

Schröder's policy of closing his eyes to reality

The German government seeks closer relations with the US

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“Never explain; never complain. I want to use our time together with you, to cast our eyes forward.” These were the words used by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to describe German foreign policy after the Iraq war. He was speaking on May 9 to the American Chamber of Commerce in Berlin, which was celebrating the hundredth anniversary of its foundation.

Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer expressed similar sentiments in an interview with the magazine *Die Zeit*. Referring to the Iraq war, he said, “There is no point now carrying out yesterday’s discussions... Now it’s a question of the future.”

After the tensions and conflicts of the past months, the German government is evidently intent on acting as if nothing had happened. How it hopes to look to the future while at the same time closing its eyes to the past and the present remains a mystery.

In Berlin, Schröder invoked the “common values” that unite Germany and the US in a “vital friendship”—“respect for basic human rights,” the recognition of “freedom and democracy,” “international law” and an “international system of legal institutions.” His speech made no reference to the war against Iraq in which the US brutally disregarded all of the “values” he cited.

Schröder’s silence cannot hide the fact that this war represents a profound turning point in international relations. The US government ignored international law and the will of the majority of the United Nations Security Council, and made unmistakably clear that in the future it intends to disregard any authority other than its own interests and military strength.

Under these conditions, the stance now taken by Schröder and Fischer is equivalent to retrospectively awarding legitimacy to the war and occupation of Iraq. Although in his *Die Zeit* interview Fischer denies that

this is his standpoint, he immediately goes on to add, “Whatever position one took towards the war with Iraq: as soon as the first shot was fired, the success of the efforts to establish a new order was of decisive importance for European security.” The headline for his interview read: “Saddam Hussein’s overthrow is a cause for celebration.”

In practice, the German government has already made considerable concessions towards the US. Berlin has indicated its muted agreement to the UN resolution with which Washington is seeking to sanction the transformation of Iraq into a virtual US protectorate. Last week, the US State Department sent its special ambassador Kim Holmes to Berlin to review the details of the US draft resolution for the UN.

In the course of the summit of the French-German-Polish governments in Breslau last Friday, Schröder made clear that he was prepared to take over the role of mediator and seek to secure the agreement of Paris and Moscow for the US resolution. This was the desire of Germany, he made clear, and the government was working for its implementation.

France and Russia, which both have veto powers on the UN security council, have expressed their own misgivings about US plans for the occupation of Iraq—not least because of the direct threat to the interests of French and Russian oil companies, which had made long-term trade arrangements with the government of Saddam Hussein.

On Friday, May 16, Schröder is due to meet US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Berlin—the first meeting between the chancellor and a member of the American government for months. It is expected that the meeting will also arrive at a further closing of positions regarding the US resolution for the UN.

In the meantime, there have even been reports of a

possible deployment of German troops in Iraq. According to *Der Spiegel* magazine, the German defence minister, Peter Struck, is said to have assured his American counterpart Donald Rumsfeld, in secret talks, that Berlin had no objections to participating in the occupation of Iraq. Last week, Struck visited Washington. In his discussions there, he left open the issue of German army involvement in Iraq, which would have to be decided by the German parliament. According to *Der Spiegel*, however, the sending of German troops is no longer a matter of principle, merely an issue of timing. There are no fundamental objections to such a move.

The anti-war stance adopted by the SPD and Greens last September, which was decisive in securing the government's autumn electoral victory, is proving more and more farcical. With its move to retrospectively legitimate the war and US occupation of Iraq, the German government has only strengthened the hand of the hawks in the American administration for whom the next war is just a question of time. Equally, the retreat undertaken by the German government is a stab in the back for all those who expressed their opposition to the war—in America and all over the world.

In any event, German hopes for reconciliation with the US government are illusory. At every opportunity, Schröder and Fischer emphasise that they are in favour of the unity of Europe alongside an alliance with the US and see no contradiction between the two objectives.

“The close German-French friendship and collaboration is as indispensable for all of Europe as it is for Europe's transatlantic partnership,” Schröder said in Berlin. “Nobody should try to pose Germany with making the senseless choice between its friendship with France and its friendship with the US.” A united and powerful Europe is “also in the interests of the US.” It is not a problem “in our partnership of too much America, rather that there is too little Europe.”

Fischer used very similar language in *Die Zeit*. The economic strength of the EU has “not led to a situation where one side confronts the other, the power of Europe against America,” he remarked.

However, if anything has become clear over the past few weeks, it is that Washington is not prepared to tolerate any rivals on an equal footing. It has ruthlessly

used its influence in Europe to split the continent. With its cosying up to the US administration, the German government is only serving to exacerbate this process.



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