

German Clerics Meet Americans Against War

by Rainer Apel

Not too many prominent politicians from Germany are likely to travel to Washington, D.C. to repeat what Angela Merkel, chairwoman of the opposition Christian Democrats, did at the end of February, when she met with pro-war officials in the Bush Administration and affirmed her support for war against Iraq. Her popularity ratings in the polls at home promptly sank by 12%. Contributing to this was the publicity given in Germany to a deployment of LaRouche Youth Movement organizers at her speaking event at Georgetown University: Germany's N-TV channel broadcast a news clip on the protest all day long on Feb. 25.

After the Merkel debacle, German politicians are more likely to try to repeat what several church leaders did, when recently touring the "United States, outside D.C.," where they met an America completely different from what the pro-war media propaganda machine tries to portray.

View From the Real America

Already in late January, Walter Mixa, chief Catholic chaplain of the German Armed Forces, had found in meetings with Americans that the pro-war enthusiasm spread by the Bush Administration is not at all shared in the country. Mixa reported that especially the military people he talked to were very reserved, if not entirely opposed to the war.

A delegation of the main Lutheran Church (EKD), led by its administrative head Manfred Kock, also chose to meet with Americans "outside the Administration," at the end of February and beginning of March, and their reports confirmed what Mixa had found. Johannes Friedrich, Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria and a member of the EKD delegation, gave interviews after his return home on March 6, criticizing U.S. President George W. Bush for using religious terms and biblical words, while what he says is not really based on the message of the Bible. That is also the reason for the main American churches' opposition to Bush's mission for war, Friedrich said, adding that he and his delegation had never tried to arrange meetings with Administration officials: It "would not have made much sense, as they would not even meet with the U.S. church leaders." Some American Senators, however, attended an event jointly arranged by the EKD and the National Council of Churches, he added.

Friedrich reported that outside of the American capital, he found the great majority of Americans opposed to the war, and was repeatedly told, "Thank God for France and Germany." What also impressed him very much is that many

Americans are complaining bitterly about the fact that billions of dollars that are needed at home—for schools, for family support, for social welfare—are being wasted by the Bush Administration for this war.

Friedrich emphasized that he is not biased against the United States, having had many American friends for a long time. However, he got so disgusted with the war propaganda on Fox TV, that he switched off the TV set at his hotel room.

Churches Reject Claim of 'Just War'

On March 11, EKD leader Kock warned in a prime-time interview on Germany's ZDF-TV, against "religious-looking" arguments for war, of the kind put forward by the Bush Administration. He said that certain interests were unjustifiably pushing the issue of "just war" (which has a basis in the tradition of the churches' doctrine as well as in international law), as a foul excuse for not seeking peaceful means to settle conflicts like the present one over Iraq.

Just before the traditional Spring Convention of the Catholic Bishops, which began in Freising in the state of Bavaria on March 10, Bavaria's Cardinal Friedrich Wetter stated that, having experienced the last world war and the Allied bombardments of German cities as a young recruit in the German Army, he still retains vivid images of how many innocent human beings can become casualties of warfare, even if that result is not intended. War, however "just" it may be, is never without injustice, and therefore, civilized nations must seek peaceful solutions to problems; must seek to establish a just peace—which is the viewpoint of the German Catholics, Wetter added. The Freising convention also reaffirmed a January resolution of the Catholics denouncing the concept of "preventive" war.

In another strong statement on March 11, Reinhard Marx, Bishop of Trier, warned that pro-war rhetoric of the kind used by the Bush Administration runs a high risk not only of leading to a violation of international law, but also of provoking a global clash between Islam and Christianity. Marx added that even if there were a United Nations mandate for war (which he doubted would occur), still those who oppose the war for principled reasons were obliged, not to fight, but rather to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict and seek peaceful solutions.

Also the annual convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Germany (VELKD), held in Hanover, passed a resolution opposing an Iraq war on strict terms of religious ethics and international law. Concerning the latter, the resolution makes the following points: 1) the Charter of the United Nations obliges every signatory to settle conflict by peaceful means, in the first place; 2) neither of the two exceptions—self-defense, or a specific UN Security Council mandate, along the lines of Article VII of the Charter—applies to the case of Iraq; 3) existing international law does not provide for wars with the aim of "regime change," nor for wars of "prevention."