

Pressure on Germany To Join War Increases

by Rainer Apel

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's repeated statements against the Rumsfeld-Cheney drive for war against Iraq, during the last three weeks of the German election campaign in September, were not well-received (to put it mildly) at the Pentagon, nor were they forgotten in the meantime. This was apparent when the Washington correspondent of Germany's national state radio DLR asked U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, at the Pentagon briefing on Nov. 26, whether "anything short of participation in a military operation against Iraq would be sufficient" for the German government to get back on the list of friends. Rumsfeld replied: "That is a misunderstanding of what took place in the last election campaign in Germany, it seems to me. To think that it's correctable by something involving Iraq—it just isn't."

The Rumsfeld remarks were much commented on in the German media, as an unmistakable sign that the U.S. Secretary of Defense wants the present coalition government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder out, and that no improvement of relations is possible. Rumsfeld's remarks illustrate the escalation of pressure and blackmail against Germany; and in that light, one might also put what the Berlin correspondent of the London *Times*, Roger Boyes, wrote in his column on Nov. 27 under the headline: "Schröder on Borrowed Time as Unrest Spreads." Boyes referenced domestic attacks from labor, industry, and the mass media against the government's budget cuts, as a sign that Schröder may not survive the two state elections in Hesse and Lower Saxony on Feb. 2. These contests could bring the latter state under the control of the opposition Christian Democrats and give them a two-thirds majority in the Bundesrat, the upper house of Parliament. With that majority, the opposition could paralyze the government, as they have begun to do already on several legislative projects since late October. For example, the Schröder government failed in getting the Bundesrat to approve its plan for new budget cuts, and even several states governed by Schröder's own Social Democrats voted against the cuts. As the government is boxed in domestically, it is more vulnerable to pressure from the Rumsfeld-Cheney faction.

War of Nerves Against Schröder

A third front in this war of nerves against Schröder is what he himself, in an unprecedented interview on national television, mentioned on Nov. 29: a barrage of death threats and hate mail against himself and his family. Whereas there

are always people who translate their rage into hateful letters and e-mails, the massive increase in such outpourings suggests some orchestrating hand behind the threats.

An additional problem is posed for Schröder domestically, with the broadening public criticism of his decision not to interfere with the Americans' use of their military facilities in Germany, for a war mobilization. A list of what the Americans are requesting from the Germans, which the Pentagon sent to Berlin, has been answered positively by Schröder and his Defense Minister, Peter Struck. But a number of prominent politicians from Schröder's coalition partners in the Green party, including longtime defense policy spokeswoman Angelika Beer, have warned Schröder that his decision violates Article 26 of the German Constitution, which bans any German participation in wars of aggression. They have argued that a military operation against Iraq would be such a war, as the alleged "evidence" of Saddam Hussein's producing weapons of mass destruction is more than doubtful to German experts on the matter. Green party member Christian Ströbele has mooted a legal case against Schröder at the Constitutional Court, and reminded Schröder that two German chancellors before him had denied the Americans the right to use their facilities in Germany: Willy Brandt, intervening against U.S. shipments for Israel during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973; and Helmut Kohl, during the U.S. air raids against Libya in 1986. And Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, Schröder's Minister for Developing Sector Relations, has urged a principled German "no" to the Bush Administration's "cynical power games," saying that the cost of an Iraq war in the range of \$200 billion would be one-third of all development aid paid by the industrial nations in the past four decades.

Sharon Weighs In

An additional front of pressure is posed by Israel's Ariel Sharon government, which has officially requested delivery from Germany of the armored personnel carrier version of the Fuchs ABC reconnaissance vehicle. German laws ban exports of military goods to regions of war or escalating conflicts, however, and so Schröder is hesitant to give Sharon what he wants. But numerous leading politicians from all German parties, including Christian Democratic Union Chairwoman Angela Merkel, have already called for export regulations to be disregarded and for the government to respond positively to the Israeli request because of the "special moral historical responsibility of Germany for Israel." Whereas there is hardly anyone in Germany who disputes this special responsibility, the delivery of military matériel is highly controversial: The armored vehicles might be used by the Sharon government against the Palestinians, instead of serving for the protection of Israel against Iraqi missile attacks (as in the 1991 Gulf War).

Chancellor Schröder's problems are certain to increase during the coming weeks.