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Interview of Kenneth W. Stein

By Guseppe Liga

QUOTE HEADLINE: I, A Pacifist During the Vietnam (War), Would Now Send My Son To War"

Boxed Quote: To the Europeans I say: The U.S. people support Bush because after 9/11 it learned what fear means.

PALERMO: "In 1968 I was a recent graduate from the University of Michigan, and protested against the Vietnam War. I always voted for the Democratic Party (except once), and am definitely not a warmonger. But today everything has changed in AMerica. My 19-years-old son and I discuss a lot: should he be drafted for the war on Saddam, he and I would agree that it is appropriate. The truth is that Saddam has already killed millions of individuals and can kill many more: he is a danger for his neighbors as well as for the rest of the world. I lost tragically dome relatives in 1939 because of the French and German pacifist attitude regarding Hitler. My mother (Jewish) survived fleeing from Germany. Now I have no doubts: we learned the lessons of history, and do not want to make the same mistakes." Candor is one of the virtues of Kenneth Stein, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. He is one of the top experts in contemporary history of the Middle East, has been an advisor to former Democratic President Carter. However, at the [Palermo's] Department. of political science, where he held yesterday a crowded lecture/discussion, Prof. Stein-- in spite of his good humor and careful attention to the student's questions-- impacted against a rubber wall: almost all students and professors don't understand and don't want the "American war."

Q: You co-authored a book with former President Carter, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, nicknamed "Jimmy the Good: for the energy he applied in putting an end to some wars. Now Mr. Carter says that a war in Iraq without the U.N. backing would be "an event unheard of, out of international rules."

A: In this case I disagree with my friend Carter. If you Europeans want to understand why most of us Americans support Bush and the war against Saddam, you must think of September 11. Those attacks, which knocked down the Twin Towers, transformed permanently American history. For centuries the U.S. was isolationist. Fewer young people than

in Europe had an interest in foreign policy; foreign languages are studied less than here. But since 9/11 everything changed: we were scared, and we still are. To face this new enemy-- international terrorism-- we're ready to wage war on Saddam. If necessary, outside the U.N., in a coalition with some ten countries that are already on our side.

Q: These days you are holding lectures throughout Italy (editor's note: today you go to Catania.) Did you notice that 90% of students and common people in Europe are against this new war?

A: Yes. It is difficult to explain our reasons. Perhaps there might have been communication mistakes on the part of the current American leaders.

Q: Do you think Bush and Rumsfeld are too tough? Every statement they issue seems arrogant, thereby fueling people's negative reactions. They needlessly exasperate "old Europe." Perhaps the more subtle and flexible Clinton would have succeeded in having the allies accept the attack on Iraq.

A: Certainly, much depends upon one's face. Reagan and Clinton were like Teflon, nothing stuck on them, no matter what they said or did. On the contrary, if Bush says something inappropriate, it sticks on him. There is also the fact that Mr. Chirac, a second DeGaulle, wants to take advantage of the dissent within the U.N. to overturn the U.S. condition as the only superpower left. France wants to be the leader, the number one country in Europe.

Q: Many, including [Italian scientist] Rita Levi Montalcini, maintain that this is "only a war for oil."

A: Not at all. If we wanted oil, we would have taken it in 1991, after we defeated Saddam and our troops were in command throughout South Iraq. The right question is: does the U.S. have the right to defend itself from a deadly danger? I acknowledge that there is a weak point in the picture I outlined: the post-war period. We would like to see a transitory government jointly run by Arabs and the international community, not by the U.S. But it is impossible to foresee future scenarios. Saddam exercises his power through the hatred existing among the various clans: a terrible civil war might explode in Iraq. Should the instability in the area increase, it would be a serious failure.