German press turns anti-American

Editorial of Gleichheit, published by the Socialist Equality Party of Germany

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The March/April edition of the German magazine Gleichheit, *reproducing important articles from the* World Socialist Web Site, *is soon to be published. The new edition will take as its theme "Europe and America". It contains several contributions analysing the significance of the war in Afghanistan, as well as a detailed article by Peter Schwarz concerning the growing tensions between Europe and America. The following is the editorial of the forthcoming edition.*

Over the last few weeks a significant change of opinion can be discerned within influential circles in Germany. The traditional feeling of attachment to the US, characterised by a general harmoniousness since the end of the Second World War, has soured into a sceptical and even hostile attitude. In particular, publications normally regarded as belonging to the liberal or social-democratic spectrum —*Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*—have taken on an increasingly anti-American tone which is also finding an echo in government circles.

When Chancellor Gerhard Schröder pledged the Bush government "unqualified solidarity" in the war against terrorism after September 11, his statement was received with hardly any criticism. But since then it has become clear that the US government is not prepared to coordinate its political and military moves with its allies. Commenting on the general state of disillusionment, the magazine *Der Spiegel* asserts: "The calculation by Europeans that the zealously promised 'unqualified solidarity' would strengthen its ability to influence its 'big brother' has proven to be an illusion." And *Die Zeit* suggests: "The Europeans have deceived themselves. George W. Bush has not changed from Saul to Paul. The Afghan campaign rapidly developed into the triumphal display of unilateralism." According to *Der Spiegel*, what is predominating in governmental circles recently is "the view that pure power politics rather than the fight against terrorism" lies behind American moves in the Middle East.

In the latest edition of *Die Zeit*, Theo Sommer states that Europe should react to America's "arrogance of power" with "self-confidence, calm and determination". He believes that the European Union should "resist America's unreasonable demand to reduce world politics to the military component" and instead "strive for patient diplomacy, multilateral solutions and the strengthening of the United Nations"—in other words, it must forge its own alliance against the US. Sommer stresses that in no way should Europeans allow themselves to become "America's global deputy sheriff".

Germany's federal government is also heading for confrontation with the US. During a cabinet meeting, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, until recently firmly committed to the transatlantic partnership, gave warning of a day "when Europeans will have to make it clear that the Americans are no longer pursuing our kind of politics".

Behind this swing in opinion lies the realisation that the geopolitical interests of Europe and America cannot be reconciled permanently. The further the US extends its military operations in Central Asia and the Middle East, the weaker appears the official justification that it is fighting a war against terrorism. The stationing of American troops in an increasing number of former states of the Soviet Union, together with threats of war against Iraq and Iran, reveal that the US government is striving to dominate strategically important regions and sources of raw materials, which are also vital to the European economy. In its latest issue, *Spiegel* magazine quoted an unnamed European foreign minister, saying he certainly did not want "to insinuate that [the US government] was planning a permanent occupation of oilfields in the whole region—but in order to protect themselves, there will eventually be no other course open to the Americans and this will have unforeseeable consequences for the Middle East region and world peace as a whole."

While American and European troops in Afghanistan fight side by side, contradictions and tensions between the respective ministries and state departments are sharpening. Under these circumstances, criticism of the aggressive American foreign policy also serves to mobilise support for the equally aggressive aims of German and European foreign policy. In order to pursue this objective, a deliberately anti-American tone is being assumed.

Disapproval of American policy is also being voiced by right-

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wing politicians like Friedrich Merz, chairman of the CDU (conservative Christian Democratic Union) parliamentary faction, who normally regards any criticism of US governmental policy as sacrilegious. But criticism of the reactionary policy of the Bush administration is, in itself, no more an expression of anti-Americanism than criticism of the policies of Chancellor Schröder is an expression of anti-German sentiment. Anti-Americanism begins when the American people as a whole are held responsible for Bush's policies, when any opposition between the ultra-right forces buttressing the Bush administration and the majority of the population is denied.

It is this latter interpretation which runs through numerous lead articles and commentaries in the German press. Wolfgang Koydl in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* declares: "In Europe and elsewhere people like to hold George Bush personally responsible for America's hoodlumism. Sometimes he's seen as a cowboy, sometimes as a Rambo.... But Bush isn't the exception.... It may be that he received no—or only a narrow—majority in the presidential elections; nevertheless he currently defends the moral values of a religious, prudish, hard-working America better than the saxophone-playing philanderer, Bill Clinton." *Der Spiegel*'s editor, Rudopf Augstein, absurdly claims that "It is the American mentality that we will never be able to change to the end of mankind." And *Die Zeit* allotted Jedediah Purdy, a young American graduate, a whole page of the newspaper to vent his feelings on the issue, where he writes: "Bush stands for the tradition of the good hearted in American politics". This, according to Purdy, is the "predominating political culture" which expresses a specific American tendency "to yield up the legal protection of liberties".

These claims are a mixture of presumptuous ignorance and intentional muddling. They ignore the enormous social contradictions tearing American society apart, just as they disregard the fact that Bush failed to achieve a majority in the election and only became president thanks to the ruling of a predominantly right-wing Supreme Court.

Last year the WSWS published an article entitled "Anti-Americanism: The 'anti-imperialism' of fools", in which was written: "To present 'the US' as some predatory imperialist monolith ... can only confuse and disorient. It not only serves as a barrier to genuine internationalism, it overlooks the contradictory character of American history and society.... The United States is a complex entity, with a complex history, elements of which are distinctly ignoble, elements of which are deeply noble."

In the light of German history, the conception of an unalterable American mentality, tending towards hooliganism and the surrendering of freedom, seems patently absurd. In contrast to Germany, where a victorious democratic revolution has never occurred, the US has witnessed two revolutions—the American Revolution (war of independence) and the Civil War. These traditions have profoundly influenced social consciousness and found expression in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and elsewhere. The few genuinely democratic elements to be found in today's German constitution are primarily a consequence of the allied victory in the Second World War. The German government will not hesitate to jettison them again when conditions demand—as Interior Minister Otto Schily's two bundles of tightened security measures clearly show.

The notion that Bush embodies the average American is an absolute lie. Even if one disregards that he blatantly stole the presidential election and received nationwide about 600,000 votes fewer than his Democratic opponent, Al Gore, the fact remains that only a quarter of the American electorate voted for him. About half withheld their vote owing to the absence of a visible alternative to the two mainstream candidates.

The gulf dividing Bush and his right-wing coterie from the mass of the population has grown wider since the election. Bush has determinedly continued the policies of his predecessors who systematically diverted distribution of national income from the poor to the rich. The present war in Afghanistan is not only serving the aims of foreign policy, it is also Bush's only answer to problems on the home front. Without the continual stirring up of chauvinism accompanying the war, the social contradictions rending American society would have erupted long ago.

Poll results, which accord Bush considerable popularity, are extremely deceptive. Above all, they reflect the fact that no serious political opposition exists, since the Democrats and a compliant media have aligned themselves so completely with Bush and the real mood of the population is unable to find a conscious outlet. But such a situation can soon change, as recently happened in the case of Bush's Italian counterpart, Silvio Berlusconi.

The anti-Americanism being fanned by the German press serves to drive a wedge between the European and American peoples and to whip up support for the imperialist foreign policy of the German government. As in America, the growth of militarism in Germany constitutes an attack on the German population, which will have to bear the costs in the form of welfare cuts and the dismantling of democratic rights. A struggle against this is only possible on the basis of an international, socialist programme uniting the workers of Europe and America.

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