

Yearning for the strongman—or how *Süddeutsche Zeitung* discovered the “visionary” Bush

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On September 28 a lead article appeared in the *Süddeutschen Zeitung* entitled “A moralist in the White House”. The commentary began: “What were all the names used in Europe to denounce Bush?—cowboy and Rambo, bully and religious maniac. There were three words, however, which one has not heard up until now, and that is a shame because they describe the president best: George Bush is a revolutionary, a visionary and a moralist.”

The author of the article, Wolfgang Koydl, is a long-time member of the editorial board of the *Süddeutschen Zeitung*, which is regarded as a mouthpiece for liberal democratic views. In order to pre-empt the reaction of those readers astonished to read such words about Bush, Koydl poses some obvious questions: “What is revolutionary about a spoiled millionaire’s son? And where, one might ask, can one detect vision in a man who served his apprenticeship in big business?” And what sort of morals could one expect from a president “who, with every other sentence, looks over his right shoulder to America’s self-righteous and bigoted fundamentalist Christians responsible for his election?”

Koydl then goes on to explain what he means. Formerly it was the “deprived and the damned” who were the representatives of revolution, vision and morality, he says. However, at some point in the last two decades the dividing line between left and right has been turned inside out and now it is the “political grandchildren of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan” who are breaking up and transforming “encrusted social structures”.

While, as is usually the case, Europe muddles along with its overriding maxim, “Please no experiments,” the American president has realised that radical times

require radical answers, the author affirms. The basic premise of Bush’s policy, he writes, is that “the world has changed fundamentally since the collapse of communism, and above all since September 11, 2001, and consequently radical answers are also necessary to ensure peace, freedom and prosperity for future generations. Nearly all of the measures adopted by President Bush in the first two years of his presidency, and which provoked the loudest reactions from Europe, were based on this assumption.”

Really? One can only rub one’s eyes in disbelief. Can this really be the same Bush who came to power two years ago through a combination of vote fraud and gangsterism? The same Bush whose policies are determined by the narrow-minded interests of a rich clique of oil magnates? The same man who is seeking to provoke a war with Iraq at all costs? And now we are being told that this man is a guarantor of “peace, freedom and prosperity for future generations”?

What has taken place to account for such a change of tone in the Munich editorial offices of the *Süddeutschen*?

In the recent past it was not uncommon to read many articles in this paper critical of the politics of the Bush government. Even Wolfgang Koydl himself wrote differently on this subject just a short while ago. Bush had barely taken office when Koydl produced a sharp commentary criticising the US president’s moves to stop funds for a worldwide programme for birth control, including the right to abortion. Koydl wrote: “With such proposals, Bush makes the fundamentalist wing of the Republicans happy; in Europe and the rest of the world, on the other hand, he encourages prejudices against a bigoted, and self-obsessed

America.”

Since then, one thing in particular has changed. The Bush administration has made clear that it is prepared to pursue its political aims with the most extreme forms of brutality and ruthlessness—directed against “friend” and foe alike. The angry reaction on the part of the US government to the German government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, arising from the latter’s opposition to war with Iraq, has profoundly impressed ... and fascinated some journalists and politicians. Maybe it is not so pleasant when someone like Bush hammers his fist on the table to push home his point, but nevertheless some are impressed.

An enthusiasm for the strongman on the part of educated bourgeois layers in Germany is not exactly new—it is only necessary to recall the rampant cult that emerged around the figure of Bismarck towards the end of the nineteenth century. When the expansion of the German Reich encountered external limits and domestic conflicts intensified along with the growth of the social democratic movement, profoundly disorientated and fearful layers of the educated bourgeoisie regained their footing by establishing a myth around the brutal, cynical and reactionary founder of the Reich. Hundreds of so-called stone “Bismarck-towers” were erected across the country recalling the repressive regime of Bismarck, which was to eventually culminate in nationalism, anti-Semitism and war. Even today there are those who remain faithful to the myth.

Similarly, disorientation and fear are no doubt a motive for Koydl’s paean to Bush. The political certainties of the past have disappeared along with the Berlin Wall and the Cold War. The elites of Germany and Europe as a whole have been profoundly destabilised by the aggressive way in which the US government has laid claim to world domination, under conditions where the transatlantic partnership was one of the most important pillars of post-war political stability. The ruling elites throughout Europe are now at a loss to decide how they should respond to the unpredictable and ruthless manner that characterises the actions of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Co.

European politics is still strongly influenced by the sets of relationships established in the period after the Second World War and governments on the continent would rather look for compromise instead of confrontation. The European bourgeoisie is poorly

prepared to deal with violence in the form of trade war and military confrontation. On top of that, social contradictions are growing daily as share prices plunge and tax revenues plummet. What can they do?

Koydl’s obsequious speech in praise of Bush’s methods is, in the final analysis, an appeal for the European bourgeoisie to respond in kind. His commentary concludes: “Today the fundamentals are being determined for coming decades and America is leading, not only technologically, but also in respect to how to deal with problems. When Europe wants to prevent another century of American domination, then it has to finally do something itself, instead of moaning about the sheriff in the White House.”

Such a position embodies genuine dangers. Already behind the scenes in Europe there are extensive moves for militarisation both at home and abroad, thereby setting the stage for immense future conflicts between the rival capitalist powers.



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