

Report to the ISSE/SEP Conference: On the political situation in Europe

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The following is a report on the political situation in Europe delivered to the International Students for Social Equality/Socialist Equality Party Emergency Conference Against War by Lucas Adler, a member of the ISSE and SEP in Germany.

The conference was held March 31-April 1 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Further reports and international greetings will be published in the coming days.

I want to begin by bringing to this conference the greetings of all our members in the SEP of Germany, who welcome this conference as a very important step in the building of an international movement against war. I also want to apologize for only covering certain topics in Europe, but unfortunately I do not have much time, and the European situation is very complex.

The US preparations for war against Iran have had a deep impact on the political situation in Europe. The European powers have continued to appease Washington, while at the same time seeking to strengthen their hand militarily in order to advance their own imperialist interests.

Behind their policy of appeasement stands the insight that a defeat of US imperialism in the Middle East would be a critical setback for capitalism worldwide—with uncontrollable consequences for the political situation in Europe. At the same time, however, increasingly the interests of American capitalism are coming into open conflict with the interests of European capitalism.

The response by the European powers to growing US militarism is an intensification of their own militarism. As it is obvious that none of the traditional great powers in Europe is capable of holding a candle to the US militarily, these powers are seeking to turn the European Union from a mere economic power into a political and military world power. In this regard the European partnership with Russia also plays an important role.

But the European powers are facing a very profound dilemma. The influence of the US in Europe had been a decisive factor to lay the foundations for a unification of Europe in the first place. Only through the unchallenged supremacy of the US on the continent was it possible to prevent the re-eruption of traditional conflicts between the European powers after World War II. As the US has lost its status as the dominant power in Europe, intra-European conflicts regarding the balance of power in Europe—which have already lead to two world wars—have come up again.

To further hinder its competitor Europe, the US government now very systematically adds fuel to these intra-European conflicts. In

the run-up to the Iraq war, US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld was able to divide the continent on the question of open support for the Iraq war with his distinction between an “old” and a “new” Europe. Now the US government is going even further with the deployment of an anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The deployment of this system is aimed at rendering Russia’s nuclear armed forces virtually useless. It is also aimed at preventing any deepening of relations between the European powers and Russia. Even though the deployment would take place on NATO territory, it was only negotiated in bilateral talks with the governments of Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia and the European Union were not even been asked about their opinion.

In turn, at the Munich Conference for Security Policy a few weeks ago, Russia’s president Vladimir Putin sharply attacked US policies and even threatened counter measures. “We know that they are working on an anti-missile defense system and that thereby our nuclear armed forces could possibly be neutralized,” he said. “Russia, however, has the weapons that can overcome the system.” While Putin’s speech was sharply criticized by American conference delegates, the reaction of their European counterparts was remarkably mild.

Under these conditions, the leading European powers are promoting the concept of a Central Europe that could take the necessary steps to rapidly turn Europe into a powerful military force even without the participation of the Eastern European countries. The leading force for this development is Germany, which is currently holding the presidency of the European Council and already undertook measures to keep this position for up to 18 months, instead of the usual period of only six months.

At the ceremony for the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which set in motion the process of European unification, German chancellor Angela Merkel warned that the European Union would not be sufficiently capable of acting as a world power and demanded the building of collective armed forces. Former president of the European Parliament, Klaus Hänsch, from the German Social Democrats, said in an interview that in the future the European Union would be able to fulfill its “responsibility for world politics” much better by having a common foreign and military policy. He also suggested that those countries unwilling to carry out the necessary reforms should think about leaving the European Union.

While the official speakers of German foreign policy openly call for more influence for Europe on the world stage, the related

conflict with the US is systematically played down. To a certain degree, Germany's traditional commitment to its transatlantic partnership is still rooted within the so-called people's parties of the postwar period. Thus it is now the function of somewhat alternative parties like the Greens to advocate the interests of German imperialism in the most blatant way.

In this regard a speech given by the former chairman of the Green Party in Germany Joschka Fischer two weeks ago is very significant. Fischer, who had been the foreign minister in the previous German Social Democratic-Green Party government, called it "shocking" that the "increasing loss of significance of Europe in the world" is not even noticed in European capitals. This applies in particular, he said, to Germany, which, because of its size and economic strength, must assume a leading role in the European Union.

Europe was unprepared to solve the problems that result from the "self-imposed weakening of the United States through its policy of unilateralism and which led to the disaster of the Iraq war". Anyone who thinks that the American government will represent the security interests of Europe in the future is making a big mistake, Fischer declared, adding that the limits of American power had become visible in Iraq.

Fischer's answer to this situation is the demand for more European independence from the US and more German leadership within the European Union. Europe must arise and be in a position to consistently defend its own security interests, Fischer declared. On several occasions he stressed the "German responsibility for the formulation and realization of European interests", which is just a synonym for using the European Union as a vehicle to carry out policies in the interest of German imperialism.

But Fischer is only the sharpest expression of this shift towards nationalism and chauvinism. Similar other examples can be found throughout Europe. The former PDS in Germany—which recently changed its name into Left Party to further confuse the people—currently tries to channel any opposition against US militarism behind a European chauvinism that advocates European hegemony in contrast to US hegemony. Their main difference with Fischer's position is that the Left Party calls for a "collective policy of peace and security" instead of a "collective foreign and defense policy" when demanding a stronger European Union.

These are not the only instances in Europe of supposedly "left" or socialist parties functioning as critical mechanisms for the expression of the imperialist interests of their respective countries. Rifondazione Comunista [Communist Refoundation] in Italy capitulated last month to an ultimatum of the government of Romano Prodi, which assures Prodi support for Italy's military operations in Afghanistan. Italian involvement in Afghanistan is opposed by the clear majority of the Italian population. Prodi now also has the power to make government decisions on his own if there is disagreement on any question within his coalition. Rifondazione Comunista recently boycotted a demonstration in Rome against the war in Iraq and the politics of the Prodi government.

In France, the Socialist Party demands a greater weight of the French nation in international institutions through a strengthening of European military capabilities. Former prime minister of the

Socialist Party Laurent Fabius stressed the need to face up to "the American superpower ... and the massive imbalance due to American unilateralism".

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) is virtually silent on international developments and does not want to challenge the politics of the Socialist Party in this area. The Parti des Trauillateurs (PT) is actively advocating a vicious nationalism calling for a "free Europe of free people"—a phrase that the extreme right throughout Europe would back without hesitation.

All those organizations that played an prominent role in the anti-war movement at the beginning of the Iraq war are currently undergoing a sharp turn to the right and more and more openly defending the imperialist ambitions of their own ruling elite against the interests of US imperialism. This gives the task of building an independent political movement against war, on the basis of the political perspective outlined in the resolution that we have been discussing, an enormous urgency for the working class in Europe.

The vast majority of the population in Europe rejects the increasing militarism of the US and the European powers. The bitter experiences of two world wars are still deeply rooted within the consciousness of the European working class. But there is still a huge amount of confusion about the historical reasons for these catastrophes, and there is not yet a clear understanding of the way out of the contradiction between the nation-state system and the highly integrated world economy.

We must provide this understanding. Thus the building of an international movement against war can only be based on the vast historical heritage of the Trotskyist movement, which has drawn the historical lessons of the twentieth century and defends the perspective of international socialism consistently against every kind of pseudo-socialist opportunism and revisionism.



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