

German War Party Crumbles After Exposé

by Rainer Apel

The less rigidly ideological of the neo-cons in Germany had begun to distance themselves from the Bush-Cheney policy in Iraq, even before the first news about the prison torture there became public. For example, Horst Köhler, the former IMF director who is the German Christian Democrats' (CDU) candidate for the May 23 presidential elections, in an April 25 speech called the U.S. intervention into Iraq a "terrible mistake." Embarrassed responses from pro-Bush CDU party leaders like Angela Merkel revealed that Köhler's remarks had apparently caught them by surprise, but since then, more and prominent CDU members have distanced themselves from the U.S. policy in Iraq. Some of the neo-con hardline CDU politicians like Friedbert Pflüger, the main architect of the CDU pro-war position, have started attacking the Bush-Cheney Administration so much that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, whose anti-war position they attacked as "anti-American" a year ago, now has mocked them with the warning "not to turn too anti-American."

The case of Pflüger is a striking example of how shallow the pro-war current in Germany actually is, and how fast it is crumbling under the impact of disastrous news from the Iraqi war theater. Pflüger is the man who set up the scandalous Washington, D.C. meetings in February 2003 between CDU chairwoman Angela Merkel and some of the main proponents of the American war faction, like Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Rice. Now, 15 months later, Pflüger claims in interviews that "among the Christian Democrats, none was ever for the war, we were always against"; and he even claims now that he and Merkel actually tried to talk Cheney and Rumsfeld out of the war, last year.

On May 11, Pflüger gave full support to (Green Party) Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer for his ongoing talks with Powell and Rice in Washington, on the eve of the G-8 foreign ministers session there. Pflüger said that "everybody in Germany" insists that the full truth about the torture must come out, and that those who are responsible must be tried and punished. And, Pflüger emphasized, it is now intolerable that the United States determine the structure and composition of the next Iraqi government after June 30—this should be left to the United Nations.

The situation strongly resembles that of late 1989, when after the fall of the Berlin Wall, numerous East German prominent figures told the media that they had always been in dissent with the regime. This was called the *Wendehals* phenomenon in Germany, referring to a person who suddenly

turns his face (or, neck) in a diametrically opposite direction from before, while pretending that it has always been that way.

Going beyond simply reacting to the torture revelations, Gernot Erler, chief foreign policy spokesman of the German Social Democrats (SPD), said in a May 12 radio interview that the revelations from the Iraqi war theater have to be seen together with the situation in the U.S. "war prisoners" camp in Guantanamo. Both show where the Bush Administration's refusal to respect the standards of international law lead to, preferring "exceptions" which better serve American national interests. Erler pointed out that this was not an exclusive U.S. problem, but a challenge to the rest of the "Western" world: were the United States allowed to go its own way, it would in the future no longer be possible to insist on "human rights" and "human dignity" anywhere in the world, if they could be so grossly violated in Iraq and in Guantanamo.

Rather than looking for individual military commanders that would be blamed for the torture practices, Erler said, "it [must] be clarified whether it resulted from a systematic approach to achieve results from interrogations, through mishandling and humiliation of human beings. If that is the case, then the entire system must be abolished; and the entire chain of command must be held responsible, in any case." Only this could repair the damage to the reputation of the West, Erler added.

Erler's portrayal of the Bush-Cheney-run United States as a "rogue state" will have an impact on the remaining four weeks of the election campaign for European Parliament (elections on June 13), and it will be featured as an important aspect of the SPD's campaigning. But it will also fully vindicate everything that the LaRouche movement, its political party in Germany, the BüSo, along with its fraternal parties in other countries such as France and Sweden, have said; LaRouche candidates in all three countries are running for seats in the European Parliament. At the same time Erler made his remarks, the latest issue of the BüSo's weekly, *Neue Solidarität*, had just been released with a revealing timeline on who said what in Germany's political establishment on the Iraq War a year ago, including a review of CDU party chairwoman Angela Merkel's afore-mentioned trip to the United States. Just prior to the trip, she had written an op-ed in the *New York Times* claiming that a majority of Germans did not share Chancellor Schröder's anti-war views. Her pro-war rantings and hand-shaking with Cheney and others during that trip, made prominent media coverage in Germany—including a full-day television clip of the northern German N-TV channel showing LaRouche Youth Movement protesters against Merkel's speech at Georgetown University. Nemesis struck Merkel promptly, after her return from the States, when her popularity ratings dropped from 46% to 21% within only a few days.

Now, under pressure by the news about torture in Iraq, Merkel now says she did "not feel happy about the U.S. conduct."