

Protesters in Berlin denounce US-British aggression

Voices against the war

A correspondent
29 December 1998

On the last day of the bombing attack on Iraq several hundred persons gathered in the central Alexanderplatz in Berlin to protest against the American aggression. Among those present were many youth and elderly people who gathered for several hours despite the very cold and rainy weather.

Their anger against the American action and their solidarity with ordinary Iraqis was expressed in banners carrying slogans such as: 'No war in the gulf!', 'Stop the US aggression against the Iraqi people!', 'Stop the madman Clinton!' and 'Stop the killing'.

The speakers at the demonstration sought to limit the protest to the lowest political level, and divert attention from the scandalous position of the German government. Repeatedly the proposal was made that Christmas cards be sent to Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer as well as Saddam Hussein to express their protest.

Petra Pau (from the Stalinist-orientated PDS) claimed that the German Foreign Minister had some 'timid reservations', and emphasised her hope that these reservations would spread and lead to appropriate actions.

The position of many of the participants at the demonstration stood in clear opposition to the opinions of the speakers. In talking to reporters from the WSWs they made no secret of the fact that they were deeply disappointed, if not horrified, at the position of the government, and, above all, the Green party.

A woman from Dresden, nearly 80 years old, and her elderly companion sharply condemned the bombing attack. They had personally experienced the horrors of war and criticised the government vehemently.

'This war is a huge crime, above all directed against innocent people. Just think about the children. I don't know all the reasons for this war. I do know however that war, for whatever reasons, is a crime. Every war, whether it takes place in Africa or anywhere else, must be outlawed.

'We experienced it in Dresden in 1945, when the Americans dropped phosphorous bombs on the population.

People literally on fire jumped into the river Elbe to try and put out the flames, but they continued to burn. That must never happen again. None of the great powers has the right to impose its power with such means. None!

I was born in 1921 and someone like me, who experienced the fascist attack on Spain, continually draws parallels. The current war against Iraq is as brutal a crime as the fascist assault on Spain and serves above all to test out the newest weapons.

I'm really outraged by the reaction of our new government. Above all by the Greens! With the SPD--well what do you expect? I did not expect much from them anyway. But with regard to the Greens, I am extremely disappointed and I know that many others, particularly amongst the elderly, think the same. Their behaviour does not justify them sitting in government. Quite the opposite! Those who voted for the SPD and Greens hoped that these parties would make changes.'

Her companion emphasised that every cruise missile costs 2 million deutsche marks and that 200 had already been fired. In light of the poverty which is found in large parts of the world this money could be much better spent.

I am disappointed first and foremost by the position of the government, and in particular, Joschka Fischer, who up until now gave the impression that he was against violence. But now one sees his real position. He stands for continuity with the old CDU government and plays the role of the 'ingratiating child' for the benefit of the Great Powers. I had expected that the government would speak out against the war because the majority of the German people are against it. They were voted for by the majority of the German people and should therefore represent their interests.'

Andreas Batzke, 35 years old, and at the moment unemployed, declared that he 'expected the SPD to react as it did. On the other hand I am very disappointed by the Greens. I regret that I gave the Greens my vote.

I am against this war, although I am no friend of Saddam Hussein. But in every war it is the ordinary people who are hit most, those who cannot do anything about it. Nobody

knows where this war will lead, above all now as Ramadan begins. It could be that the entire Arab world rises up against Bill Clinton, and then you can work out what would happen. An escalation of the war must be prevented--and the danger is there! That is why I am here. But I don't know if this action will make any difference.'

Two Berlin school students also declared their opposition to Saddam Hussein: 'He is a dictator. But the bombing attacks are no solution. We are not quite clear why Clinton began the war. Perhaps he wanted deflect attention away from the upcoming debate on his impeachment from office. But this action will not serve to drive Saddam Hussein from power, it only hits the ordinary Iraqis. One must proceed against him as an individual, and not by bombing the Iraqi people.'

'I think the position of the German government is very bad. I have the impression that they support everything that the USA does, no matter what.'

Four women members of the Iraqi Cultural Union in Berlin carried a banner reading: 'Rescue our people from Saddam's dictatorship--but not at the cost of the people! Saddam should be made answerable to an international court of law!'

'I come from Baghdad but we have lived for a long time in Germany,' one of them reported to the *WSWS*. 'Just today I had a call from my sister in Baghdad. The situation there is very bad. They have terrible fear. My sister said it was not so bad in 1991. I told her that it is claimed here the war is clean, i.e., a war exclusively against military installations. She said emphatically, 'No!' Many houses have been destroyed and the hospitals are full of wounded. My sister's flat has also been destroyed and she does not know where to go with her family. There is no possibility of bringing them to a safe place. There is nothing there to eat or drink, and the thoughts of everybody are directed simply toward how they can survive.'

'They are very angry about the war because it is not the right way to overcome Saddam Hussein. The government is barely harmed by the situation. It controls the black market and profits in any case. The only loser is the population. That is why we do not understand the war. The people are against Saddam Hussein, that is not the issue--at least 50 percent of the Iraqis. They did not choose this government. We are also the victims of the UN sanctions. They hit only us.'

'Saddam Hussein's call for a holy war is an attempt to gather the entire Arab region behind him. Unfortunately there are many who, because of their anger against the war, allow themselves to be misused for Saddam Hussein's aims. For those of us in opposition the situation is very difficult. We attempt to collect our forces and unite with regard to our

aims, but every time such actions throw us back.

'Some say the embargo cannot be lifted so long as the Iraqis do not oppose Saddam Hussein and take their fate into their own hands. But how should that take place? We, as well as the family of my sister, the children of our neighbour, do not have enough to eat. They are trying to stay alive and improve their situation. The embargo has made the situation much worse, especially for those striving for a political change. It must be lifted!'

'I find the position of the German government to be dreadful. I did not expect such a reaction from an SPD government, and especially from the Greens and Mr. Fischer. Perhaps he will go the same way as Mr. Schily (SPD interior minister), i.e., from the Greens to the alternatives, then to the SPD and perhaps next to the CDU. It is unbelievable! He is a man who changes his mind in order to get to the top, without the least regard for those who have voted for him.'

Another from this group said, 'I am of the opinion that America is not interested in a democratic Iraqi state. The agitation and lies about the so-called enmity between Iraqis, Kurds, etc., which is propagated by America and is used to declare us as the enemy, does not correspond to the reality. All Iraqis want to live in peace. Before they always lived in peace. I am a Kurd. These three are all Arabs. We are friends. We are all one people!'

'America has played a very negative role in the history of our country. They got Hussein going, raised him to prominence, armed him--and now Hussein has become a great dictator who no longer does everything that the American government tells him to. So now they try to cut him down and make him a little smaller again. Or they try to overthrow him in order to replace him with someone who is more compliant. The aim remains the same, however, to hold the Iraqi people under dictatorial power with blood and steel.'

See Also:

The mask falls: Germany's Red-Green government and the bombing of Iraq

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