

No to war against Iraq

Editorial of Gleichheit, magazine of the Socialist Equality Party of Germany

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We are publishing below the editorial of the January-February issue of Gleichheit (Equality), the magazine of the Socialist Equality Party of Germany.

As this edition of *Gleichheit* goes to print there are increasing indications that America is preparing an imminent military offensive against Iraq. At the end of December US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld ordered an additional 50,000 US troops to join those already stationed in the Gulf. The total US troop contingent now totals 100,000. The press is speculating about the possibility of a war beginning in February.

Millions are concerned about the prospect of an imminent war. It is as if a catastrophe were being played out in slow motion before the eyes of the world. UN weapons inspectors, who have failed to come up with the slightest evidence to justify a war, are serving, together with the diplomatic talk shop in the United Nations Security Council, as a threadbare fig-leaf for US-led military aggression planned months in advance and driven by aims very different from those officially put forward.

The United States views its hegemony in oil-producing regions in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea as critical to both the functioning of its domestic economy and its ability to dominate the capitalist system on a world scale. The strategists of US imperialism are convinced that control of oil supplies will give the American ruling elite a massive competitive advantage over all present and future rivals. They have argued for some time that the US should guarantee its dominant world role through the application of its military superiority. Following wars in the Persian Gulf, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan the US is preparing its fourth major military operation in little more than a decade.

This is an expression not of strength, but rather of the profound internal crisis of American society and the capitalist system as a whole. There is an enormous gulf between America's unlimited global ambitions and the real extent of its economic resources.

Examined historically, it is evident that the objective position of the United States in the world economy is far weaker than it was 57 years ago, at the end of the Second World War. At that time the United States possessed, vis-à-vis potential capitalist rivals, overwhelming military superiority. But its military strength was less important than its dominant economic position in world capitalism. Approximately 75 percent of the capitalist world's productive capacity was located within the borders of the US.

Notwithstanding its military power, the situation today for

America is vastly different. Its fear of being overtaken by rivals—in Europe, China and Japan—finds expression in the frantic and frenetic policies of the US government. The Bush administration is seeking to use its military power to counteract the consequences of economic decline and the vast class differences besetting American society.

The bursting of the Wall Street bubble has given the lie to the self-serving claims that the 1990s saw a colossal resurgence in the productive potential of American capitalism. It is now clear that the past decade witnessed an extraordinary squandering of financial assets: trillions of dollars were poured into speculative enterprises that were, at best, unproductive, but in most cases utterly wasteful. The attempt to create the mirage of value through speculative activities independent of the production process had a profound effect on the character of American capitalism and the social physiognomy of its ruling elite.

Corporate activity assumed an increasingly criminal character. The daily activities of the ruling elite, concentrated ever more frantically on its self-enrichment, assumed the form of an increasingly brazen plundering of social assets. The staggering degree of self-enrichment finds its mirror reflection in the stagnation and deterioration of the social position of broad masses of the working population. By the turn of the new century, the United States had become the most socially unequal of all the advanced capitalist countries. One figure sums up the extreme social polarization that exists within the United States: the annual income of the country's 13,000 richest families is greater than the combined annual income of the country's 20 million poorest families.

Beneath the surface of American society a bitter class war is developing—a conflict that has failed to find political expression because both of the traditional parties of American politics, the Republicans and Democrats, unreservedly defend the interests of the ruling oligarchy. In similar manner to the Social Democratic parties of Europe, the American Democrats have shifted further to the right as social contradictions have intensified.

The realisation by the US ruling elite of the dangers of broad resistance to its policies is indicated by the enormous attack on democratic rights carried out by the Bush government. The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 are being used as justification for such measures but, in fact, they are directed against any potential opponents who dare to challenge existing social conditions.

In the long run, politics abhors a vacuum. The accumulated social tensions must inevitably find a political expression. This must be the starting point for any serious opposition to war with Iraq. It must proceed on the basis of a programme that takes up the social interests of broad masses of the working population and seeks to mobilise workers worldwide, and especially in the US, on the basis of a socialist perspective.

Developments in Germany confirm that it is pointless to base any rejection of war on the reaction of European governments. The clear opposition to war proclaimed by German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party—SPD) during last year's election campaign has dissolved into thin air.

He has agreed to the unrestricted use by US armed forces of German airspace and US bases in Germany. In the event of war, German "Fuchs"-type tanks will remain in Kuwait and German soldiers will man AWACS reconnaissance aircraft operative in the war zone. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (of the Green Party) has gone so far as to indicate that Germany would vote in favour of a UN resolution for war.

All that is claimed by the government at the present time is that there will be no direct participation by German soldiers in an invasion of Iraq—although this demand has never been put to the German government. Instead, Germany is freeing up US troops for war against Iraq by taking responsibility for security in Afghanistan, and agreeing to organise the protection of US bases in Germany.

The political somersault by the SPD-Green Party coalition arises from the social interests which the government represents. Both the government's foreign and domestic policies are pledged to defend the interests of big business. A government that consistently pursues hostile policies against the working class of its own country by attacking social and democratic rights at home cannot pursue peaceful policies abroad.

Berlin would much prefer that the US did not conduct a war against Iraq. After all, such a war would enormously endanger German interests in the Middle East. But it is more afraid of an open conflict with Washington, which could have repercussions for Germany's influence on the world stage. This is the starting point for right-wing criticisms of the Schröder government, accusing it of isolating Germany internationally by precipitous statements against the Bush government.

In a speech to the Aspen Institute in Berlin in October of last year, the prime minister of the German state of Hesse, Roland Koch (of the Christian Democratic Union-CDU) declared: "Unfortunately, in these difficult times, the German Republic lacks the influence which it should have on the basis of its economic and political weight, as well as its geographical position...The downright stupid Iraq policy of the German government has led to a situation for Europe which, with regard to its influence on the world political situation, can only be described as disastrous."

Koch also criticised the "unilateralist tendencies" of the US. There can, he said, "be no doubt that the declining willingness of the US administration to take into account other political interests in the world is a worrying development." He continued: "The unilateral standpoint of the US does not correspond to our own

interests."

He went on to say that this problem would not be solved either by pleading with or abusing the US, but only through the construction of "multi-polar" power structures. German foreign policy had to concentrate its efforts to this end.

Europe, he declared, "only has a chance when, in the final analysis, it speaks with a united voice on the issue of foreign relations." Toward this end he championed a "military intervention force" and "financial conditions inside the Republic of Germany that make it possible to ensure that our soldiers are well trained and can be responsibly deployed and equipped with the best technical material."

Despite mutual invective, the government of Schröder and Fischer is basically in agreement with the orientation laid down by Koch. As on economic and social policy, the German government is prepared to let itself be led on foreign policy matters by the opposition.

At the same time as the government adapts to the war course of the Bush administration, it proceeds with the construction of independent military capacities for Germany. The result is an increasing militarization of foreign policy, together with the demand for additional financial resources for rearmament, the cost of which has to be shouldered by the population as a whole.

The dangers arising from such a development can only be countered by a mobilisation of broad layers of working people on both sides of the Atlantic. The construction of an international mass movement on the basis of a socialist perspective is the aim of the *World Socialist Web Site* with its daily analyses and commentaries.

This latest edition of *Gleichheit* features important articles that have appeared on the WWS over the past two months. Together with material on the background and causes of the Iraq war, we deal with the expansion of the European Union and other important international developments. The magazine also features the election statement of the Socialist Equality Party of Germany for its campaign in the Hessen state elections of February 2. In our culture section we publish an obituary of the writer Stefan Heym, who died a year ago.



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