

The German Greens as a party of war

Peter Schwarz
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No other German party has so vehemently supported the war against Libya as the Greens. If the former pacifists were to be in power in Berlin today, German Tornado bombers would be dropping their deadly cargo over Tripoli.

Following the authorization for war given by the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, the leading party body of the Greens issued a statement that declared: “We believe the actions of the United Nations as a whole are politically necessary to protect the population from grave human rights violations.”

The Greens parliamentary leader Renate Künast accused the German government, which had abstained from voting in the Security Council, of political failure. “It was a matter here of making a political statement and commitment to help the Libyan people—on this issue the federal government failed,” she told *Spiegel* online.

The former Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer was even more scathing in his criticism of the government. In an article for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* he wrote: “Like the Balkans, the southern coast of the Mediterranean is part of the immediate security zone of the EU. It’s just naive to think that the most populous and economically powerful country of the EU could and should stand aloof there.” Foreign policy means “answering tough strategic decisions, even if they are anything but popular at home,” Fischer said.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Fischer’s longtime friend Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the Greens in the European Parliament. He vehemently argued in favour of German military involvement in the war and in *Spiegel* online accused the government of “missing a golden opportunity” due to fears of faring badly in state elections.

In 1999 it was the Greens who ensured that German soldiers participated in a war for the first time since the Second World War. In agreeing to the Kosovo war, the

Greens demonstrated their credentials to enter federal government. German participation in the Afghanistan war, which continues up to today, also took place under a Green foreign minister.

The transformation of the armed forces, from a conscript army concentrating on defensive operations into a professional army geared up to carry out international combat missions, was promoted above all by the Greens. They tried to conceal the reactionary character of this change in the nature of the army by stressing the abolition of conscription—a measure hailed by many young people.

Its support for the Libya war represents a completely new stage in the transformation of the Greens into a party of war. The military interventions in Kosovo and Afghanistan were supported by all of the mainstream parties, but now the Greens are attacking a conservative government for failing to demonstrate sufficient military aggression. This is clearly an attack from the right, even if the Merkel government rejects direct involvement in the war entirely for tactical reasons.

This time round, the Greens are not merely arguing in favour of war on the grounds of entirely misplaced and hypocritical “humanitarian” concerns. They now openly justify the war in Libya by stressing its strategic objectives, as is made absolutely clear by Fischer’s declaration that North Africa is a “security zone of the EU.” The party is quite ready to accept the death of Libyan civilians and soldiers in order to comply with European security—and oil—interests.

In the wake of the Libya war and the euro crisis, German foreign policy confronts a growing dilemma. The Western orientation, which was the guiding principle of German foreign policy since Chancellor Adenauer, no longer functions. The conflicts between Berlin and Paris are intensifying. Germany’s energy dependence on Russia and its increased trade with the so-called BRIC countries have rapidly developed their

own momentum. The ruling parties are deeply divided on these issues.

Against this background of crisis, the Green Party is emerging as the party that is prepared to take over the restoration of German militarism. They are utilising their current surge in popularity to this end. In the recent state elections, the party was able to double its share of the vote, and in Baden-Württemberg a Green is taking over the post of state premier for the first time ever.

This trend is also reflected at a federal level. A recent Forsa poll awarded the Greens a record-high level of support at 28 percent, almost as much as the conservative Union parties with 30 percent. The SPD is in third place with just 23 percent, while the Free Democratic Party, which placed ahead of the Greens in the general election of 2009, has slumped to 3 percent.

The short-term rise in the popularity of the Greens has nothing to do with its war policy. In mid-March one opinion poll revealed that 88 percent of respondents opposed the deployment of German troops to Libya, with only 8 percent in favour. Following the widespread propaganda campaign in favour of the NATO intervention against Libya, a slight majority of the population then expressed their support for the military operation, but even so, 65 percent rejected any German participation.

The Greens have been able to profit first and foremost from the crisis of the federal government, which is divided on all major policy issues, and the decline of the SPD, which disabused and disillusioned its core voters in the working class with its anti-welfare Hartz laws. Secondly, the Greens have been able to play on their reputation that they represent some sort of alternative to the established parties, although they have long since been integrated into the existing system. In particular, the nuclear disaster in Japan provided the formerly anti-nuclear party with a new burst of support.

Anyone, however, who expects alternative policies from the Greens is doomed to disappointment. The party has responded to its increase in electoral support with a clear shift to the right. This is the case not only for foreign and security policy, but also for economic policy.

As a partner in the former SPD-Green government, the Greens were vehement advocates of the Hartz laws

and chancellor Schröder's Agenda 2010. Since then they have become advocates of ferocious austerity policies aimed at rescuing the banks and reducing public debt at the expense of social spending. To further this end they are quite willing to form governing alliances not only with the SPD, but also with the conservative Union parties and the FDP.

The transformation of the Greens, from a middle-class protest party emerging from the remnants of the 1968 peace and ecological movements into a right-wing bourgeois party advocating militarism and austerity policies, has profound historical roots. The most influential layers in the Greens are drawn from an affluent social layer whose fortunes are bound up with the operations of the financial markets and the assertion of Western imperialist interests in the post-1968 and especially the post-Soviet period.

This epoch saw catastrophic declines in workers' living standards—amid the collapse of the USSR, the dissolution of Yugoslavia into Western-backed ethnic wars, and privatizations and outsourcing in the wealthy countries. For the affluents represented by the Greens, however, these changes provided the basis for amassing significant personal wealth. It is for this reason that, amid international economic crisis and a resurgence of the class struggle, the Greens support the wars and the financial privileges of the ruling elite.

Peter Schwarz



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