Why Germany's Christian Democrats support the war against Iraq

Ulrich Rippert
25 February 2003

The war against Iraq has split not only the European elite, but also that of Germany. Sections of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Free Democrats (FDP), as well as the German conservative press, are conducting a campaign against the political course adopted by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party—SPD) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) that is growing more hysterical by the day.

A recent example is the article by CDU leader Angela Merkel published in the *Washington Post* on February 20. Under the headline "Schroeder Doesn't Speak for All Germans," Merkel accuses the chancellor of sweeping aside for tactical electoral reasons the "most important lesson of German politics," i.e., that Germany should never again go it alone.

The German government's blocking of military aid for Turkey "undermines the very basis of NATO's legitimacy," writes Merkel, who goes on to defend Eastern European candidate members to the European Union (EU) against criticisms made by French President Jacques Chirac. According to Merkel, these countries have merely declared "their commitment to the transatlantic partnership between Europe and the United States".

Two weeks ago, the CDU chair delivered a speech supporting the US war policy at the Munich NATO security conference. Only the direct threat of force and massive American troop presence in the region had forced Saddam Hussein to cooperate with the weapons inspectors, she said. Schroeder's policy, she declared, contradicted "German state interests".

According to press reports, in private discussions with representatives of the American delegation Merkel let it be known that a CDU-led government would have signed the declaration of the eight European states giving full support to the US.

Until recently, the CDU and its sister party, the CSU, had been more restrained in their statements about the war, in view of important state elections and the knowledge that most of the German people reject the American war policy. By openly solidarizing themselves with the Bush administration, the CDU and CSU are carrying out a right-wing offensive against the majority of the population.

There are several reasons for their very public line-up behind the Bush administration.

Merkel and the CDU foreign policy spokesman, Wolfgang Schäuble, justify it predominantly as a matter of foreign policy. The "close partnership and friendship with the United States" is just as fundamental an element of German policy as European integration, Merkel declared in the *Washington Post*.

Schäuble argues along the same lines. He warns of the economic and political implications of intensified conflict with the American administration, and ascribes responsibility for this exclusively to Chancellor Schröder, who, he asserts, has behaved improperly towards the US.

This view recalls the ostrich, which sticks its head in the sand when confronted with new dangers. Merkel and Schäuble act as if the obvious striving for unrestrained world power by the American administration has not fundamentally changed the coordinates of international policy. They are not concerned by the fact that the Bush administration has renounced the consensus upon which previous transatlantic relations were based and is using its influence to split Europe.

Their subservience to Washington stands in the tradition of the CDU, which took the side of the US in the two great foreign policy controversies of the post-war period: the dispute over tying Germany to the West immediately after the war, and the conflict over Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, when his attempts at rapprochement with East Germany were initially opposed by Washington.

However, there is more than just a nostalgic reflex behind the CDU's partisan support for US war policy. Others inside the CDU/CSU—like parliamentary Vice Chairman Friedrich Merz, Hesse State Premier Roland Koch, and foreign policy expert Friedbert Pflueger—are also pursuing domestic goals. They are not so much concerned with foreign policy as with the unremitting popular resistance to welfare cuts, mass sackings and the privatisation of Germany's public sector.

They are attracted to the belligerent war lust of the Bush administration, which for them has a fascinating allure. While the idea of war, with all its horrors and victims, as a legitimate tool of policy repels and shocks the majority of the population, these politicians regard war as a means of intimidating the population and forcing their will upon society. This is why they are inspired by the roughhousing of a Rumsfeld or a Bush.

They represent the same aggressive, criminal element in German politics that the Bush administration embodies in America. Although they are pressuring the Social Democratic-Green Party government to the right with regard to all social questions, and the SPD-led regime has already dismantled large swathes of social benefits, the CDU/CSU right wing continue to rabidly attack the

© World Socialist Web Site

Schroeder-Fischer government, which was re-elected only six months ago.

They are receiving support from the conservative media, which reacts almost frantically to the growing anti-war mood in the population, abandoning the most elementary standards of objectivity and spewing out fire and brimstone. Bolstered by the Pentagon's war propaganda, they try to foment fear and hysteria.

In unison with some CDU/CSU and FDP politicians, the conservative press has been accusing the government of playing down the dangers of smallpox virus emanating from Iraq and ignoring intelligence provided by the secret services.

On the day after the mass antiwar demonstrations, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagzeitung* led with a sensationalist story on a report from a federal ministry, according to which Germany potentially faced "25 million dead in a smallpox attack". According to the newspaper, the government has had this information since August 9, 2002, but has failed to pass it on to the general population.

The whole thing proved to be pure panic-mongering. Two section chiefs from the Federal Department of Health, completely inexperienced in secret service affairs, had conjured up the disaster in a paper for the budget committee in an attempt to secure 30 million euros for a vaccination campaign. They based themselves on a Secret Service paper, given the lowest security classification, which itself was almost entirely culled from public sources. "Such information does not constitute proof; it is not even evidence," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented.

That conservative circles are serious in their attempts at intimidating the population is shown by another development, which, in the light of the tirades against the Iraqi dictator, would be amusing if its implications were not so reactionary. With growing frequency established newspapers are declaring that democracy should not be confused with the will of the majority. Instead, the press argues, governments should be driven by a determination to implement their political goals, regardless the opinion of the governed.

In a February 17 front-page editorial under the headline "Misunderstood Democracy", the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* begins by stating that more than 70 percent of the population sides with the SPD-Green government on the Iraq question. It then raises the question: "Isn't a government obliged to carry out the will of the people when it seems to be so clearly articulated? Many see it this way."

Not so, according to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The paper claims that the widespread understanding of democracy as the "people's will" is the "worst degeneration of democracy". It cites a well-known philosopher as its principal authority: "Karl Popper has already warned of a too literal translation of the Greek term democracy into German—'Democracy was never the people's will, it cannot be and should never be'."

The defining characteristic of democracy, the paper opines, is not that the will of the people prevails, contrary to "a dictatorship, where it is an individual or clique". The practice of power, according to the newspaper, is "always a matter of the few." Democracy is special in that "power is abdicated for a time" and the people occasionally have the possibility of voting on government policies.

"This does not mean," the editorialist notes, "that it would be fundamentally wrong if the government did what a majority considers desirable."

The argument in favour of a government that implements its will in defiance of the population—as Bush did in the theft of the American presidential election—is increasingly becoming a demand for the premature ending of the SPD-Green coalition government. Despite its social cuts and austerity measures, in the eyes of the CDU/CSU right wing the Schröder government is not in a position to hold out against growing popular pressure.

"I think they have to go—at any democratic price," CSU regional chief Michael Glos told a CDU/CSU faction meeting at the beginning of the month. Since then the right-wing attacks on the government have gathered force.

Two weeks ago, the CDU/CSU used a *Bundestag* (parliamentary) debate about the Iraq conflict to intensify pressure on the government. After the chancellor had justified the attitude of his cabinet on the war question in a governmental declaration, the CDU/CSU presented two motions for debate, one of which was headed "Europe and America must stand together" and was directly linked to the declaration of the eight European governments that had solidarized themselves with the US. The Schröder government was called upon to abandon its opposition in the United Nations Security Council and agree to German participation in a war against Iraq.

The second motion was somewhat more general. It accused the government of "placing a question mark over Germany's foreign and security policies and thereby damaging the country's vital foreign and security policy interests, its reputation and its weight in the world."

The following day, it became known that this debate was planned as a test run for a vote of no confidence. However, there was opposition to such a course within the CDU/CSU parliamentary faction. Seven CDU/CSU deputies left before the vote and the government's majority was secured. But the attempt to destabilize the Schröder government continues.

How much support the CDU/CSU are receiving from the US was made clear by *International Herald Tribune* columnistWilliam Pfaff. Schröder will not be forgiven for maintaining his resistance to American war plans, he wrote. The Bush administration will try "to destroy the German chancellor politically".

A "regime change" in Germany seems now to rank among the priorities of the administration in Washington.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site