. Significantly, the Greens were the ones who took up the defence of the government's position and postured as the aggressive advocates of a military-based foreign policy.

Paech said that the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS, now part of the Left Party) had rejected sending troops to the Sudan a year ago because "the party viewed the military operation as ineffective as long as the economic and social causes as well as their terrible consequences are not brought under control and resolved." He also said that the party feared that the

military operation would be expanded and that the EU and NATO, and not the AU, would end up leading the operation.”

Paech criticised comments by the former defence minister and current chairman of the SPD parliamentary fraction Peter Struck that the Bundeswehr will also have to be sent to Africa soon. He also quoted the secretary of the defence ministry, Friedbert Pflüger: “Because Europe... has to import increasing amounts of energy from other regions we have to pay attention to African oil wealth as a potential way to diversify our sources of supply. In contrast to us, the United States has already acknowledged the significance of African oil. Western Africa will account for a quarter of their essential oil imports by 2015.”

Paech demanded that the German government prosecute its policies through civilian means rather than military ones: “The foreign office has a paper that concerns itself with conflict prevention and mediation. There exist many means to promote peace without the use of military measures. We have to use these instruments.”

Paech’s speech was constantly interrupted by interjections from all the other parties. The Greens above all found Paech’s speech too much to take. At the end of it, one of the Greens’ leading members, Hans-Christian Ströbele, finally asked a question. Ströbele has long time promoted himself as one the party’s so-called left-wing members. Although Ströbele initially rejected German military participation in Afghanistan, he then ensured that internal party opposition to the intervention fell apart. Since then, Ströbele has given his blessing to numerous other foreign interventions by the German army, in Afghanistan, Macedonia and Africa.

Ströbele said: “Mr. Paech, I understand many of your arguments, also the one about oil.” However, he went on to say, didn’t the African Union itself ask for help? Ströbele said that if the government were to deny this help, it would undermine the self-determination of Africa.

Another Green parliamentary deputy, Uschi Eid, was even clearer. Paech’s arguments had “deeply appalled” her. Eid screamed hysterically towards the Left Party for the duration of her entire speech. Paech’s arguments protected murderers and rapists, she said. On

the one side stood the government and the rebels, “and on the other side the people: women, men, children, those displaced, and those who have been murdered and raped. I then ask you: ‘As a left-winger, on whose side do you stand?’ Those on the left wing stand on the side of the victims and not that of the perpetrators! You stand on the side of the latter when you don’t intervene. By looking away you become guilty!”

Eid’s speech was greeted with substantial applause from members of the Union parties, SPD, FDP and the Green Party itself.

The Greens have long been aggressive advocates of German militarism. During their seven years in government, they sent German troops into combat for the first time since the end of the Second World War. At that time, the Greens’ arguments played a key role in overcoming the broad popular resistance to military interventions. Today their demand for the establishment of a full-time professional army situates the Greens on the right wing of this foreign policy debate.

It is noteworthy that the Greens reacted so hysterically to arguments they themselves had formulated ten years ago. On every issue, they have broken with their “alternative” policies to become a right-wing middle class party, as their tirades against the Left Party further demonstrate.

While the Left Party strives for a coalition with the SPD and Greens, the latter are preparing themselves for a partnership with the Union and FDP. At their last party congress, they made it clear that they do **not** rule out a future coalition with any party. In this sense, the recent performances by Eid and Ströbele must be seen as lobbying: they are refuting their own past because it could stand in the way of future coalitions.

The Greens were able to claim a significant success as a result of this effort. The conservative CDU deputy Anke Eymer began her speech with the following words: “I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Uschi Eid for her words. Congratulations!”



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