

Germany: ISSE holds Berlin meeting on US war plans against Iran

Our correspondent
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The International Students for Social Equality held a well-attended meeting at Berlin's Technical University last week. In his opening remarks to the meeting, Peter Schwarz, an editorial board member of the *World Socialist Web Site*, stated, "Those who have followed the events of the last weeks can no longer have any doubts that the American government is seriously preparing for a war against Iran." A lively discussion took place about the preparations for war against Iran and the building of an international antiwar movement.

Christoph Vandreier, who chaired the meeting, pointed out that exactly four years earlier to the day, Berlin's streets had seen more than 1 million demonstrating against the impending Iraq war. In other cities as well, millions had taken to the streets in the largest international demonstration of antiwar sentiment in world history. To develop an international movement against war, it was vital to draw the lessons from the failure of the peace movement of that time, Vandreier stressed.

Peter Schwarz dealt first with the developments that proved the war plans against Iran were far advanced. "After the Iraq war and the disaster which then ensued, this appears to be pure madness," he said. "And it is madness. Nevertheless, the Bush administration is systematically advancing the practical, political and propaganda preparations for a war against Iran."

Schwarz spoke about the rejection of the Baker-Hamilton report by the Bush administration. The commission headed by James Baker, the former secretary of state and Bush family friend, had not called for the occupation of Iraq to be ended. It did, however, propose the long-term reduction of troops in Iraq and the inclusion of Iran and Syria in a political solution. Instead, the Bush government increased troop numbers, is preparing a new offensive in Afghanistan, and is despatching a second aircraft carrier, concentrating the largest naval force in the Persian Gulf since the beginning of the Iraq war.

"This only makes sense as part of preparations for an attack on Iran," Schwarz said. "Supported by long-range bombers stationed on the American bases in Europe, in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere, the US military has the capacity to bombard Iran around the clock with cruise missiles and hundreds of airplanes."

The possible deployment of tactical nuclear weapons has also been discussed, he stated. "It would be the first use of the atom bomb since the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War."

Schwarz then described the campaign of disinformation with which the Bush administration is preparing a military strike and that strongly recall the events on the eve of the Iraq war four years earlier. For example, the spreading of unproven claims that the Iranian government is arming the Iraqi resistance and is responsible for the deaths of American soldiers.

Washington has also launched an intensive round of shuttle diplomacy in order to bring on board the Arab regimes in the Middle East.

Finally, he quoted former security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who at a Senate committee had warned quite openly of the fact that the Bush

government was capable of organising provocations—including a possible terrorist attack in the US—in order to produce a *casus belli*.

"The recent bomb attack in the Iranian city of Sahedan, which cost the lives of 11 elite soldiers from the Revolutionary Guards, must be seen in this connection," said Schwarz. Responsibility was claimed by a Sunni group, which fights in the name of the Baluchistani minority against the Shiite regime in Tehran. One knows from several sources that Washington has provided money to support such groups. Such an attack could encourage ethnic tensions in Iran, provoke a conflict with Pakistan (which Tehran accuses of supporting Sunni terrorists) or cause the Iranian government to take aggressive countermeasures, which would then provide a pretext for a further escalation by the US.

The consequences of a war against Iran would be devastating in every regard, continued Schwarz. "It would cost the lives of hundreds of thousands—and in the case of the use of nuclear weapons, even millions. It would not stop at the Iranian border and would draw the whole region into the vortex. The ethnic, religious and other tensions in the region, which were encouraged by imperialism over decades, would explode like a witch's cauldron. Russia, the European and Asian powers would also become embroiled, who all have substantial interests in the region. The scenario more and more recalls the eve of the First and Second World Wars."

Such a war would also have domestic consequences in Europe and America. There would be considerable opposition—but also the danger of terrorist attacks. "Governments would react by setting aside democratic rights and establishing semi-dictatorial regimes." It is only in this context that one can understand why German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble is so obsessively increasing state powers.

"Why is the Bush administration pursuing this insane project?" Schwarz asked. "As Marxists, we do not ignore the role of the individual in history. But in the long run, one cannot understand such dramatic historical events like a war simply from the individual motives and interests of people such as Bush, Cheney and the clique that surrounds them. There are more fundamental forces at work."

Bush and his clique are the most malignant expression of the insoluble crisis of a social system that is historically outlived—American and world capitalism. "The modern, global productive forces cannot be reconciled with a social system that is based on the nation state; the socially organised production process, which connects millions of individuals, cannot be reconciled with the anarchic system of private property and the market."

The mounting crisis of world economy forces the great powers into a merciless competitive struggle for cheap labour, raw materials and markets, which in the long run is carried out with military means. The US is trying to compensate for its economic decline vis à vis its European and Asian rivals with military means, and to defend its position as a global hegemonic power.

This also explains why, although there is much criticism of Bush's

course in the American ruling elite, there is no serious opposition. The new Democratic majority in the Senate and House, which owes its election victory to the popular opposition to the Iraq war, has from the start categorically refused to deny Bush the funds he needs or to launch impeachment proceedings against him. "Bush knows he can count on their support in the long run."

"The Democrats represent the same oligarchy, the same super-rich layer, as the Republicans," said Schwarz. "This parasitic layer, which perhaps constitutes just 2 percent of the total population, has appropriated indescribable wealth, while the vast majority live in precarious conditions or in open poverty. Such social polarisation cannot be reconciled with democracy. The fear that this could unleash a popular movement, completely out of their control, prevents the Democrats from seriously opposing Bush."

Speaking about the role of the German and other European governments, Schwarz said they were following the war preparations against Iran with great unease, because considerable economic and strategic interests were at stake. "Whereas the US has boycotted Iran since the 1979 revolution, the Europeans have massive business interests there." But no European government would be prepared to oppose Washington openly. Instead, they try to put a brave face on matters, pursue a policy of appeasement and would support the US in the long run, if it should come to war.

The behaviour of German Chancellor Angela Merkel is typical in this regard. "Publicly she maintains her friendship with Bush, is a picture of harmony, supports the sanctions against Iran and expresses no word of criticism—although the German government is well informed what is at stake. Behind the scenes, she is trying to work against the US. At least this is how newsweekly *Der Spiegel* interpreted her recent Middle East trip, during which she is said to have tried to engage various Arab regimes in a policy of 'dialogue,' instead of military confrontation."

"It is obvious that such cowardly tactics will not stop the war plans of the Bush government," Schwarz concluded. Washington would rather use Merkel's attitude, as in the UN resolutions supported by Germany before the Iraq war, in order to legitimise a military strike.

The German government fears an American defeat in the Middle East far more than it fears a war against Iran, because such a defeat would weaken imperialism as a whole. It wants to keep all its options open to share in any possible war booty. And it fears that open resistance to Bush could encourage an antiwar movement that would quickly grow out of control.

"Germany, France and Italy are reacting to the aggressive militarism of the US by increasing their own militarily capacity and sending their own troops to the Middle East. The German armed forces are active in Afghanistan, in Lebanon and in the Horn of Africa, and with the sending of six Tornado airplanes to southern Afghanistan have taken the first step to becoming directly involved in the fighting. And this increasing militarism is accompanied by the strengthening of the state apparatus and massive social cutbacks," explained Schwarz.

Summing up, it must be said that the German government bears joint responsibility for the criminal policies of the Bush administration.

In conclusion, Schwarz dealt with the question: What has become of the antiwar movement of four years earlier? At that time, millions took to the streets, but today there does not seem to be anything happening at all.

The reason has to be sought in the bankruptcy of the perspective and organisations that set the tone at that time. Their aim was to put the Bush administration under pressure through the UN and the European governments.

Attac, which played an important role at that time, is close to the social democrats. Many leading Attac members worked for SPD and Green Party parliamentary deputies. It has since become clear that the then-SPD-Green Party government cooperated closely with the US, despite its public

rejection of the war; refusing, for example, to close the US bases in Germany. It also supported the US policy of illegal abductions ("renditions"), as the cases of Murat Kurnaz and Khaled el-Masri showed.

Some of the leaders of the peace movement of that time can today even be found in government and support—as does Rifondazione Comunista in Italy—the sending of troops to the Middle East.

"The antiwar movement has fallen flat because its perspective is bankrupt," Schwarz concluded. "On the other hand, the opposition of the broad population against the war has grown, which can be seen most clearly in the US, and there exists widespread social anger and discontent."

The most important task consists of placing this widespread opposition on a sustainable political basis. "American militarism can only be opposed through the building of a broad, international, independent political movement of the working class directed against the roots of militarism in the capitalist system."

Such a movement must call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, for the withdrawal of the war flotilla from the Persian Gulf and for the dissolution of the network of military bases established by the Pentagon throughout the Middle East as well as in central Asia. It must also demand the withdrawal of all European troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East, as well as the closure of all US bases in Europe.

It must advocate the nationalisation of the arms industry and its transformation into production for peaceful purposes. And it must demand that the enormous military expenditure be used instead for social purposes, as well as the nationalisation of the main war profiteers, such as the large oil corporations.

In the coming weeks and months, the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party will be dedicating their forces to the construction of such a movement. In this context, Schwarz referred to the Emergency Conference against the Wars in Iraq and Iran, being conducted by the International Students for Social Equality on March 31 and April 1 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the US.

A lively discussion followed the lecture.

One student provided several reasons why the building of an independent political movement of the working class against war was not possible: One cannot reach the people, they are too self-occupied, the bourgeoisie have an all-powerful propaganda apparatus, etc.

In answer, it was said that millions of people are prepared to fight against war and are enraged over social injustice, but the bankruptcy and betrayal of the old workers' organisations means they lack a viable perspective. The task before us consists of preparing politically for the inevitable social struggles ahead.

A long-standing member of the Greens, who had left them because of their support for the Afghanistan war, wanted to know concretely how Attac and the Greens had misled the antiwar movement. He pointed to the Green Party parliamentary deputy Hans-Christian Ströbele, whom he claimed had steadfastly retained his antiwar outlook, in contrast to the party leadership.

In response, it was said that it was precisely Ströbele who had played a key role in providing a left-wing cover for the political line of the Greens. The Greens had been taken into government and entrusted with the foreign ministry, in order to push through—against widespread opposition—the transformation of Germany's armed forces from a defensive territorial force into an army of international intervention. The Green Party, as the party whose programme had embodied pacifism, was the only one able to do this.

Ströbele had taken an opposition stance in order to deflect the resistance, but in the crucial moment, however, was always ready to do a deal that kept the party together and helped the leadership to hold sway.

The former Green member at the meeting then described how Ströbele—just when the SPD-Green Party coalition was threatened with losing its majority over the deployment of German troops to Afghanistan—negotiated an agreement permitting four of eight opposition delegates to vote against the deployment. Thus the appearance of an opposition was preserved whilst guaranteeing a majority for the deployment.



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