

Germany: Greens to hold special party congress on Afghanistan

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On September 15, the German Green Party will debate its attitude to next month's parliamentary vote to extend the German Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) mission in Afghanistan.

There is broad agreement in the Greens that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandate, under the auspices of the UN, should be extended. The overwhelming majority of the 3,200 German soldiers presently stationed in Afghanistan are part of the ISAF.

When the Greens were in government with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 2001, they unreservedly supported the despatch of the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan, and still do. One of the Green Party's founding members, Tom Koenigs, is now a UN Special Envoy in Afghanistan. In numerous press interviews, Koenigs has called for more troops to be stationed in Afghanistan.

The Greens are opposed, however, to an extension of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)—here again, there is broad agreement in the party.

The Greens had previously supported German participation in OEF. Party chair Claudia Roth justified this in 2001 with the words: "It is not a question of a war against a country, a war against a religion, but the fight against terrorism, whereby I do not exclude repressive police and military means."

However, the party has since reached the conclusion that it would be more helpful to German interests in Afghanistan if they were no longer associated with the US military and OEF. An end to the OEF mandate would not be difficult, since there are only some 100 members of Germany's Special Forces unit involved with OEF. Moreover, according to the Bundeswehr, these forces have not seen active duty for more than two years.

Differences exist purely over the fate of the third and latest Afghanistan mandate. Since spring of this year, six Bundeswehr Tornado jet fighters have been involved in reconnaissance flights in Afghanistan providing details of targets for both the ISAF and OEF.

The Greens were divided in March of this year when the Bundestag (federal parliament) agreed to the Tornado deployment. A total of 26 Green deputies voted for it, with 25 voting against or abstaining. In the meantime, the situation has become more complicated. The government plans to table a *single* vote in October on both the ISAF mandate and the

Tornado deployment.

This has confronted the Green Party delegates with the question of how to act. They can vote "yes" to the combined resolution, and thus support the Tornado deployment, to which some are opposed. They can abstain, or they can vote against the motion, even though all the deputies support the ISAF mission.

The ultimate decision will have no binding effect. Constitutionally, votes in the Bundestag are according to the "conscience" of each deputy. Moreover, the voting behaviour of the Greens will not have the slightest influence on the decision of parliament, since the government coalition enjoys a secure majority.

To address the question, the party leadership has submitted a lead motion to the special congress of the Green Party. "The question whether we agree in the Bundestag to the plans of the government to deploy the Tornado in the context of ISAF...has been disputed within the party and parliamentary group since the spring," the motion reads. "There were good reasons for both positions. In the view of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens—the official party name], the past discussion and the situation locally speaks both *for* and *against* a further Tornado deployment."

The special party congress is to decide about this *for* or *against* or, as a third option, an abstention. The party makes clear, however, its continued support for the German military intervention in Afghanistan. The congress is to decide "whether an abstention by the Bundestag faction is appropriate given our support in principle for ISAF as a means of securing civilian reconstruction and also to express our discontent with the course being followed by the government and its tactical manoeuvres," the motion states.

Based on the experience of earlier Green Party congresses, it can be assumed that the controversy will be debated with much heat, excitement and the occasional outbreak of tears, while on the main issue—the maintenance of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan as part of ISAF—everything will remain as it is.

The reality in Afghanistan is excluded from debate: the many thousands of dead civilians, the devastating effects of the war on the life of the general population, the power of the corrupt puppets and drug barons protected by the occupying troops, the

imperialist interests of the great powers.

In the end, the Greens will stand steadfastly behind the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan. After six years of war, it requires a massive effort of psychological repression to attribute a progressive role to the German Armed Forces in Afghanistan. Self-contented and overwhelming preoccupied with themselves, the Greens display only disdain and disinterest in the fate of ordinary people. In so doing, they have become an important prop of the foreign policy of German imperialism.

The Green Party's position on Afghanistan is part of the party's continuous rightward development. If the Greens are now against Operation Enduring Freedom, this does not represent a return to their earlier pacifist positions. Put in the vernacular, their support for the ISAF while simultaneously refusing to support the American-dominated OEF translates as "militarism yes—but along German lines and not for American interests."

In view of Washington's aggressive foreign policy and the American debacle in Iraq, the ruling class in Germany is pursuing its international economic and geostrategic interests with increasing assertiveness.

Former Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer has been loudly advocating greater German responsibility in foreign and security policy. In a speech at Berlin Humboldt University in mid-March, Fischer declared that Europe under German leadership should prepare to "resolve the problems that arise from the self-imposed weakness of the United States as a result of its policy of unilateralism." Fischer expressly endorsed a stronger military commitment by Germany and the European Union.

The Greens have played a key role over the last 10 years in helping to boost German militarism. Their admission into the federal government in 1998 was acquired through their assent to the war against Yugoslavia. In government, they then supported Bundeswehr missions in the Balkans, in Africa and in Afghanistan.

They tried to disguise these operations with pacifist clichés: the Bundeswehr is a "peace-keeping" force, it fights for "democracy" and "liberty," or to prevent a new "Auschwitz" in the Balkans, they maintained. But it is becoming increasingly more difficult to mask the imperialist goals of German foreign policy in this way.

From the outset, the war against Afghanistan was about controlling a country that has enormous geostrategic significance due to its proximity to the oil reserves of Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as China. Through its military participation, the SPD-Green Party government signalled that it would not stand idly by while the other great powers once again carved up the world.

In domestic policy, the Greens are moving ever closer to the Christian Democrats of the CDU/CSU. In social policy, they continue to vehemently defend the "Hartz" welfare reforms and other cuts in social spending. Their recently agreed-upon

economic programme could have been written in part by the right-wing Free Democratic Party (FDP).

In environmental policy, they heap praise upon Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), who has recently discovered the voter appeal of advocating measures to limit climate change. When, on her recent trip to China, the chancellor merely mentioned the topics of climate change and human rights in a completely non-committal way, Green Party leader Bütikofer praised her, saying "It is quite right that we speak in a clear language with China."

"I take my hat off to her," added party leader Claudia Roth a little later. Merkel's style differs "pleasantly" from that of her predecessor, Roth said, referring above all to the Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder. Former Green environment minister Jürgen Trittin commended "the way in which Angela Merkel had raised the topic of human rights in China".

The leaders of the Greens' parliamentary faction, Fritz Kuhn and Renate Künast, as well as other leading Greens, have been meeting for some time with Chancellor Merkel in confidential talks. Since March, the so-called "Pizza Connection" has been revived, as the ongoing talks between Green and Christian Democratic parliamentary deputies have been dubbed. These actually started as far back as the 1990s. Margareta Wolf of the Greens and Hermann Gröhe of the CDU, who were both involved in those early days, have now revived the meetings.

Since a Christian Democrat-Green Party coalition at federal level is no longer a taboo—unlike 10 years ago—in the future, the participants want to keep their meeting places a secret. The names of the approximately one dozen participants are also to be kept secret, since they are no longer outsiders within their own parties. Gröhe is a legal advisor for the CDU/CSU Bundestag faction and also belongs to its executive committee; Wolf is foreign trade spokeswoman for the Greens' Bundestag faction.

Figures active in the "Pizza Connection" in those early days in Bonn now occupy leading roles in the current government and include Eckart von Klaeden (CDU/CSU parliamentary faction foreign policy spokesman), Roland Pofalla (CDU secretary-general) and Norbert Röttgen (a leader of the CDU/CSU parliamentary faction).



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