

Marx 21's Christine Buchholz visits German troops in Africa

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On February 18, Christine Buchholz, a German Left Party parliamentary deputy and a leading member of the Marx 21 group, published a report about her recent trip to Africa with the new German defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Party).

This remarkable article, which has been prominently posted on the web site of Marx 21, which has links to the International Socialist Tendency, underscores the fact that the Left Party and the pseudo-left tendencies which work within it are integral parts of German imperialism and play a central role in the revival of German militarism.

Von der Leyen's trip to Mali and Senegal in early February marked a new stage in an ever more aggressive German foreign policy. It followed the Munich Security Conference, at which President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD, Social Democratic Party) and von der Leyen made clear that the German ruling elite intends to defend its economic and strategic interests increasingly through military means.

On the day the sojourn to Africa began, the cabinet approved an extension of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) mission in Mali. Once in Africa, von der Leyen announced plans for a further deployment of German forces in Somalia and brusquely rejected criticism of the expansion of foreign missions.

No one even vaguely critical of German militarism, and certainly no one representing socialist principles, would have participated in this sort of trip, an important element of German military propaganda. The minister was accompanied by senior military brass and defence ministry staff, members of parliament, journalists and television cameras, and visited carefully selected and prepared destinations so as to present the Bundeswehr in as favourable a light as possible. The various German dignitaries travel, eat and live together on such junkets, get to know one another and meet the corrupt local elites.

Buchholz, Marx 21 and the Left Party have expressed no qualms about any of this. For them, there is nothing more natural than flying in the company of an imperialist defence minister to a "trouble spot" where the Bundeswehr is conducting a foreign mission!

At the beginning of her report, Buchholz says succinctly, "On 5 February, Ursula von der Leyen undertook her first trip as the new defence minister to visit Bundeswehr troop contingents involved in Senegal and Mali on international military missions. Each of the

parties represented in the Bundestag (parliament) was able to send one of its members on the delegation. I was there for the Left Party and was able to observe that the mission in Mali is a building block in a larger-scale strategy to send German soldiers into the world in the context of European and other multilateral missions."

The concept of an "embedded journalist" was coined in the Iraq war in 2003. It referred to a journalist who was not objective or independent in his or her own research, but was integrated into the military, reporting from the latter's perspective and publishing only what the brass permits. Logically, in the case of Buchholz, one could speak of an "embedded opposition."

Her account of the trip, in fact, is a model of "embedded" reporting. Under the guise of supposed objectivity, Buchholz is circulating war propaganda. Occasionally interspersed with critical phrases, the report has the primary task of legitimizing unpopular military operations, while providing the government with advice as to how it can make them more effective.

Buchholz is well aware of the political significance of the trip and the geostrategic and economic interests pursued by German imperialism in Africa. In her "conclusion" at the end of the report, she says:

"It has become clear that the Bundeswehr mission in Mali can be understood also from the German perspective. Before the Mali trip, Ursula von der Leyen made clear in an interview with the TV news programme *Tageschau* that she is interested in more Bundeswehr missions—generally and throughout the world. Together with Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and German President Joachim Gauck, she repeated the theme at the Munich Security Conference. Africa offers itself as a continent where this goal can be implemented. It not only has many resources for resource-hungry capital, but also many conflicts that can serve as a pretext for intervention."

Buchholz does not dare openly express her support for these predatory plans. But everything she writes serves to gloss over them and present the operations of the German and French forces in Africa in a favourable light.

Right at the beginning, Buchholz emphasizes that the governments of Mali and Senegal received the German delegation warmly and even called for a stronger German commitment.

The Senegalese minister of defence, she writes, expressed his thanks "for the years of military equipment aid" which Germany "has provided Senegal". He also asked "for assistance in intelligence gathering". In Mali too, "Ursula von der Leyen and

the delegation [...] were received warmly by the officials”. “Both Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and Malian Minister of Defence Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga emphasized the importance of German aid”, said Buchholz.

The purpose of these remarks is as transparent as it is repulsive. Buchholz repeats the words of the corrupt elites in Dakar and Bamako, who support German imperialism in Africa, in an effort to provide them legitimacy. In this way, she only underscores on which side she herself stands. She is part of the conspiracy of the imperialist powers and the African bourgeoisie, who work closely together to suppress the African working class and plunder the resources of the continent.

Without any embarrassment, Buchholz recounts her personal conversations with senior military figures, whose remarks she reproduces uncritically. For example, French General Marc Foucaud, commander of French troops in Mali, assured her in a discussion, “I’ve heard that you have problems with the actions of the French? [Operation] Serval is a humanitarian intervention.”

Buchholz knows perfectly well this is a lie. The operation in Mali is just as little about “humanitarianism” or fighting “terrorism” as the war in Afghanistan. It is part of an offensive by the imperialist powers to return Africa to direct colonial control, and it is the continuation of the NATO attack on Libya two years ago. Operation Serval is a brutal combat mission in northern Mali, supported by the Bundeswehr with four aircraft and up to 330 soldiers, and has already cost thousands of lives and created hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The circumstances of her meeting with Foucaud highlight the reality that Buchholz has no “problems” with the imperialist offensive in Mali. The conversation took place, according to Buchholz, during an “evening with representatives of the ‘security network’ on the veranda of the German Ambassador—beautifully situated on the banks of the Niger River in a residential district of Bamako”; a scene reminiscent of the “good old days,” i.e., the former colonial subjugation of Africa.

The Left Party and pseudo-left forces such as Marx 21 are taking on a role as crucial as that played by the Greens at the time of the Bundeswehr’s first such mission in 1998 in Kosovo.

A few months before Buchholz travelled to Africa as an “embedded opposition”, leading foreign policy figures from the Left Party openly called for “humanitarian” military operations.

The ruling elite knows that individuals of Buchholz’ ilk will not say or do anything that might harm German imperialist interests. For five years, Buchholz has sat in the Bundestag Defence Committee for the Left Party, where she loyally upholds the confidentiality of the committee and enjoys close ties to the political and military elites.

If Buchholz occasionally expresses a few critical remarks about the German actions in Mali, she does this as a concerned representative of imperialism. She proposes a more intelligent strategy and better propaganda to promote the war policy against the growing resistance of the population.

In a press release, she warns that the extension of the Bundeswehr mission in Mali will not solve “the real problems in the country”. Furthermore, “nothing definite about the course of the war conducted by the French army and the current operations”

is known.

Buchholz is not fundamentally against sending more German soldiers to Mali and other parts of Africa. In her report, she complains that on the trip “it did not become clear ... with what specific arguments the government wants to increase the German contingent.”

Other passages read like a propaganda brochure for the Bundeswehr, which is seeking to enlist new recruits for military operations abroad. “Some of the talks with German soldiers were exciting. With a certain pride, the medical corps personnel showed us the field hospital in which it is pleasantly cool compared to the surroundings. It is equipped with modern appliances. [...] For them [the soldiers], the war in the North is far away. The greatest burden is the months of isolation in the camp, and the hard work everyday in the Malian heat.”

Buchholz also heaps praise on the Malian units trained by the Bundeswehr. Under the heading, “Practice for urban warfare”, she says, “Young Malian soldiers show their skills to the minister, the German delegation and the large press entourage: they defuse mines and destroy explosive material. These skills are needed especially because of the use of IEDs, improvised explosive devices, by the insurgents in the north.”

Buchholz’ open alliance with the German Ministry of Defence and the Bundeswehr must be understood as a political warning. Marx 21 and the other pseudo-left organizations have moved sharply to the right in recent years. They have supported the repression of the Egyptian revolution and the imperialist interventions in Libya and Syria. They speak for affluent middle class layers, whose social interests are linked with an aggressive imperialist policy and the suppression of the working class.

Only a day after Buchholz’ travelogue appeared, Marx 21 published an interview with Ilyas Boudraitskis, a member of the so-called Socialist Movement in Russia. Boudraitskis defends the fascist forces in Ukraine, with which German and American imperialism are working closely to bring a pro-Western regime to power and prepare for massive attacks on the working class. He describes the fascists as the “bravest and militant sections of the movement”. When asked whether he is prepared to “discuss with Nazis”, Boudraitskis replies: “Maybe with some.”

The pseudo-lefts have long tried to hide their extremely right-wing political positions behind Marxist phraseology. This is no longer possible in the explosive social and political situation in Europe and internationally. As imperialism mobilises its military apparatus and fascist thugs to defend its interests, the pseudo-left makes clear that it is willing to join an alliance with these ultra-reactionary forces.



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