

WSWS/SEP meeting in Berlin: “The strength of the US government has been grossly exaggerated in Europe”

Our correspondents

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The following is a report on a public meeting of the World Socialist Web Site and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany) held June 1 in Berlin. The topic of the meeting was “Lessons of the Iraq War: The Tasks of the European Working Class.” The remarks of Peter Schwarz of the German SEP and WSWS International Editorial Board will be published in full over the next several days.

“Neither the European governments in general, nor the Social Democratic-Green Party government in Germany, in particular, have the courage, political imagination or intellectual backbone—not to speak of social motivation—required to deal with the American government in the manner it deserves. We are living in a period characterised by the most extreme forms of cowardice and backwardness.”

With these words, David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of the US, began his contribution to a public meeting of the WSWS and Partei für Soziale Gleichheit held June 1 in Berlin. North spoke on the lessons arising from the Iraq war to an audience consisting of workers, youth and professional people who came from cities and towns in both the east and west of Germany.

He was preceded by two other speakers—Peter Schwarz and Chris Marsden—both members of the WSWS International Editorial Board. They dealt with the situation in Europe in the aftermath of the war.

North emphasised that Germany had witnessed a particularly vigorous and heated discussion of the nature of the Bush government and the Iraq war. When the former justice minister, Herta Däubler-Gmelin of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), dared last year to hint at a comparison between Bush’s politics and those of the Nazi regime, she suffered the fate of all bourgeois politicians who, in an unguarded moment, blurt out the truth. “She was immediately sacked.”

Above all, the reintroduction of war as a legitimate method of pursuing foreign policy points to parallels, notwithstanding all of the differences, between the Bush administration and the Nazi regime. “At that time—70 years ago—the axis of German politics consisted of unvarnished disdain for international law,

shameless lying, and the continual elaboration of new pretexts for stoking up and justifying war. All of this sounds familiar today.”

North pointed out that the central charge lodged against the Nazi heads of state and military chiefs at the Nuremberg trials could and should be levelled against the Bush administration. “Contrary to popular belief, the core of the accusations at the Nuremberg trials was not the destruction of 6 million Jews in the concentration camps—a deed which, without a doubt, ranks as one of the greatest crimes in the history of humanity—but rather the planning and execution of a war of aggression. On this charge, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld are equally guilty.”

North went on to explain that there were many reasons for the cowardice of the European, and especially the German, governments in refusing to call this crime by its right name and challenge those responsible. One of the reasons is a grotesque overestimation of the strength and power of the Bush government.

“One regularly reads commentaries and analyses in the German press that speak of the ‘unparalleled strength’ of the US government. I ask myself: in what world are the people who write such things living? In reality, the current government in Washington is politically the weakest and most corrupt ever to hold power in the United States. It is a government that reels from one crisis to the next without any clear orientation, a government led by people who do not have any serious understanding of the world situation and mainly base themselves and what they do on illusions and self-deception, while appealing to the most confused and backward layers of the population.”

North gave some figures on the extent of the economic and political crisis in the US, which is having dramatic consequences for the living standards of the broad mass of the population. Since March 2001, 2.2 million jobs have been destroyed in the US, raising the total of unemployed to 9.2 million. An estimated 5 million people are working at part-time jobs with an income below that required to survive. Even according to official statistics, which tend to underestimate the situation, there are currently 14 million people in the US who

are either unemployed or underemployed.

The character of unemployment has also changed dramatically. The level of “structural unemployment” (i.e., the percentage of jobs that have been permanently wiped out) has risen to 75 percent of all jobs lost. Increasingly, well-educated and qualified workers are losing their jobs. There has been a notable increase in the rate of unemployed amongst computer specialists and mathematicians—from 0.7 percent in 1998 to 6.0 percent last year.

“It has become a part of everyday life for people who formerly earned \$200,000 or \$250,000 per year to find themselves holding down a low-wage job paying \$6 or \$7 per hour,” North said. “For its part, the government is obsessively undertaking to make the rich even richer.” This policy has led to the bankruptcy of administrations in many of the individual states. Of the 50 states, 37 are estimated to be insolvent.

“When future historians write of the period of the Bush government, they will declare that it was entirely obvious that the situation was developing towards revolution. One saw it coming, they will say. Behind the glitter and show of the military operations, the entire society was undergoing a rapid decline.”

North emphasised that it was imperative for a revolutionary orientation in Europe to base itself on the profound social contradictions in American society. It was significant that none of the European governments were prepared to recognise the real state of affairs in America and oppose the Bush government. Under such conditions, the task of uniting Europe and opposing the global war policy of the American government fell to the European working class.

Chris Marsden, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Great Britain, spoke on the role of the Blair government, which had been rocked by the mass mobilisation in Britain against the war. No other government had gone so far in aggressively opposing the interests, hopes and aspirations of the country’s broad masses. Blair’s reactionary and cowardly war policy, trailing behind Bush, had evoked widespread popular anger and disgust.

Marsden reported that according to a poll taken by Channel Four TV, Blair headed a list of the most hated British politicians. He had even managed to push his role model, former Conservative Party Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, into third place.

There was considerable willingness by broad layers of British workers to politically take on Blair. This required, however, a thoroughly worked-out and considered political programme. Marsden drew together the three basic elements of a programme for a political offensive against the British government:

“First, such a programme must be based on the broad opposition to the renewal of imperialist militarism that was evidenced in the mass movement against the Iraq war.

“Second, it must advance a comprehensive defence of the

social position of the working class against the efforts to impose the untrammelled rule of big business at home. This domestic policy is being pursued with a ruthlessness equal in its own way to that demonstrated in the efforts of Washington and London to crush Iraq.

“Third, it must seek to mobilise the working class throughout Europe independently of the European bourgeoisie—including those governments such as the French and German that made a show of advancing an alternative to the warmongering of Bush and Blair.”

Marsden explained that pressure from the American government was changing the entire project of a unified Europe, which was increasingly breaking apart. Whereas former US governments, including that of Bill Clinton, supported the project of unifying Europe, the Bush government was deliberately pursuing divisive policies, and in recent months had taken a number of steps to split Europe.

The close links between Great Britain and the US played a key role, Marsden continued, but the newly established collaboration with Poland and other eastern European countries was also important in this respect. The cowardly capitulation by Germany and France in voting for the latest United Nations resolution pushed by the US and Britain had made clear that the ruling elite in Europe had no real alternative to American policy.

“It is the European working class that must spearhead opposition to imperialist reaction on all fronts, in a determined political struggle against Washington, but also against London, Paris and Berlin,” Marsden declared. He added: “In opposition to the nightmare of a new American century based on the type of brutality evinced in Iraq—and against the failed perspective of a unified capitalist Europe—the working class must advance the perspective of a United Socialist States of Europe.”

On this basis, it would be possible for European workers to offer a perspective to millions of people across the globe and extend the hand of friendship and solidarity to American workers, based on a common stand against the Bush administration and the threat its militarist and colonialist policies pose to all of humanity.



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