

German Green Party congress: “Peace” from the barrel of a gun

Peter Schwarz
9 December 2006

The German Green Party recently held its first national congress since national elections held last year, which led to the defeat of the coalition between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, who had governed Germany since 1999. For the first time in 18 years, the Green Party has no ministerial representation either in the national government or at the state level, but anyone expecting an attempt to draw a political balance sheet at the weekend conference in Cologne was sorely disappointed.

Millions are currently suffering the effects of policies introduced by the government of former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Greens), including the Hartz laws and other drastic social cuts. But such issues left Green Party delegates cold.

Instead of concerning itself with the consequences of its policies, the Green congress was focused on a debate on the new logo for the party, which the leadership had introduced without previous discussion amongst the membership. This was a topic party delegates could really get their teeth into.

This is characteristic of the Greens. They ignore the disastrous consequences of their own policies and shake off responsibility like a duck shakes off water. Following seven years in government, they see absolutely no necessity to take a critical look at the results of their actions.

The Greens reflect the interests of wealthier middle-class layers who are largely wrapped up in their own personal careers and regard the impoverishment of broad layers of the population only from the standpoint of constituting a potential threat to their own lifestyles. Egoistic, vain and always with an eye to their own careers, they are prepared to debate everything other than the consequences of their own policies. All that remains of their former radicalism is a “radical realism”—i.e., a readiness to adapt to the existing order at whatever cost.

From this standpoint, the Greens are moving even further to the right. This was most clear in the congress debate over the deployment of the German army in Afghanistan.

Less than a decade ago, the Greens categorically rejected the dispatch of the German army for missions abroad.

However, when the party took up government responsibility, it supported a series of deployments to the Balkans, Africa and Afghanistan, and assisted in the transformation of the German military from a territorial defence army to an international strike force. Now, the party vigorously opposes anyone who even hints of any sort of military withdrawal from Afghanistan, although the situation in the country has deteriorated significantly.

When one delegate, German parliamentary deputy Christian Stroebele, declared at the congress that “the dirty war led by the Americans in Afghanistan is a job-making machine for terrorists,” he was howled down by the majority in attendance. Stroebele was not even demanding the unconditional withdrawal of German troops, which cooperate closely with the Americans within the context of the ISAF mandate and operation “Enduring Freedom.” The so-called left wing in the party is no longer prepared to go so far. Instead, Stroebele merely demanded a window of opportunity to develop an “exit strategy.” But even this was enough to unleash a storm of indignation.

Party Chair Claudia Roth intervened in the debate to declare that it “was about Afghanistan in the here-and-now, and not about principles.” The international colonial force ISAF is still needed for reconstruction, she claimed, and asserted that a signal of withdrawal has nothing in common with the Green Party’s policy of peace.

The leader of the Green parliamentary group, Fritz Kuhn, supported Roth and declared that a vote for a German exit strategy would be interpreted by the Afghans as follows: “They are leaving us alone, and the Taliban can return.”

The former environment secretary, Jürgen Trittin, accused Stroebele of renouncing Green foreign policy. In its role precisely as a party of “peace” the Greens stand for the “link between civil structures and military security,” Trittin said.

In an agitated speech, one leading Green, Krista Sager, even accused critics of the German military mission in Afghanistan of representing a “national conservative attitude.” She declared, “This sort of ‘what’s it got to do with us’ attitude—that cannot be the message which emerges

from this party conference for people in Afghanistan."

Eventually, a large majority of the 750 delegates voted in favour of a motion put by the party's executive committee supporting the continuation of the German ISAF mission.

The congress carefully avoided any concrete commitments regarding possible future government coalitions. But the programmatic debate was characterised by efforts to avoid offending anybody and to "keep all options open," and a readiness to form a coalition with all parties—including the "free market" Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

To this end, the congress called for a nationally guaranteed basic income for all, while at the same time it justified its support for the anti-social Hartz IV laws enacted by the previous SPD-Green coalition government.

The Greens continue to support the European Union constitution, despite the rejection of the document by the electorate in France and the Netherlands. The delegates merely demanded a breakdown of the constitution into a charter of basic rights and a set of rules for institutional relations—i.e., the same content in a new package.

The current distribution of political influence in Germany means that the Greens only have a chance of forming a government coalition in alliance with the FDP and either the SPD or the CDU. Accordingly, overtures were made at the congress to the FDP.

"In fact, many resolutions and positions of the Greens can be explained in terms of the large-scale operation to make the party compatible to the FDP," commented the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*.

At the end of the congress, Baden-Württemberg deputy Oswald Metzger announced that the Greens had "every chance for an exciting constellation with the (conservative) union parties." For seven years, he said, the Greens had played the role of "handmaiden to the SPD," and a coalition with the CDU and/or the FDP "radiates unbelievably more charm." At the same time, Metzger categorically excluded any coalition with the SPD and Left Party, declaring: "Germany does not need a third left-wing party."

The Green parliamentary fraction head, Renate Künast, also made quite clear her preference for overtures to conservative parties.

The Greens, however, are confronted with the problem that they have become so similar to other German mainstream parties that the electorate no longer sees any point in voting for them. To this end, the conference sought to sharpen up the party profile by reactivating one of its original basic themes—environmental protection.

In view of the drastic consequences of rising climate temperatures, the congress agreed an energy-saving programme. By the year 2020, Germany should reduce its

carbon dioxide output levels by 40 percent, and at least 80 percent by 2050, it declared.

According to the party Co-Chairman Reinhard Bütikofer, "Climate protection is a theme which appeals to a large section of the population." He went on to stress that Green environmental policy is not in opposition to the interests of the economy. "The economy will not be able to tackle the ecological turn without a political framework," he said. "However," he added, "without the economy, ecological renewal will have no future."

The practical measures for climate protection proposed by the congress were modest. In order to lower fuel consumption, the congress resolution recommended a speed limit of 130 kilometres per hour, a tax on airplane fuel, and a duty on motorists driving in city centres. Bütikofer failed to explain why, after seven years in office, the Greens had been unable to introduce a speed limit on motorways—a commonplace in every other country in the world.

In its entirety, the Cologne congress marked a further turn to the right on the part of the Greens. The party was founded 25 years ago on the basis of demands for progressive social change that did not, however, challenge the existing structure of capitalist relations. The party's own development has thoroughly exposed the falsity of this premise.



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