

Germany welcomes conference of war criminals, witch-hunts their opponents

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In the coming weeks, two conferences are planned in Germany on the war and occupation in Iraq.

At the “Munich Security Conference,” high-ranking international political and military figures are expected to justify the US war of aggression and the destruction of entire Iraqi cities. It is also anticipated that the conference will play down the use of torture and abuse by the occupying forces and call upon the German government to support this criminal venture.

With great regret, organisers of the Munich conference have acknowledged that one of the principal architects of this criminal war, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, has called off his participation. He will, however, send Undersecretary Douglas Feith in his place. Feith is a leading spokesman of the so-called neo-conservatives and a proponent of a new war against Iran.

The second conference is due to take place in Berlin in more modest surroundings. It is called the “International Iraq conference on occupation, resistance and international solidarity.” It has been organised by an alliance of left, pacifist and Arab-nationalist groups and individuals, extending from the freethinkers’ federation to the newspaper *Junge Welt*. The aim of this meeting is to discuss the resistance against the occupation regime that has emerged from the war of aggression.

Joachim Guillard, one of the organisers, explained in an interview: “Can the entire resistance be made responsible for terrorist attacks? Which goals are pursued by the different forces of the resistance? We want to discuss these and other questions. At the centre will be the question of how we can best practice solidarity with the Iraqi population.” Among the organisers, there is evidently agreement that the occupation of Iraq by American and British troops is

illegitimate, and that Iraqi resistance against it is entirely legitimate.

A comparison of state and media reactions to the two conferences is instructive. While in the case of the Munich conference everything imaginable has been done to guarantee its functioning and protect participants against protests by opponents of the war, the conference in Berlin is being spied on, slandered, and criminalised, and may, in the end, be banned. This despite the fact that even the police have made clear that they do not anticipate any criminal offences or terrorist attacks in connection with the Berlin conference.

On January 13, the Berlin Senator of the Interior, Erhardt Körting (German Social Democratic Party-SPD), told members of the city’s intelligence services committee that the conference had been planned by “supporters of the former regime of Saddam Hussein” and left-wing groups. Although he failed to provide the slightest evidence for the first of his accusations, it was repeated uncritically in virtually all German media reports.

The headlines were virtually all variations on the same theme: “Saddam supporters plan congress in Berlin.” These media outlets were utterly disinterested in the fact that organisers of the conference clearly dissociated themselves from the former Iraqi dictator and the Baathist regime—Guillard stated that one did not “shed a tear” for Hussein, and “not one” of his supporters was expected to attend the congress. The boulevard newssheet *B.Z.* frankly admitted that the intelligence services were the source for its report.

Körting admitted there was no reason for forbidding the conference, but announced nevertheless, “We will be observing what goes on.”

Spiegel on-line tried to bolster the media campaign

against the conference with a few facts, but failed miserably. Only one supporter of the congress was revealed to be an alleged “Saddam supporter”—Aziz Alkazaz, a co-worker of the renowned and thoroughly respectable scientific think tank, the German Orient Institute. But even in the case of Alkazaz, the author of the *Spiegel on-line* article acknowledged, it is “utterly unclear” whether he intends to participate “at all.” In other words, the article that appeared the previous day on the very same web site, under the heading “Saddam supporters plan conference,” was entirely bogus.

However, neither Körting nor the media outlets were prepared to correct or apologise for their erroneous presentation of the facts. Their priority is to defame, intimidate and, if possible, criminalise any sort of solidarity for the Iraqi resistance and opposition to the occupation of Iraq.

Klaus Hartmann, chairman of the freethinkers’ federation and one of the conference organisers, commented quite correctly in an open letter to Körting:

“Whoever in accordance with the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal fights a major crime, this war of aggression, and defends international law, does not thereby become the “supporter” of any particular head of state. To the strict defence of international law belongs the realisation that the war by the US and its coalition of obedient murderers against Iraq contravenes international law, the occupation is a form of terror while resistance against it is legitimate. Even the demand for liberty for Saddam Hussein is not a question of sympathy or rejection, and does not mean that he should not be put on trial for proven crimes committed in complicity with the US—however, in a free and sovereign Iraq, not under the occupation and its puppets.”

Körting’s statement that “at this time” there are no grounds for banning the congress should not be regarded as an “all-clear” signal. Last September, an “Arab-Islamic” congress in support of the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance was also scheduled to take place in Berlin. Then, Körting also declared there were “no indications that this congress would be a gathering of terrorists.”

However, following a hysterical witch-hunt by the media over alleged “militant Islamists,” and in particular a call by German Interior Minister Otto Schily to ban the conference, Körting carried out a

rapid about-face and justified a prohibition on the grounds of alleged “agitation.” However, no action has been taken by the state to back up the accusations of mass incitement, support for terror organisations or public approval of criminal offences made against the organisers of the conference. The Federal Prosecutor’s Office has since dropped its investigation. In other words, the arguments used to justify the ban have proven false.

For those responsible, however, this does not represent any hindrance to their next attack on the right to free speech and assembly.



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