

Europe's Pro-War Leftists: Selling "Humanitarian Intervention"

By Benjamin Schett

"I believe in two principles: never again war and never again Auschwitz."[1]

These words could be heard at a convention of the Green Party of Germany in May 1999, during the NATO bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in which Germany participated. The speaker was the Green politician Joschka Fischer, Germany's Foreign Minister at the time. His comment was meant to be a justification for the war against the Serbian people, the same people that already had to suffer under German imperialism in two World Wars.

In the 70s this same Mr. Fischer was a radical leftist activist and in the 80s he became one of the founders of Germany's Green Party. The premise behind its creation was to give political and parliamentary representation to all the different environmentalist and anti-war groups. At that time, if anyone had spoken about the possibility that this same party would one day play an active role in a war of aggression against Yugoslavia at the end of the millennium, it would have been labeled as absurd. In fact, direct German involvement in any war used to be completely taboo and no one from the Left or from the Right would have even dared to consider such an option; the popular consensus was that after 1945, no war would be started out of Germany ever again.

This political transition in Germany, which has been mirrored across much of Western Europe, is important for understanding how it came to pass that many mainstream "leftists" became modern-day warmongers, sometimes to even greater extremes than their conservative counterparts.

It is their promotion of the self-contradictory concept of "humanitarian interventionism" (as carried out, for example against Yugoslavia in 1999 and Libya in 2011) that has come to make the approach of allegedly "progressive" policy-makers so subversive. Their moral authority is spun as being much more credible than the more blatant ranting of neo-conservative preachers of hate.

In Western Europe, most proponents of militarisation on the mainstream Left are associated with Green or Social Democratic parties. One of the first advocates of militarized "humanitarian intervention" was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, member of the Green Party of France. He was also one of the masterminds behind the abolition of European nation states in favour of a stronger European Union. During the Civil War in the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia, Cohn-Bendit demanded that the Serbs had to be bombed, and anyone who didn't agree with that would carry the same burden of guilt as those who turned a blind eye to the Fascist mass murder in World War Two:

"Shame on us! We, the generation that held our parents' generation in such contempt because of its political cowardice, now we watch on seemingly helpless, powerless and yet still holier-than-thou as the Bosnian Muslims are ethnically cleansed."[2]

Indeed, the ploy of drawing parallels with Nazi crimes in order to demonise a rival who stands in the way of Western geostrategic interests was perfected during the Bosnian war. A case in point was the story of the so-called death camps in Bosnia: In August 1992, a British newspaper published a photograph of an emaciated man behind a fence, which was supposed to be proof of the existence of Nazi-style concentration camps run by Serbs. However, as German journalist Thomas Deichmann later found out, the man was standing outside the fence and therefore was not imprisoned behind barbed wire.[3] To be sure, detention camps existed on all sides and there is no doubt that conditions there were often horrific. The point, however, is that Western propagandists tried to whitewash the Croat and Muslim sides, portraying them wholly as victims, while at the same time presenting the Bosnian Serbs as barbarians and Nazis.

Using labels to demonize opponents or even whole populations is not a new concept when it comes to the mudslinging of propaganda wars. A de-politicised understanding of Fascism merely as a form of nationalism makes it possible for postmodern leftists to present wars of aggression as

“humanitarian interventions” and therefore as “anti-fascism” in action. The more traditional leftist idea of anti-fascism would view fascism not only as a chauvinist/racist ideology, but would also consider its economic background and the alliance of high finance, the arms industry and political elites.

When the United Nations Security Council proposed Resolution 1973 on the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011, which served as a pretence for attacking the country, Germany abstained from voting, along with Russia, China, India and Brazil. The German conservative-liberal coalition government was heavily criticised by Social Democratic and especially Green circles for not taking a stronger pro-war stance. Former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer attacked his successor Guido Westerwelle for not having supported the resolution of the warmongers, and added that Germany could now “forget about a constant seat in the U.N. Security Council.”[4]

Therefore it is not surprising that in the current conflict in Syria (which is significantly orchestrated and financed by the West, as were the civil wars in Yugoslavia and Libya), Western Europe’s Green politicians and other liberal leftists are the strongest proponents of a policy of escalation towards the Al Assad government. Claudia Roth, one of the two current German Green Party chairs, recently hosted a TV debate on Syria and shouted down any voice of reason pleading for negotiations with the Al Assad government.[5] One of them was writer and politician Jürgen Todenhöfer, who holds a balanced position on the conflict and recently travelled to Damascus for an interview with Al Assad, in order to let the Western world hear the “other side” as well.[6] The fact that anyone let Al Assad voice his opinion was already too much for Ms. Roth, who expressed her irritation with Mr. Todenhöfer’s trip to Syria in no uncertain terms.

At the same time, the first Western head of state to openly raise the possibility of attacking Syria was France’s newly elected “socialist” president François Hollande. In his statement he let the world know that he would “not rule out international military intervention in Syria”.[7]

Hollande’s election to the presidency expressed many people’s hope that Nicolas Sarkozy’s five years of reactionary, neoliberal and corrupt leadership would be replaced by a more humane way of governing. Unfortunately, when it comes to foreign policy, Hollande seems to carry on his predecessor’s neo-colonial agenda.[8]

In the cases of both Libya and Syria, Bernard-Henri Lévy, a French “nouveau” philosopher, professional self-promoter and frequent object of media mockery, called upon his government to intervene and prevent the “killing of innocent civilians”. [9] Of course his open call for war was sold as humanitarian grassroots activism. In an open letter to the French president, published (among others) by *Huffington Post*, Lévy used the massacre in Hula as a justification for intervention.[10] The fact that evidence indicates that the victims of this terrible crime were supporters of Al Assad’s government who were killed by insurgents[11] doesn’t matter to the black-and-white world of these virtuous philanthropic activists.

From “Auschwitz” in Bosnia and Kosovo to a “Syrian dictator” slaughtering women and children, the strategy of overcoming people’s resistance towards wars of aggression by appealing to their guilty conscience – the “don’t turn a blind eye” tactic – stays the same. And no one plays this game better than today’s “progressive” false samaritans.

Bearing all this in mind, we return to the example of Germany. To date, the country’s government has actively participated in spreading anti-Syrian propaganda, but has not expressed a pro-intervention enthusiasm comparable to the “progressive” pro-war disinformation campaign. Although not many positive things could be said about Chancellor Merkel’s neoliberal, U.S.-friendly government, Germany’s present administration at least does not seem to be inclined to risk a military adventure to the same extent as the Green/Social Democratic opposition, and continues to speak in favour of a “diplomatic solution”.[12] And while the current government’s track record proves they are far from innocent in matters of interventionism[13], things could get even worse during elections in 2013 if Germany’s government again forms a Social Democratic/Green coalition, as was the case from 1998 to 2005. After all, they managed to pull off a historic achievement by making war presentable again to the German public for the first time since 1945.

Notes

- [1] http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=4440.
- [2] http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=281&story_ID=19&slide_ID=3.
- [3] http://web.archive.org/web/19991110185707/www.informinc.co.uk/LM/LM97/LM97_Bosnia.html.
- [4] Süddeutsche Zeitung (German): <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/streitfall-libyen-einsatz-deutsche-aussenpolitik-eine-farce-1.1075362>.
- [5] <http://www.ardmediathek.de/das-erste/hart-aber-fair/21-00-besser-wegschauen-und-stillhalten-darf-uns-syrien?documentId=11083714>.
- [6] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBJlpY1qX28>.
- [7] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/french-president-leaves-open-possibility-of-military-intervention-in-syria-a-835906.html>.
- [8] During his presidency, Sarkozy was responsible for militarised intervention both in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya.
- [9] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/25/levy-libya-film-screening-cannes-festival>.
- [10] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/syria-massacre-houla_b_1552380.html.
- [11] See for example: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=31455>.
- [12] <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/syrien1576.html>.
- [13] All this, however, despite the fact that the German army and Federal Intelligence Service is providing military aid to the insurgents in Syria. See: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2012/aug2012/syri-a21.shtml>.

Global Research, September 21, 2012,
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/europes-pro-war-leftists-selling-humanitarian-intervention/>