

From pacifism to a party of war: The political evolution of Germany's Greens

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If the history of the return of German militarism after two criminal world wars is ever written, the Greens will play a leading role.

When the party was founded in 1980, it focused on pacifism, environmental protection and the rejection of nuclear power. The mass protests against the deployment of nuclear-armed medium-range missiles in Europe contributed to their initial success.

Yet within 20 years they had thrown pacifism overboard. When they first joined the federal government in 1998, the Greens organized the first German foreign military intervention since the Second World War—the bombing of Yugoslavia, which Hitler's Wehrmacht had already devastated six decades earlier.

With their participation in the government for a second time, the Greens have finally emerged as the face of German militarism. While Petra Kelly, the party's first spokeswoman, had herself photographed with flowers in her hair, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock now appears in front of the cameras wearing a steel helmet.

Baerbock's furious attacks on Russia and President Putin have earned her the admiration of militaristic circles on both sides of the Atlantic. On 1 March, she flew specifically to New York City to announce to the UN General Assembly: "We have decided to support Ukraine militarily."

"Russia's war signifies a new era," Baerbock explained. "We have reached a pivotal moment. Yesterday's certainties no longer apply. Today we are confronted with a new reality that none of us has chosen. It is a reality that President Putin has forced upon us."

In reality, the Greens have been fuelling the Ukraine conflict for years. Already in 2004, the party-aligned Heinrich Böll Foundation supported the so-called Orange Revolution. Since then, it has promoted and funded NATO supporters in Ukraine. It played an important part in the right-wing coup that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, brought a pro-Western regime to power, and laid the foundations for today's war.

Marieluise Beck, a Green deputy in Germany's federal

parliament, personally participated in the protests in Kiev and wrote a diary about it. Her husband, the head of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Ralf Fücks, attacked the federal government, which also supported the coup, from the right. He accused the government of making "helpless appeals to the Russian leadership" instead of aggressively opposing it. The decisive role played by fascist forces such as Swoboda and Right Sector in the coup was deliberately played down by the Greens.

Today, Baerbock is doing everything possible to sabotage a diplomatic settlement of the conflict—and not only since the Russian attack on Ukraine. Since taking over the leadership of the Foreign Ministry on December 8, she has categorically rejected all Russia's efforts to obtain security guarantees and threatened to take "harsh measures."

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at the end of 2020, Baerbock spoke out in favour of a massive rearmament programme for the German army and a greater military role for Europe in global politics. If the West did not want to leave the field to countries such as China, Russia or Turkey, Europe would have to take its "peace role" in the world more seriously again, Baerbock said at the time.

She advocated higher military spending and war operations. In some areas, "you have to invest more to make guns shoot and night vision devices work," she said. In the event of Green participation in the government, she pledged to talk to France about robust European military operations. "This will be no simple task: But we can't evade it."

Robert Habeck, who led the party together with Baerbock before he joined the government as Vice-Chancellor and Minister of the Economy, has also long been campaigning for German arms supplies to Ukraine and the suspension of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The war over Ukraine then served as a welcome pretext for the German government to implement these plans. Within a week, it announced the largest rearmament offensive since Hitler. Defence spending will triple this year to make Germany Europe's leading military power once again.

The plans for this "new foreign policy epoch" had long

been in place. They were prepared by experts from the Ministry of Defence for the coalition negotiations. However, they had not been published due to the fear of the public protest they would trigger.

That the war in Ukraine serves to justify long-prepared rearmament plans has also been confirmed by the EU's Foreign Affairs Representative, Josep Borrell. "In the week since Russia's invasion, we have also witnessed the belated birth of a geopolitical Europe," he wrote in an article published in several languages. "For years, we Europeans have been debating how to make the EU more robust and more security conscious, with a common goal and the ability to pursue our political goals on the world stage. In the past week, we have probably made more progress on this path than in the last decade."

Even environmental protection, which is at the heart of the Greens' electoral programme, is now being called into question by Habeck. In order to make Germany independent of Russian energy supplies, he has talked about allowing coal and nuclear power plants to operate longer. "With reference to the war in Ukraine, their leaders have simply relativized the importance of environmental protection," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* approvingly noted.

The traffic light coalition government, made up of the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens, and Free Democrats, broke its own coalition agreement in the shortest possible time, the *FAZ* enthused. "It's not even three months old. Outdated, outdated, changed, questionable, irrelevant, these are the keywords that fit almost every chapter," the newspaper noted. "A new security policy, a revised foreign policy, a corrected energy policy, and in general: clear leadership"—all that Merkel's right-wing critics in the CDU urgently wanted in the policy of the new government.

Habeck was also celebrated in the US when he became the first German government minister to visit the country after the beginning of the war. "The end of the pipeline, the u-turn on military aid and the announced increase in defence spending have made Germany a favourite partner of the US government overnight," reports the *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland*. "The changes mean that trust and expectations are met to an extent that is extraordinary," Habeck stated.

The transformation of the Greens from pacifism to militarism cannot be explained by subjective motives or cliched phrases such as "power corrupts." It is deeply rooted in the Party's social and political DNA.

In 1980, the Greens gathered together the participants in the 1968 student protests, who had in the meantime made their peace with the existing social order. They were joined by opponents of nuclear power, environmentalists and various citizens' initiatives. "The common denominator of these different currents was their rejection of the class

struggle," we wrote on the thirtieth anniversary of the party's founding. "From the '68 movement they brought the prejudice that the working class was an apathetic mass, susceptible to backward ideas and fully integrated into the system by consumerism."

Socially, the Greens rely on educated layers of the urban middle class, which experienced unprecedented enrichment in the stock market and real estate boom after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while the living standards of the working class stagnated and declined. The Greens have the highest proportion of members who are university or college graduates (72 percent) and the lowest proportion of members who only have a high school qualification (4 percent). In the SPD, this ratio is 41 percent to 23 percent and in the Christian Democrats (CDU) 43 percent to 20 percent.

During the SPD/Green coalition government led by Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer, the Greens not only supported the first foreign military operation by the German army since World War II, but also—with the Hartz laws and the Agenda 2010—the most extensive social cuts since the establishment of the Federal Republic. They have since governed in several federal states in alliance with the CDU.

The war hysteria of this social milieu is an international phenomenon. As the *WSWS* noted, a critical examination of the "historical and political issues raised by the war between Ukraine and Russia" is not permitted in these complacent sections of the middle class. They categorically reject a principled, left-wing opposition to Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine that does not conform to the predatory interests of the imperialist powers and relies on the unification of the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class in the fight for socialism.



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