

Germany: The reactionary programme of the organisations backing “Winter of Peace”

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16 December 2014

An alliance of various pacifist and religious groups, supported by the Stalinist west German Communist Party (DKP) and sections of the Left Party took part in demonstrations and rallies at the weekend under the banner of “Friedenswinter” (Winter of Peace).

On Saturday, a march was held from Berlin’s main rail station to Schloss Bellevue in Berlin, the official residence of the German president. The speakers at the rally included the Catholic theologian Eugen Drewermann, the evangelical priest Siegfried Menthel and the cabaret artist Reiner Kröhnert. In attendance were prominent members of the Left Party, such as Diether Dehm and supporters of the right-wing Monday Demonstration movement (see below) with their own banner.

The nationalist tone of the demonstration was clear from individual banners declaring that the German president Gauck was “not worthy to lead the German people” and also banners carried in particular by members of the DKP, eulogising Russian President Vladimir Putin and calling for an alliance between Germany and Russia.

Under the banner, “Together for peace”, the organisers are reacting to the widespread opposition to war and militarism. Their aim is to block any political struggle against the root cause of war, the capitalist system. Instead they are attempting to divert the growing popular concern about the return of German militarism and the war policy of the government in Ukraine and the Middle East into a pacifist, religious and nationalist dead end.

The call for the demonstration begins with the words, “We are—like millions of people in our country and worldwide—deeply concerned. Wars are spreading globally at immense speed, and are returning to Europe with the war in Ukraine.”

This is followed by a torrent of hackneyed pacifist phrases, meant to give the impression that moral appeals to reason and to the conscience of those in power can prevent a war. The “logic of war” must be replaced by the “logic of peace”. “The road of confrontation and violence, of hate and destruction” must be overcome.

The statement demands “the human right to peace”, the “overcoming of violence everywhere in the world”, civilian conflict resolution, “cooperation instead of confrontation”, a “world without weapons” through “extensive disarmament”, and so on.

This list of pious wishes, combined with religious drivel, serves as a cover for a clearly right-wing development of the peace movement.

In the spring there had been intense conflicts between the two most important networks of the German peace movement, the “Bundesausschuss Friedensratschlag” and the “Kooperation für den Frieden”. The trigger was the Ukraine conflict. Former Stalinists on the fringes of the Left Party adopted positions against Russia, condemned Crimea’s separation from Ukraine and took the side of the

German government. They were opposed by other layers of Stalinists, most notably those organised in the DKP, who had transferred their former support for the Stalinist regime in Moscow to the Putin regime and defended Crimea’s annexation by Russia.

This conflict paralysed their pacifist activities, and in light of the small numbers on the peace movement’s Easter Marches, the bankruptcy of the old pacifist movement was clear.

In parallel, a so-called “new peace movement” arose, which describes itself as a “vigil for peace”, or also “Monday Demonstrations 2014” (a reference to the demonstrations in 1989 that heralded the collapse of the former East Germany). It was called into being by Lars Mährholz, who describes his political views as “neither right-wing nor left-wing”, but who stresses his adherence to Buddhism and speaks of “peace in itself”. Mährholz describes his peace initiative as one that is “not bound politically” and which merely serves to influence opinions.

In the summer, Jürgen Elsässer participated in the Monday demonstrations. Elsässer is one of the most controversial political figures in Germany. A former Maoist from the Communist League (KB), he worked for many years as the editor of the political magazine *Konkret*, and later for the *Junge Welt* and *Neues Deutschland* which both have close links to the Left Party. Five years ago, he founded the “Popular initiative against finance capital”, which bears anti-Semitic traits and fishes in the “right-wing spectrum”.

Since then, Elsässer has moved constantly to the right. In his monthly magazine *Compact*, he combines support for the Putin regime with German nationalist and far right views. In the October edition, he published an extensive and very favourable interview with the Swiss right-wing populist Christopher Blocher (SVP). In November, Blocher’s party colleague Oskar Freysinger was a speaker at the *Compact* conference in Berlin, “Peace with Russia—for a sovereign Europe”.

In the current edition of *Compact*, Elsässer supports the right-wing thugs of the German National Party (NPD), hooligans, skinheads and “Die Rechte” (The Right Party), which engaged in street battles with the police a few weeks ago in Cologne. He is also seeking collaboration with “Pegida” (Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the West), which recently organised a xenophobic demonstration with 10,000 participants in Dresden, and wants to gather together a fascistic movement.

In order to disguise the right-wing character of the Monday demonstrations, and not to exclude any links to the old peace movement from the start, Elsässer has withdrawn from the Monday activities. But his colleagues from *Compact* remain.

One of them is Ken Jebsen. He presented a youth programme for

broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB) for ten years before being fired in November 2011 for alleged anti-Semitic utterances. Officially, his dismissal was for repeatedly breaching journalistic standards.

Since then, Jebesen has published his own video channel and is a frequent speaker on the Monday demonstrations. His sharp criticism of the warmongering in the German media and his detailed information about the links between the “alpha journalists” and right-wing American think tanks have attracted a certain following.

Jebesen rejects the accusation of anti-Semitism, but then makes remarks such as: “Whoever has a problem with IS, which translates as Islamic State, should ask themselves the question, why the alarm bells never ring when ‘IS-rael’ calls itself a Jewish state. Here too, the US has done everything to make the madness acceptable, only that the madmen with the Star of David possess nuclear weapons.”

Ken Jebesen plays a key role on the Monday demonstrations, and is also described as the “chief ideologue” of the new peace movement, because he adeptly seeks to mix left- and right-wing views.

But the initiator of the movement, Lars Mährholz, is not the concerned esoteric and pleasant, almost apolitical MC of the Monday demonstrations which he would like people to think. According to media reports, he was for many years a member of the “Young Journalists Association” (VJJ), and was a friend of its chairman Torsten Witt. At the end of the 1990s, Witt organised demonstrations along with the lawyer Horst Mahler from the fascist German National Party (NPD). These protests were not for peace but rather against the planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin.

Today, Mährholz is also linked to right-wingers. Recently, he announced he was holding discussions with the student fraternity member Michael Vogt, who ten years ago produced the historically revisionist film “Secret file, Hess”, about Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess, together with NPD member Olaf Rose.

There can be no doubt that many right wingers are active in the so-called new peace movement, and increasingly set the tone. Their criticism of war is above all directed against the US administration and its ally Israel. Their criticism of the German government is concentrated on the accusation that it is too subordinate to Washington. In Ukraine, Germany has let its policy be hitched to the American wagon. This vassalage must cease.

Without saying so openly, this criticism is aimed at the demand for more independence for German imperialism. It links in with the right-wing call for “German sovereignty”. It is no accident that the full title of Elsässer’s magazine is *Compact-magazine for sovereignty*.

This demand for more German independence is not directed against the government, but supports it. The announcement by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President Joachim Gauck *et al.* that Germany in future must play a greater and more independent role in the world’s crisis regions, does not go far enough for the right-wing peace activists. They are demanding more distance from the US administration and closer collaboration with the Putin regime.

In face of the return of German great power politics, the old peace movement has collapsed. Now it being reorganised in an alliance with the Monday demonstrations as a right-wing organisation.

A glance behind the pacifist phrases makes clear that the political orientation of Friedenswinter hardly differs from that of the issuers of the statement “War in Europe again? Not in our name!”, more than 60 personalities from politics, business, culture and the media.

Initiated by Horst Teltschik (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), who since 1972 has belonged to the intimate circle of advisers of

former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and from 1999 to 2008 has headed the Munich Security Conference; and signed by ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD, Social Democratic Party), ex Federal President Roman Herzog (CDU) and many other representatives of German imperialism, this statement has nothing to do with a “peace policy”. It speaks for that section of the ruling elite who believe Germany must pursue its imperialist interests more independently, above all, more independently of the USA. It is no accident that this statement has been received positively on the website of Friedenswinter.

The “March on Gauck” is one component of the dispute over Germany’s foreign policy orientation, which is currently being pursued at all political levels. Its core is not the question whether, but how Germany’s great power interests can best be pursued.

The fact that sections of the Left Party support Friedenswinter, and are collaborating with far-right forces, is no surprise. Last year, when the strategy paper “New power—new responsibility” was being elaborated, the Left Party’s leading member Stefan Liebich was directly involved. Since then, the Left Party has supported the government’s aggressive foreign policy ever more openly.

In April, for the first time, several Left Party parliamentary deputies voted for a Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) intervention in Syria in the name of “disarmament” and “peace”. In the summer, parliamentary party leader Gregor Gysi, as one of the first German politicians, called for weapons to be supplied to the Kurds, and demanded a massive intervention by UN troops. At the beginning of October, 14 leading Left Party members published a statement entitled, “Save Kobane”, which called for a UN resolution in favour of a massive military intervention against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Whereas it had mainly been the right wing of the party around Stefan Liebich and Dietmar Bartsch who had marched in step with the government’s war policy, now the supposedly left wing, with its support for Friedenswinter, is heralding a new rightward development of the Left Party. Leading Left Party members such as Wolfgang Gehrcke, Sahra Wagenknecht, Andrej Hunko and Diether Dehm all supported the call for the demonstration in Berlin.

This alliance of forces confirms that the struggle against war can only be conducted successfully on the basis of an independent movement of the working class based on an international socialist programme. What is above all necessary, is a struggle against the cause of war and militarism, the capitalist system.



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