The reactionary politics of German Greens on display at party congress

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The German Green Party has proved on many occasions that it is expert in embellishing the reactionary content of its program with empty talk of freedom, humanity and peace. Such hypocrisy was once more on show at the party's annual congress held last weekend in Hamburg.

The party's slogans recall George Orwell's "newspeak." The tightening up of immigration law is described by the Greens as a "humane asylum policy"; the German government's embrace of militarism as a "European peace policy"; and its neoliberal economic course as "freedom for all."

The main motion from the party executive was titled "Designing Green Freedom—emancipatory and participatory, with responsibility and solidarity." The motion states that "freedom" is a "basic value" of the Greens, and is defined entirely in the sense of economic liberalism. In the name of "freedom" and "self-determination," the motion argues for austerity and welfare cuts—i.e., for a "serious budgetary policy" and the "liberation of future generations from mountains of debt."

A request to delete reference to resolving the problem of "mountains of debt" was rejected, and the main motion was carried by an overwhelming majority.

With regard to German foreign and military policy, the Greens long ago jumped on the bandwagon of war. In 1998, after it entered into a coalition with the Social Democrats to form a government at the federal level, Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was in the forefront of the campaign for the first international combat mission by the German army since the Second World War—as part of the NATO bombardment of Serbia.

At the time, the Green Party course evoked resistance inside the party, and on one occasion Fischer was hit by a paint bomb lobbed by one of his pacifist opponents. This time around there was no opposition to the party's reaffirmation of its allegiance to the government's militaristic course.

At the Hamburg congress, Cem Özdemir, one of the two party leaders, defended his support for the government's policy in the Middle East, in particular Berlin's supply of weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga. "You have to put the Kurds in a position to defend themselves," Özdemir declared.

However, he also criticized the government for not going further. Özdemir favors an even stronger commitment of the *Bundeswehr* (the German Armed Forces). Following a trip to Iraq, he wrote a report, along with party colleague Tom Koenigs, former UN Special Representative in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and Theresa Kalmer, chair of the Green Party youth organization, that calls for further steps to support the Peshmerga.

"After the weapons deliveries, the Peshmerga fighters need to be trained in the use of them and in military tactics on a large scale," the report states. This urgently requires "more Bundeswehr personnel."

Germany must also support the implementation of "international protection zones in order to protect threatened minorities," the report states. Similar protection zones served in Libya as a pretext for a massive military intervention.

In its main motion on a "European peace policy," the majority of Green Party delegates voted against sending weapons to the Iraqi Kurds, but the motion also explicitly respected "the freedom of conscience of those members who have reached a different conclusion," i.e. those who voted in favor of supplying weapons. In other words, Green parliamentary deputies are free to support German military deployments, even if it is contrary to the official party line.

Basically, the congress supported German military missions, albeit with a few misgivings. "The use of military violence in war, irrespective of its objectives, is a great evil," the main motion states, but then continues: "But in some situations it may be necessary to prevent

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even greater evil." This includes when it is necessary for "immediately containing violence."

Using the same reasoning, the party's parliamentary fraction chair Katrin Göring-Eckardt called for the use of German ground forces in Iraq and Syria to "protect civilians." The congress decided to consider such use when needed.

A similar discussion took place regarding immigration policy. On this issue, delegates backed the Green premier of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, who in September secured a majority in Germany's second house, the Bundesrat, permitting the repatriation of refugees from the Balkans. Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were declared to be secure havens, and refugees from these countries can now immediately be deported. Particularly affected are Roma who are defenseless against racist attacks in these countries.

When the youth wing of the Greens protested during Kretschmann's speech at the congress, the two party chairs, Simone Peter and Cem Özdemir, stood demonstratively alongside him. Following his vote in the Bundesrat, Peter had described Kretschmann's decision as "wrong."

After the young Greens were kicked out, Kretschmann defended his decision to the applause of delegates. In typical Green fashion Kretschmann stressed how difficult it had been for him to make this "compromise." Everyone knew how "scrupulously" he had wrestled with his conscience. His statement—"only those who make compromises can expect the same from others"—was then greeted with enthusiasm by delegates.

The motion on asylum policy, drawn up jointly by the party executive and Kretschmann, was passed at the congress by a large majority. Hypocritically, the motion stated that the Greens regarded the decision of "the Bundestag and Bundesrat to expand the list of safe countries to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia was false and controversial with respect to European law." At the same time, the decision was "part of a package... that included real improvements for refugees in our country."

This cynicism was surpassed by a further resolution calling on the federal government to allow an annual small contingent of 5,000 Roma to be admitted from the Balkans. "The individual right to seek asylum is not affected by the quota," it states. "We demand therefore the individual examination of asylum applications, especially regarding severe cases of discrimination."

But it is precisely this—the principle of individual examination—that Kretschmann opposed with his consent for the government's policy.

The Green congress in Hamburg consolidated the right-wing shift of the party that has taken place in recent years. The congress prioritized motions dealing with the "struggle against factory farming," "healthy food for all," "ecological transformation" and "a reassessment of our concept of freedom," but nothing was said about social issues.

It was left to parliamentary chairman Anton Hofreiter to outline to the affluent and smug layers of the upper middle class, which constitute the main clientele of the Greens, the party's new "Agricultural Policy"—a ban on factory farms—which was to ensure "good food."

The congress made it clear that the Greens regard their role as "kingmaker" for the increasingly discredited Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. They agree with these parties on all major issues, and when they do raise criticisms, it is from the right.

The Greens already have representatives in seven state administrations. In six states, they govern in a coalition with the SPD, and in the state of Hesse with the CDU. In the state of Thuringia, they are expected to shortly join a new coalition government with the SPD and the Left Party, headed by a premier from the Left Party.

The motion "Green Dawn" lists the founders of the party almost 35 years ago: "ecologists, disillusioned socialists, civil rights activists, feminists, pacifists, lesbians and gays, animal rights activists, activists from citizens' initiatives, Young Democrats, and many more."

The Hamburg congress marked the end of the period in which this kind of petty-bourgeois identity politics could pose as progressive or even leftist. The Greens are a right-wing, bourgeois party, rooted in affluent sections of the middle class, openly following in the footsteps of Germany's ailing neoliberal Free Democratic Party.

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