

German Greens parade pro-business, pro-war credentials

Dietmar Henning
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The Greens have to become Germany's new classical business party, Baden-Württemberg Premier Winfried Kretschmann declared at the Greens' state party conference in Tuttlingen, which ended on November 10. He might have added: the new pro-war party.

In the lead-up to the national party conference in Hamburg, scheduled for November 21-23, the former environmental party is endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of the ailing Free Democratic Party (FDP). Baden-Württemberg, where Kretschmann became the Greens' first state premier, serves as a pilot project in this respect.

The ex-Maoist Kretschmann accused the CDU, which long dominated the southern German state, of ignoring the new challenges facing the economy, such as advances in digital technology. He claimed this was the key to securing the state's leadership in technology and the ability of Baden-Württemberg's strong economy to compete globally.

Kretschmann denounced the federal government for spending money on pension increases, rather than investing in expanding the fibre-optic network. "We want to preserve our beautiful homeland," he said. "But we also want to continue to be a high-tech industrial state, and that means we need the necessary high-speed networks. So: homeland, high-tech, high-speed."

This recalls the catch-phrase "laptop and lederhosen (leather shorts)", used as an advertising slogan by the arch-conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) in neighbouring Bavaria.

Federal Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt's (CSU) proposal to implement the planned traffic toll system by attaching special plaques to car windscreens, was described by Kretschmann as "merely fossilised (thinking)". What he has in mind is the digital mapping of all vehicles on the road, which is rejected even by

conservative privacy advocates. But the 220 delegates greeted the idea with thunderous applause.

Greens federal parliamentarian Cem Özdemir, also from Baden-Württemberg, emphasised that "We need to get closer to the business community and regularly invite business representatives to our party conferences." He demanded that, following the "disappearance" of the FDP from the political stage, the Greens should increase their efforts in the business world, especially regarding medium-size firms. "Young entrepreneurs don't want to go back to the old days," he said.

Boris Palmer, the Greens mayor of Tübingen, said that a "[communication] cable to the business world" is the recipe for a successful outcome in the next elections. He praised Kretschmann as "someone who understands the business world".

Hanns-Peter Knaebel, chairman of the medical device manufacturer Aesculap, represented business interests at the party conference. He called for the six-lane expansion of the A81 motorway to Singen and upgrading the railway line to Zurich.

While the Baden-Württemberg Greens are orienting as a more right-wing, pro-business party in order to overtake the CDU, the Greens at a federal level do the same on the issue of war. They supported the fascist-led coup against the elected president in Ukraine, criticised the federal government for being "too soft", and called for more robust US and European Union (EU) intervention to isolate and weaken Moscow.

Interviewed by *Der Spiegel*, Greens parliamentary foreign policy spokesman Omid Nouri Pour insisted that the Bundeswehr (German military) should support the US air strikes in Iraq and Syria with Luftwaffe (German air force) fighters. Katrin Göring-Eckardt, chairwoman of the Greens parliamentary faction,

demanded in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that German ground forces deploy to Syria.

Under these circumstances, Kretschmann's recent controversial agreement to the undermining of asylum rights went largely unnoticed at the party conference, although it contradicts the Greens' party programme. The Baden-Württemberg premier had cobbled together the necessary majority in the Bundesrat (parliamentary upper house) in order to have the Balkan states of Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina classified as safe countries of origin. Refugees from these countries can now be immediately deported. This particularly affects the Roma, who face racist attacks in these countries.

Kretschmann had to argue his position on the issue only because the Greens' youth organisation had lodged a critical motion. When he defended his decision, however, no one protested. His assertion that the "compromise" reached meant "great improvements" for asylum seekers was greeted with prolonged applause. Among the many delegates backing Kretschmann's stance was Fritz Kuhn, the Greens mayor of the state capital, Stuttgart.

State president Oliver Hildenbrand pontificated: "Refugee policy is a matter of the heart for us Greens. And, thanks to our Green premier, it is also a top priority in Baden-Württemberg."

The party convention in Tuttlingen set the tone for the coming national convention of the Greens in Hamburg, where party leader Özdemir expects "broad support" for Kretschmann. The party's move to the right in recent months and years is to be anchored in its Hamburg programme.

The party executive's main motion is entitled "Build Green Freedom—emancipatory and participatory, responsible and united." It stresses "freedom" as the Greens' "fundamental value" and defines it exclusively in the sense of the free market. The "spirit of innovation, entrepreneurship and competition for new solutions and products are a way of expressing the economic freedom we want to enhance," it states.

In the name of "freedom" and "self-determination", the resolution calls for austerity and cuts in social services—a "sound budgetary policy" and "liberation of future generations from mountains of debt", in the motion's flowery language. It stresses, "Empowerment is the keyword: the state should enable self-

determination and help people in their quest for freedom."

Deputy parliamentary faction leader Kerstin Andreae and parliamentary colleague Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn expanded this in a subsequent debate: "Our guiding principle is a strong but lean state that will foster open spaces rather than diminish them. State regulations should always be taken with a degree of scepticism."

The main motion is aimed at upper middle-class layers, who aspire to social success and personal fulfilment within the framework of capitalism. The terms "worker", "employee", "unemployed" or even "Hartz IV" (Germany's miserly social benefits scheme) do not occur in it.

Dieter Janecek and Gerhard Schick, respectively economic policy spokesman and financial policy spokesman in the Greens parliamentary faction, contributed to a debate by characterising "entrepreneurs and start-ups, creative people and artists, free-thinking scientists and the socially and environmentally committed" as "entrepreneurs of change".

This is complemented by the demand for green oases, where the green entrepreneur, escaping from the rabble, can recover from the stress of everyday capitalism. "We see a strong social need for wider open spaces and protected areas for peaceful retreats," states the main motion, adding that this is a requirement for "a society that doesn't only strive for things that are faster, bigger, further away; and a life-style that leaves time for us to breathe."



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