

Reactions to Bush win reveal growing US-Europe rift

Peter Schwarz
9 November 2004

Disappointment and dismay were the prevailing popular reaction around the world to George W. Bush's election victory.

If people in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and other parts of the world had been given a vote it would have resulted in John Kerry being elected by a huge majority. In Germany, one opinion poll showed nearly 80 percent would have voted for Kerry and only 13 percent for Bush. The incumbent president is widely hated, even among conservative voters, being regarded as responsible for the Iraq war as well as the embodiment of unrestrained imperialism and political intolerance.

The *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* published a two-page article with comments by internationally renowned writers. Unlike the public statements of the German government, they are not limited by diplomatic considerations and in this way provide examples of widespread sentiments.

The Spanish writer José Manuel Fajardo called the election result "democratic suicide" and concluded, "The majority of the world regards Bush's victory as a collective fiasco." His Turkish colleague Ahmet Uemit wrote, "The fact that Bush won the election is grounds for concern everywhere in the world, and also in my own country."

Chinese author Zhu Dake regretted how "unashamedly this American government turns its back on the traditional western values of Europe," and concluded, "This is the beginning of a metamorphosis by America and a global crisis. Ignoring the 'Geneva Convention,' the torture scandals in Iraq and in Guantanamo, marks the birth of a new empire, whose characteristics are blood and violence. Bush and his clan are the midwives to this new realm."

Russian author Vladimir Sorokin wrote, "Unfortunately, it is impossible to calculate the damage that Bush has done to Western democracy and the image of the West in the 'Third World.' For us, underground Soviet artists, in the 1970s America represented the defence of human rights, an island of liberty. Today, the face of official America resembles that of a bureaucrat in Brezhnev's Kremlin, lacklustre, self-righteous, unfeeling and uneducated."

Palestinian writer Hassan Khader noted, "I don't know whether it means much in the White House, but the fate of many people is linked with the decisions taken by the inhabitant of the White House." And British author Lawrence Norfolk bemoaned, "It seems that Americans will support Bush as long as the president commits his mistakes on the other side of the Atlantic, and not in the White House like Nixon and Clinton."

Most press comment, in particular in liberal or left-leaning newspapers, attributed Bush's reelection to a shift to the right by the American population.

French newspaper *Libération* claimed, "Bush, God's chosen one, is also the American people's chosen one. With 58,884,526 votes, he has become the most popular president in American history. The Texan's conservative values are also those of a large majority of Americans."

The Paris-based *Le Monde* wrote, "Whether we like it or not, America has become more conservative, more religious and more unilateralist."

Another editorial in the same newspaper claimed, "Perhaps one must seek the explanation for the result in the self-certainty of a president with simple ideas, strong words and an aggressive strategy."

Similarly, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* commented on the election result, "The fear of terrorism and the longing for a strong leadership were greater in the USA than the desire for change. The majority want simple answers to complex questions."

In Germany *Die Zeit* wrote, "The Americans have become more traditionalist, religious, moralistic and patriotic." And in an article headlined "The yearning for strength," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* commented, "Bush is an aggressive and polarising president. And yet he was evidently elected by a majority of Americans because people value his straightforwardness and toughness. The heart of America...demands strength and simple formulas. Difficult problems must have simple solutions."

Green Party politician Hans Christian Stroebele told the *ARD* television channel he saw Bush's success as retrospective justification of the Iraq war by the Americans.

The British tabloid *Daily Mirror* ran with the glaring headline, "How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?"

Russian writer Viktor Jerofejew also blamed the American people. Writing in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, "The Cold War has finally been won. The victors are idiots. Poor Marx got it wrong. The working class does not have enough brains to unite worldwide. It is better to have no brain at all. The idiots will rule the world. At least for the next four years."

All these comments have one thing in common; by equating the votes for Bush simply as agreement with his reactionary political programme they ignore the complex social reality that was the basis for the election result.

Certainly, there are open reactionaries who consciously support Bush's right-wing course. But they are a minority even among those voting for Bush, who constituted less than a third of those eligible to vote. The greater number are those who only voted for Bush because neither of the two main candidates addressed their real interests and needs.

The weaknesses of John Kerry's campaign were so obvious that they did not remain hidden from European commentators. But these regarded their source mainly in Kerry's personality—his lack of charisma, his wooden appearance, etc. However, the real weakness of the Democrats is that they represent the same rich elite as the Republicans. Kerry could not openly address the questions that move millions—the Iraq war, social inequality, their precarious living conditions. When he did, he became so entangled in contradictions that the Republicans could easily exploit them.

Under these circumstances, the lies, demagogic tricks and dishonest appeals to "moral values" that marked Bush's election campaign proved effective. The Republicans succeeded in diverting the despair, fears and tensions that many voters felt into reactionary channels. This does not change the deep gulf that separates the mass of the population from the

political and economic elite, which will soon bring many of those who today voted for Bush into conflict with his government. It is not the American population that has moved to the right but the political establishment, both Democrats and Republicans alike.

Those who claim to the contrary are moving inevitably into the camp of European imperialism. The view that it is “the Americans” as a whole who are responsible for Bush’s victory contains its own reactionary logic. According to this outlook, the most important ally in the fight against American imperialism is not the American working class—which allegedly stands behind Bush—but the European governments.

Such a view is driving many former liberals or left-wing elements of the middle class into the camp of European imperialism—like the German Greens, who today are among the most energetic advocates of international military intervention and welfare cuts in the name of maintaining “competitiveness.” This process, like the general rightward development of European politics, will continue to accelerate following Bush’s election victory.

The first official reactions, particularly in Germany and France, to Bush’s election success were awkward attempts at ingratiating themselves. They have made it clear that they are ready to collaborate with the criminal clique in Washington, to forget past differences and “look to the future.”

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer explained that trustful collaboration with the United States as the closest and most important ally outside Europe was indispensable for resolving difficult international conflicts; the government was ready to continue collaboration positively. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder expressed similar sentiments.

Karsten Voigt (SPD—Social Democratic Party), responsible in the German government for relations with the US, called on Bush to be open towards collaboration with the Europeans and win new partners. “I hope he will listen to those in Europe who are critical of him; that he will develop an initiative towards Europe that leads to new common thinking, conceptions and actions,” Voigt said in a television interview. “If he took such an initiative, he would find open doors and minds in Berlin.”

French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier expressed himself with somewhat more reserve. The Americans must recognise that they cannot think “they alone control and direct the world,” he said.

This line was supported by numerous press comments with speculation that the president would see things differently during his second term of office. They drew parallels to Ronald Reagan, who had changed from making aggressive attacks on the Soviet “Evil Empire” in his first term to espousing disarmament and cooperation with Mikhail Gorbachev in his second term.

“And yet, we must wish that Bush stops being Bush,” reads the latest editorial in *Die Zeit*. This is in his “own best interests,” because “whatever America wants in the next four years requires reliable, cooperative friends.”

Le Figaro called on the French government to “seize the opportunity without hesitation to restore trusting relations with America.” It was far from sure that Bush would continue his present course. “Experience in the United States shows that re-election can transform a president.” In the first term, a president must worry about his re-election, in the second about “his place in history”—at the beginning, behaving very politically; towards the end, “wanting more unanimity. One must encourage this tendency with Bush.”

This is pure wishful thinking. Bush and his clique regard the election result as a chance to continue more rapidly their aggressive domestic and foreign policy course. In Iraq, the long-prepared attack on Fallujah began immediately following the election, its unconcealed aim being to raze to the ground this town of 300,000 inhabitants. And in the Arab countries, most analysts assume Bush will attack Iran in his second term. Attempts to ingratiate themselves with Bush can only mean that the German and

French governments will at least tolerate these crimes politically, if not directly support them.

However, increasing tensions between America and Europe will not be laid to rest. They have objective causes, which lie far deeper than the personal motives of the president. The aggressive struggle for world markets and control of oil reserves and other important raw materials by the globally operating corporations will intensify the conflict between the imperialist powers and power blocs. The ruling elite in the US is determined to compensate for its economic weakness by utilising military power.

This would not have been any different under a President Kerry. Nevertheless, most European governments would have rather seen a victory for Kerry, who had promised Europe closer collaboration. This cannot be concealed by the messages of congratulation to Bush.

Only Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Polish President Kwasniewski and Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared enthusiastic over Bush’s success. Like Kwasniewski, Berlusconi, a kindred spirit of the US president, took part in the Iraq war. Putin, who maintains close personal relations with Bush, assumes that a Republican administration will interfere less in Russian affairs in the Caucasus and in Chechnya than a Democratic government would have. It is no coincidence that the billionaire George Soros was one of the most important backers of Kerry’s campaign, also financing the election campaign of the anti-Russian Georgian government head Mikhail Saakashvili.

Above all, it is the left-leaning bourgeois press, critical of the US, that sees a heightening of transatlantic conflicts after Bush’s re-election as inevitable—and promotes the need for European imperialism to act more decisively.

Le Monde expressed this most clearly, writing, “The reelection of George W. Bush poses them [Chirac, Schröder and Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero] a real challenge: they must establish a new relationship with an America that is less inclined towards Europe in the long term than it ever was.... In order not to have to choose between insignificance and dependence, the Europeans must act in their own interests and find their own solutions. Since American voters have not given us the president we would like, it is time that Europeans act independently, instead of reacting to the policy emanating from Washington. The reelection of George W. Bush could offer the opportunity for this step.”

The *Frankfurter Rundschau* expressed a similar view, “The transatlantic common ground, which was taken as given in the past, has now come into question.... If George W. Bush implements the voters’ mandate as he has outlined it, then the Germans must make it clearer where the common ground ends.”

Such assertions of “independent European action” will take place at the expense of the European working class, which will pay the price for increased military spending and increasing “competitiveness.” It will lead to an escalation of international conflict and will aggravate the international danger of war. The only viable basis for the struggle against American imperialism is the unity of the American and European working class on the basis of a socialist programme.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact