

German Greens press for confrontation with Russia

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Prior to the First World War, the German Navy League mobilized state officials, professors and other members of the upper middle class behind German militarism. Today, the Green Party's Heinrich Böll Foundation has taken on this task.

The lifestyle has changed. The well-paid Members of Parliament, lobbyists and academic members of staff who operate in the milieu of the foundation no longer dress their children in sailor uniforms, but in eco-clothing made from natural fibers. In their choice of social models, alternative lifestyles have replaced the reserve officer. When it comes to their support for German imperialism, however, they are on a par with their predecessors a century ago.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation proved this again on Monday when it convened a conference in Berlin titled: "Ukraine, Russia and Europe." What followed was four hours of hysterical warmongering against Russia.

Dissenting opinions were not to be found in the two panel discussions that made up the conference. All participants were united in their condemnation of the Putin regime and of Russian nationalism. When it came to Ukrainian nationalism, however, they could only see the positive side. The notion that right-wing and fascist tendencies had dominated the nationalist movement was dismissed as Russian propaganda. Their heroes were pro-Western oligarchs such as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, the Russian Mikhail Khodorkovsky and of course Boris Nemtsov, who was killed shortly before the conference.

There was not even so much as a hint of criticism of American and German policy in Ukraine. There were only differences over the question of whether one should aim for a direct "military solution," as formulated by Lilia Shevtsova, who works in Moscow for the American Brookings Institution think-tank, or whether one had to "invent something like a humanitario-military attitude", a "mix of humanism and a strong attitude with an army" as advocated by Bernard Kouchner, the former Foreign Minister of France.

Ralf Fücks, president of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, set the tone for the conference with his introductory remarks. "The Russian leadership," he declared, "combines diplomacy with military, propaganda and economic pressure in a sovereign way." The European governments and the US in comparison are far removed from "a consistently far-reaching strategy. Until now, they have only reacted instead of becoming proactive." This had to change.

Fücks made clear that the Greens were not primarily concerned with Ukraine itself. He saw the conflict over Ukraine far more as a danger for the European Union (EU), on which the economic and political influence of Germany in Europe and in the rest of the world is based. "What is at stake," said Fücks, "is the future of the European Community itself." Ukraine was a test of its ability to act and of its credibility.

"When, if not now, is the time for a joint foreign and security policy?" asked Fücks. "If we fail in this test, the centrifugal tendencies within the EU will only accelerate... When we speak of Ukraine and Russia, we speak about ourselves! That is the message that we want to convey with this

conference."

Other speakers underscored this point. Mihajlo Minakov of the University Kyiv-Mohyla-Academy threatened: "If you don't support us in the solution of the east European crisis, you will end up a peninsula on the Eurasian continent." And historian Timothy Snyder warned that China will ultimately be the winner of the crisis.

Timothy Snyder

The professor from Yale University is a sort of traveling salesman in matters of Ukrainian nationalist propaganda. He had previously appeared, also together with Bernard Kouchner, at a similar conference in Kiev in May of last year.

In Berlin he took up the task of rebutting the objection that lingered in the air but which no one would raise openly: that German foreign policy, with its support of the putsch in Kiev and its collaboration with right-wing Ukrainian nationalists, was following in the footsteps of the Nazi dictatorship.

In his convoluted and at times thoroughly illogically presentation of history, Snyder mixed opponents of the Nazis with Nazi collaborators and aggressors with their victims.

He began with the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, from which he extrapolated a shared responsibility of the Soviet Union for all the crimes of the Nazi regime, and the fact that the Nazis had found collaborators in the Soviet Union following their invasion of the country. From that, he concluded that the Nazi-invaders were not responsible for the crimes which had taken place in the Soviet Union during the Second World War, but rather that the Soviet Union was equally to blame.

The trick of Soviet propaganda was to shift the blame for all of these crimes onto the west, onto capitalism and fascism—or rather to "export" it there, as Snyder put it. The victory of the Red Army over the Nazis, won at the cost of millions of lives, was accordingly a myth, "the myth of the Great Fatherland War," created to "undo this evil."

"I am stressing this," Snyder continued, "because this export of the responsibility of history is happening again in a very crucial way. Just as then, so now blame for the Soviet past, blame for the Nazi past in the Soviet Union, is exported, is externalized." The Ukrainians were called fascists, while "the idea of the West as backers of fascism" was being resuscitated.

In a manner recalling the anticommunist hysteria of the McCarthy era, Snyder then bemoaned the way Russian propaganda had subverted European thought, "how things have worked their way directly or indirectly into the way we talk about Ukraine, and therefore about Europe, and therefore about ourselves."

"The worrying thing is," he continued, "how little we have noticed this.

There is a syndrome here, in which this thing we might dismiss as propaganda has actually engaged all of our minds in the West. In this sense, and it is a very important sense, the Kremlin is certainly winning.”

No one at the podium or in the audience protested these falsifications, which effectively stood the history of the Second World War on its head. They all agreed with Synder’s conclusions, advocating a massive military rearmament in Europe and above all in Germany.

“The Russians have a real army. The Russian army is not unstoppable. Germany could have a bigger one if it wanted to,” the Yale University Professor declared in his concluding remarks. Europe, he said, needs “a bigger strike force, an officer corps, a military academy. I find it strange that this is not being discussed now. You cannot have a foreign policy without an army.”

Bernard Kouchner

Bernard Kouchner was somewhat more restrained. The co-founder of “Doctors Without Borders” has for years played a leading role in the justification of imperialist wars with “humanitarian” arguments. In the 1990s, he supported the intervention of NATO in the Balkans and more recently endorsed the interventions of the French military into Libya and Africa. From 2007 to 2010 he was France’s Foreign Minister, under conservative president Nicolas Sarkozy.

Kouchner, however, considers European forces still too weak for a military confrontation with Russia. He posed the question: “Are you ready to fight against the Russian army?” and answered: “No, you are not.” According to Kouchner’s arguments, Russia would first have to be softened up through “humanitarian” means.

Lilia Shevtsova

This was strongly opposed by Lilia Shevtsova. With a piercing voice that began to crack as she spoke, the Brookings Institution staffer attacked German foreign policy—but not without first having thanked the Heinrich Böll Foundation and its president in the warmest tone for their work in Kiev and Moscow.

“You are responsible for that monster whom you have coddled for so long in the Kremlin,” she shrieked. She singled out Egon Bahr, the architect of Willy Brandt’s eastern policy in the 1970s; Gerhard Schröder, who as chancellor of Germany cultivated a close relationship with Putin; and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the current foreign minister of Germany

She accused German policy of naivete. “‘From Russia with love’, you still love it!” she railed. “Germany has always been the crucial factor for Russia, until the summer of last year Germany was the chief enabler, the chief accommodator.”

In the discussion, Shevtsova stressed that there could be no compromise with Putin’s Kremlin. “You should apply some much more drastic instruments beyond sanctions in order to force Putin to backtrack,” she said before asking provocatively, “Are you ready to see the collapse of Putin’s regime? Are you ready or not? Are you ready for the unpredictable situation that could emerge? If you try to find a compromise which would preserve Ukrainian dignity, your dignity and Putin’s agreement, this is going into the abyss.”

She spoke strongly against the assertion that there was no military solution. “There are situations where there are military solutions,” she said, calling for greater courage in this area. Ukraine would have to

undergo a massive military buildup, spending millions of dollars. The audience responded with applause.

During the conference, Shevtsova gave an interview to the news magazine *Focus*, in which she predicted a possible putsch against Putin and said that if he did not leave the Kremlin in time, Putin would “go down in flames.”

Conclusion

At the end of the discussion, Fücks summed up the conclusions in five points.

The first was: “Let us not be divided among ourselves. Use the conflict with Russia as momentum to advance European integration, including a strengthening of European defense.”

Second, Fücks proclaimed support for “democratic civil society in Ukraine and Russia,” a euphemism for the support of regime change in Moscow based on the model established by the Maidan protests in Kiev.

Third, he called for an intensification of sanctions against Russia, in particular “sanctions aimed at the Russian elites, focusing on the finance sector, because they were an especially vulnerable spot for the regime.”

Finally, he demanded massive financial support and investment programs to stabilize Ukraine economically and politically, as well as strengthening the EU’s energy independence from Russia.

That is largely in line with the policies which the German government has systematically pursued since declaring at the beginning of last year that it would break with a policy of military restraint and begin to play a larger role in world politics. The Greens follow this course but with a belligerence that goes even beyond that of the governing parties—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

They systematically and ruthlessly promote a confrontation with Russia, positioning themselves in these questions most closely to Washington. They offer a platform to people like Shevtsova, who do not shrink from a nuclear war and a putsch in Moscow with—as she says herself—“unforeseeable” consequences in the conflict with Russia.



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