

Berlin Attac stands by its act of political censorship

Editorial Board World Socialist Web Site
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In the April 3 edition of the newspaper *Junge Welt*, the Berlin centre for the anti-globalisation movement Attac gave its answer to the March 26 Open Letter of the Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*. [See “Against political censorship and bureaucratic caprice: An open letter from the WSWs Editorial Board to the Attac movement in Berlin”] In its open letter to Attac, the WSWs protested against the actions of two representatives of Attac who, at the last minute, banned a member of the editorial board, Ulrich Rippert, who is also the national secretary of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party), from addressing the Berlin antiwar demonstration of March 22.

The reply by Attac Berlin does not mention in any form the political arguments raised by Carl-Friedrich Waßmuth and Jan Sievers to justify banning Rippert’s address. Instead, the Attac letter raises a number of organisational issues, which are to a large extent simply untrue. The response by Attac only serves to confirm the charge that they are guilty of political censorship: the group used its organisational influence over the antiwar protest and resorted to bureaucratic measures to suppress certain opinions that did not correspond to their own.

The reply by Attac states that the WSWs is “completely unknown within peace circles” and that its members first “showed up at the plenum just a few days before the demonstration.” It is entirely normal, the letter continues, “to refuse permission to unknown speakers on the day of the demonstration.” It adds that organisers must ensure that “rallies do not last for several hours.”

All of these arguments can be shown to be either untrue or utterly irrelevant to what actually took place.

The facts are as follows: Rippert had already, on January 21, sent a letter requesting permission to speak to the “Action Alliance 15th February”, to which both the “Achse des Friedens (Peace Axis)” and Attac are affiliated. Since the beginning of March, representatives of the WSWs have taken part regularly in the weekly meetings of the Peace Axis. At these meetings it was evident that the work of the WSWs was very well known.

At the March 20 meeting of the “Peace Axis” a majority voted in favour of allowing a representative of the WSWs to speak at the antiwar rally planned for March 22. This was noted in the protocol of the meeting and expressly confirmed at the meeting held a week later, on March 27, i.e., after Rippert had been prevented from speaking.

In accordance with the decision of March 20, it was agreed at the start of the rally two days later that Rippert would be second in a

list of three speakers, including a representative of the group “School Students Against War” and the Green Party parliamentary deputy Hans-Christian Ströbele.

It is nonsensical to maintain that the organisers were unaware of the work of the WSWs, that representatives of the latter had only sought to speak on the day of the rally, or that the issue of time played a role—under conditions where just three speakers were scheduled to address the rally. In fact, the only arguments put forward by Attac representatives Carl-Friedrich Waßmuth and Jan Sievers on the day of the rally were of a political nature.

They stated that a leaflet being distributed by WSWs supporters at the demonstration did not correspond to the political stance of Attac. In particular, they argued “it was irresponsible” to compare the US aggression in Iraq with the Blitzkrieg carried out by the Nazis against Poland in 1939. Such a standpoint was “completely exaggerated,” they said, and added that should the same comparison be made from the rally podium, it would serve to discredit Attac and “send a completely false signal to the US”.

The reply by Attac Berlin to the WSWs Open Letter fails to make the slightest mention of the arguments used to prevent Rippert from addressing the March 22 rally. In the Open Letter we made the point that a comparison with 1939 would no doubt be interpreted as a “false signal” by the Bush administration, but not by the many opponents of the war in the US. We also pointed out that such a comparison is regarded as highly undesirable by the German government.

Since the beginning of the war, the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition government has gone to considerable lengths to normalise its tense relations with Washington. It has virtually dropped its stance of opposition to the war and now merely speaks of its hope that the conflict will be speedily concluded. Bearing in mind that the German government has agreed to allow unlimited access by the US and British military to bases in Germany and to German airspace, such hopes can only be interpreted as a desire for a rapid American victory.

In an official government statement of April 3, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared: “We should not forget that those states that are leading the war against Iraq are alliance partners and friendly nations.”

At the same time the Social Democratic-Green Party government has concluded that the unilateral action of the US demands an accelerated militarization of Europe. Schröder declared, “Europe has to develop its military potential in such a way as to correspond

to its and our own commitments and responsibilities for the prevention of conflicts and the securing of peace.” Any premature conflict inside NATO would only hinder such a process and the German government is seeking to avoid at all costs anything—such as a public comparison between the Iraq war and the 1939 Nazi aggression—which could further damage transatlantic relations.

The stance taken by Attac represents an adaptation to this position. It is not possible to explain the censorship of Rippert in any other way. Attac is prepared to express certain criticisms of the German government, but is careful that such criticisms remain within definite limits. Otherwise, they would jeopardise the organisation’s numerous links with the government camp and all those who stand with one leg in the antiwar movement and the other in the German administration.

Every day that the current war continues confirms the accuracy of parallels to the events of 1939. There are few historical precedents for the enormous brutality shown by the US Air Force, which has dropped thousands of bombs on defenceless cities, while US troops have penetrated into densely inhabited areas with tanks and helicopter gunships firing at anything that moves—measures proudly described by military spokesmen as the “destruction” and “elimination” of so-called “pockets of resistance”.

The end result is the systematic butchery of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians. When previously has a war been fought between two sides with such unequal military capacities? But for Attac, any comparison with Poland in 1939 is sufficient grounds for censorship!

It is often overlooked that the central charge laid against Nazi leaders tried by the Nuremberg tribunal was the planning and execution of a war of aggression. This was the basis for the conviction and execution of leading German officials. The tribunal also created a precedent. Since then all wars that are not fought on the basis of self-defence or legitimised by the United Nations have been regarded as criminal in nature.

Such criteria are entirely applicable to the US-British war against Iraq. The US-led aggression was completely unprovoked and carried out in defiance of the will of the United Nations. The war flagrantly violates international law.

No country, including immediate neighbours whose populations overwhelmingly rejected war, felt threatened by Iraq. Indications of connections between Iraq and Al Qaeda have been so tenuous that even the acquiescent American media has been unable to exploit them for propaganda purposes. There is no evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And the claim that the aim of the war is to bring freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq is simply laughable. There is barely a dictatorial regime in the entire region that does not owe its existence to the CIA.

The war is clearly being waged for imperialist aims—control over the rich Iraqi oilfields together with the political reorganisation of the region under American domination. The war is being led by an ultra-right-wing clique in the White House and Pentagon that is increasingly trampling on the democratic rights of the American people.

The present stance of the German government further recalls

events of the 1930s, in particular the appeasement policies of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. With concessions and conciliation, Chamberlain sought to appease Hitler, who reacted with ever bolder and more aggressive moves. In Munich in 1938 Chamberlain agreed to German occupation of the Sudetenland. Shortly afterwards Hitler occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia and then went on to invade Poland.

There is a parallel here to the current behaviour of the German government towards the Bush administration. First Berlin protested, then it capitulated and adapted to the American aggression. As the US regime has gone on to patently violate international law and, with threats against Syria, Iran and North Korea, made clear that its ambitions are not limited to Iraq, Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer have merely emphasised the indispensable role of NATO and refrained from any comment that could possibly offend the hawks in the White House.

In the final analysis, the inability of the German government to offer any effective opposition to Bush rests on their common class interests. The German government criticises the unilateral foreign policy of the Bush administration, which interferes with Germany’s own ambitions, but in the sphere of domestic policy—with its attacks on social and democratic rights—it takes its lead from America.

Serious and effective opposition to Bush and US imperialism can emerge only from a broadly based movement uniting working people in Europe and America and throughout the entire world. Attac’s censorship of criticisms of Bush by the WSWS serves only to undermine such a movement.

As we said in our Open Letter: “The peace movement can be assured of success only if it does not permit itself to be manipulated by the government, and instead actively opposes the policies of Schröder, Fischer and company. This requires, however, a fair and democratic exchange of opinions over the future political orientation of the peace movement without any standpoints being suppressed.”



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