

Germany: The political bankruptcy of the peace movement

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24 April 2014

The annual pacifist Easter marches were characterised this year by two things. First, the peace movement has in part adopted the war propaganda of the German government and NATO; many speakers criticized the “annexation of Crimea” by Russia and the “Russian troop deployment” to the border with Ukraine. Second, the number of participants in the various activities—ecumenical peace services, peace biking, peace vespers, etc.—was correspondingly low.

The speakers addressed almost empty meeting places. Where several thousand were expected, only a few hundred came, often only a few dozen. Apart from some washed-out Stalinist bureaucrats from the German Communist Party (DKP), usually of an advanced age, Left Party functionaries and religious pacifists from Pax Christi, hardly anyone bothered to come.

Measured against the large peace demonstrations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when hundreds of thousands of people responded to the call to participate, and in 2003, when half a million people demonstrated against the war in Iraq, last weekend’s Easter marches marked the political bankruptcy of the peace movement.

Although the government had recently announced the end of the military restraint imposed on it following the monstrous crimes of the Nazis in World War II, and German militarism is again rearing its head, the peace movement has been unable to capitalise.

The government has deliberately fuelled the crisis in Ukraine. It has collaborated with fascists to overthrow the government in Kiev, and used the foreseeable Russian reaction to exacerbate the warmongering against Moscow. Now it is stepping up military spending and considering the risk of nuclear escalation.

Millions of people are profoundly concerned by this development. Newspapers and news stations report they are receiving “sack-loads of outraged letters to the editor.” But this outrage is not reflected in the peace movement. The reason is simple: the movement, dominated by old Stalinists, is revealing its true pro-capitalist face and generally supports the government’s war policy.

At the beginning of the Easter marches, the two networks of the peace movement, the Peace Council and Cooperation for Peace, issued a joint statement in which it says: “The peace movement is based on non-violence and therefore condemns both the armed coup in Kiev and the armed separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine.”

A little further down can be read the following sentence: “The secession of Crimea violates the Ukrainian constitution and the subsequent *Anschluss* [the term originally used by the Nazis to describe their takeover of Austria] by Russia is disputed in international law.”

This statement represents a compromise formulation that had been hotly debated. Like the government, “reformed” Stalinists around the Left Party rejected Russia’s actions in Crimea, while old-style Stalinists who have transferred their earlier support for the Stalinist regime in Moscow to the Putin regime, defended the annexation of Crimea.

One of the two signatories, Peter Strutynski (Peace Council), said his organisation welcomed “the agreements reached on Thursday at the four-party negotiations in Geneva to de-escalate the situation in Ukraine. In particular, the appeal to the Ukrainian parties to the conflict, to ‘cease any use of violence, intimidation and provocation’, corresponds to the wishes and demands of the peace movement.”

With this, the peace movement supports a diplomatic manoeuvre of NATO and the EU that is a direct component of the attacks against Russia. Could there be a clearer expression of the pacifists’ bankruptcy?

With all seriousness, the Peace Council claims the Geneva meeting on Ukraine has “agreed the first concrete steps to de-escalate tensions and restore security for all citizens.” Exactly the opposite is the case. The agreement is being used by the US, NATO, the EU and the German government to increase pressure on Russia and further advance the preparations for war.

Most explicit was the deputy chairman of the Left Party, Jan van Aken, who demanded a halt to arms supplies to Russia. “It is bad enough that Germany exports guns and

ammunition at all. But it is totally incomprehensible that despite the Crimea crisis and the drumming for sanctions, arms are still being delivered to Russia of all places,” he told *Zeit Online*.

This demand took centre place on several Easter marches. The peace group “Action Outcry” had declared in March that it was “particularly macabre” that Germany had approved sending weapons of war and munitions to Russia and Ukraine.

On the other hand, any criticism of the return of German militarism was kept within narrow limits. The impression might be gained that the peace movement was against arms exports because they wanted to ensure enough for the use of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces).

Several speakers of the peace movement sought to justify the vote by five parliamentary deputies of the Left Party in favour of the German Navy deployment in the Mediterranean with 300 soldiers, to assist in the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.

In the DKP paper *Our Time*, Peter Strutynski declares this was “not [the start of] a slippery slope.” Some letters to the editor in newspapers or blogs gave the impression “there was once again a party that once competed for peace and anti-militarism that has gone the way of the Greens.” However, this impression was wrong, he said. After all, 35 deputies of the Left Party had voted against the foreign deployment.

“The fact that this included not only acknowledged pro-peace politicians but also the party chair Katja Kipping, and that the co-chair Bernd Riexinger, not even in parliament, also belonged to the No of the majority, indicates a stable anti-war position in the [parliamentary] faction and party,” Strutynski wrote.

This whitewashing of the war supporters in the Left Party says a lot about the political bankruptcy of the peace movement. The five faction members who agreed to the use of German troops abroad include the executive board member Stefan Liebich and deputy faction chair Dietmar Bartsch. They have created a precedent.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens began their commitment to German militarism in a similar fashion, with similar phrases about disarmament and human rights. The SPD justified its initial approval to foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr in 1992, citing support for a medical mission in Cambodia. And the Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer justified participation in the war in Yugoslavia in 1999 with the cynical argument: “Never again Auschwitz.” Now the Left Party is going the same way, and the peace movement is accompanying it.

The pacifists are supporting the war policies of the government at the very moment when it announced the end

of military restraint and a massive military build-up. This is only surprising on first glance. In reality, this rightward turn results from their hostility to the working class and a socialist perspective.

Pacifists of all stripes—Stalinists, Christians, humanists, etc.—limit their opposition to war to appeals and exhortations to those in power. However, they reject a fight against the cause of war, capitalism.

As soon as those in power cast the pacifist warnings to the wind and beat the drum for war, the pacifists are at their wits’ end. Now it is clear that war can only be prevented in a struggle against capitalism, in other words, through the mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme. The peace movement has reacted to the intensification of the class struggle by moving to the side of the government.

These questions had already led to fierce disputes in the 1970s and 1980s, when hundreds of thousands participated in the peace marches. The predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party (PSG), the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA, League of Socialist Workers), participated in the peace marches and fought against their pacifist orientation.

At that time, the BSA distributed a brochure, “Lenin and Trotsky on War,” containing texts from these leading Marxists that are still worth reading today. The foreword to this compilation reads, “There is only one way to prevent war: the abolition of capitalism through the socialist revolution. This calls for a method diametrically opposed to that of the pacifists: the mobilisation of the working class to overthrow capitalism.”

Today, the PSG is the only party that fights consistently against the return of German militarism and the massive war preparations. The PSG has placed this question at the heart of its European election campaign. Its election manifesto states: “We appeal to the working people of Europe, including Russia and Ukraine, to build a broad, international anti-war movement. We call on you to make the European elections into a plebiscite against the warmongers and their accomplices in the media. A vote for the PSG is a vote against war.”



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