

Germany

# Afghanistan war: SPD, Green Party and Left Party challenged by representatives of the Socialist Equality Party

Our reporter  
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The day before the German parliament voted on extending the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) mandate in Afghanistan, Berlin's *Tageszeitung* held a panel discussion entitled "War without end?" As speakers, the newspaper had invited the Social Democratic Party (SPD) foreign policy spokesman Dr. Rolf Mützenich and the defence policy spokesmen of Bündnis90/the Greens, Omid Nouripour, and the Left Party, Paul Schäfer.

The discussion was chaired by Eric Chauvistré, author of the book "Wir Gutkrieger – Warum die Bundeswehr im Ausland scheitern wird" ("We the Good Warriors—why the Bundeswehr will fail abroad").

Despite the presence of three high-ranking members of the Bundestag (parliament) the meeting took place in a small room. The function room in the Tazcafe in Rudi Dutschke Strasse in Berlin's Kreuzberg district barely holds forty people, and apart from a small announcement in *TAZ* (*Tageszeitung*) there was no publicity. Clearly, neither the organizers nor the speakers were interested in holding a big event.

Despite the poor preparation the meeting was relatively well attended. As well as regular customers of the Tazcafe and some old-timers from the 1968 protest movement, there were also a few young people, students and school pupils.

From the outset, Chauvistré sought to prevent any serious debate and introduced the speakers as though they were family members. He made a few jokes, asking the Left Party defence spokesman: "Paul, is it true that you are still the only left winger in the Bundestag football team?"

There then followed a series of banal questions, which gave the speakers the opportunity to repeat the official war propaganda, or, as in the case of the Left Party, to describe their so-called "exit strategy."

Dr. Mützenich (SPD) said that the recent speech by President Obama not only contained several positives, but it was also to be welcomed that the president had for the first time set a date for the departure of American troops, "even if this date lay in the too distant future."

Asked what differentiated Obama's exit strategy from that of the Left Party, Paul Schäfer said his party sought a ceasefire, which should be initiated by means of immediate political and diplomatic initiatives.

Omid Nouripour from the Greens told of his travels in Afghanistan and the adjacent countries, and stressed that "despite highly visible progress" many civilian reconstruction projects still had not progressed "as far as we would like to see." It was to be regretted that the cross-country highway planned for a long time was not yet finished, he said.

After an hour, Ulrich Rippert asked to speak and called for a discussion. It took some time before he was called to the microphone and he then introduced himself as a member of the WSWs editorial board.

It was intolerable that the official war propaganda was being repeated at this meeting, Rippert said, and asked: "Why is nobody here speaking about the real questions that are involved in this war? Why is nobody saying that, like Iraq, this is a neo-colonial war, concerning the geo-strategic interests of the USA and other NATO powers?" It has been well-known for a long time that American strategists regard control of the "Eurasian landmass" as the principal goal in the establishment of a world power. Afghanistan plays a key role in such strategic considerations.

Rippert recalled that at the time of the Kunduz massacre, the greatest German war crime since Hitler was in power in Berlin, the SPD had sat in the government. He challenged the SPD's foreign policy spokesman Rolf Mützenich: "You voted in the Bundestag for the Bundeswehr to be sent on a war mission in Afghanistan. You thereby bear a personal responsibility for the war crimes in Kunduz. Why don't you speak here about this responsibility? Instead, you repeat the cock-and-bull story about civilian reconstruction and social improvements that have been used for years to try and justify the war."

Rippert's contribution was met with support from the audience and was followed by several critical questions and contributions. In the course of the discussion, Marius Heuser reiterated the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* and called for a discussion about the imperialist character of the war.

The speakers reacted with surprise and initially very defensively. They were obviously not used to facing serious counter-arguments. Mützenich said that he understood the criticism and the question about his own responsibility, something he had often asked himself. It was, however, easier to criticize from the outside than “when one is involved in the decision-making process of the parties and parliamentary groups.” He said that he and many of his SPD colleagues had been forced to agree to the war by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, when Schröder had linked the German deployment of the Bundeswehr with a vote of confidence in the government.

It was in this situation that Paul Schäfer, as spokesman of the Left Party, hurried to the aid of his colleagues in the SPD and the Greens. He knew the criticism and shared some of it, Schäfer said and added: “However, the emphasis on geo-strategic interests, or the claim that this is an imperialist war was simply banal. That does not lead anywhere. I’ve also read Marx and know that economic interests are the basis for every armed conflict. But this knowledge doesn’t take us a step forward. We’re not interested in the character of the war, but in ensuring the rapid end of German involvement. And all the opposition parties in parliament must collaborate against the government.”

Although the chairman then tried to prevent any further discussion, Rippert was able to speak again. He turned to the audience and suggested that they take a vote: “I table the following motion,” Rippert said. “All those present should vote that the party representatives here present should vote against the extension of the Bundeswehr mandate in Afghanistan when the motion is debated in the Bundestag tomorrow.” Rippert’s attempt to explain the reasons for his proposal was drowned out by loud protests from the chairman and the speakers.

Omid Nouripour of the Greens reacted with indignation. This meeting did not have any democratic legitimacy and authority to consider such a resolution, he said. The notion that it was an open meeting that could take independent decisions, something which the Greens had called for in the past as part of their advocacy of rank-and-file democracy, was rejected by Nouripour.

Eric Chauvistré shouted out angrily, that only he, as chairman of the meeting, had the right to propose and permit votes. He would not accept that the format of the meeting be changed or be broken apart. When peace was restored, Nouripour again took to the microphone and said that the majority of the Greens’ parliamentary group would be abstaining in parliament, but that he personally would be voting for the extension of the Bundeswehr mandate. That was his personal decision, and he would not be influenced by such meetings as this. Whereupon Chauvistré rapidly drew the meeting to a close.

Here is the wording of the motion upon which the meeting was denied a vote:

The participants of the December 2, 2009 meeting “War without end?” at the Tazcafe in Berlin call upon the spokespersons and party representatives of the SPD, Bündnis90/the Greens and the Left Party to vote against the motion of the government, and thus against an extension of the Bundeswehr mandate in Afghanistan, in the debate in the Bundestag tomorrow.

The reasons are as follows:

“1. The claim by the government and the majority of the Bundestag parties—including the SPD and the Greens—that the eight-year war in Afghanistan is pursuing democratic and humanitarian goals and is in the interest of the Afghan population is wrong.

“The Karzai government, supported by NATO troops, is responsible for spreading corruption, lawlessness and despotism. The elections in the summer were substantially manipulated.

“After eight years of war the social situation is devastating:

- Most of the 50,000 official war victims are civilians.
- At 9,000 tons of raw opium, 2009 is expected to be a record year for drug production.
- 8 million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition.
- 75 percent of the population have no access to clean drinking water.

“2. The real reasons for the war are the geo-strategic interests of the USA and the other NATO states. Afghanistan forms a bridge to central Asia, where large deposits of natural gas and oil can be found. As in the Iraq war, so too the Afghanistan war serves the neo-colonial interests of the great powers in the region.

“3. The German government supports the recent expansion of the war by President Obama, but is calling for more say in strategic decisions. The leadership of the Bundeswehr is calling for the past parliamentary restrictions placed upon them to be removed and to have the same legal status as American and British troops. They are exploiting the Kunduz massacre in order to have a free rein for a killing spree.

“After the historical crimes of Hitler’s armies, this strengthening of German militarism is a threat for both the population at home and abroad.

“For all these reasons, it is necessary to reject an extension of the Bundeswehr’s Afghanistan mission and vote against the government motion.”



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