

Defence Minister Guttenberg: Germany at war in Afghanistan

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On Easter Sunday, April 4, German Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (Christian Social Union) acknowledged that the German army was taking part in war in Afghanistan. Guttenberg is a trained lawyer and added that his comments should be taken colloquially and were not meant in a legal sense. Nevertheless, his statement is a significant admission.

For more than eight years, the German government has led the public to believe that the German army was providing military support for humanitarian help and economic rebuilding in Afghanistan. It was also under this pretext that the German parliament voted repeatedly to support the German mission in Afghanistan. Up until last weekend, the government was adamant in maintaining its deceit, although the escalating war involving no fewer than 130,000 foreign occupation troops has already cost the lives of thousands of Afghan civilians and 39 German soldiers.

Now it is no longer possible to maintain this lie. The last nail in its coffin was the death of three German soldiers and the wounding of an additional eight on Good Friday following an hours-long fire fight with rebels in the Char Darah district close to the German field camp in Kunduz. Guttenberg's admission, however, raises more questions than it answers.

The first is: With what right is Germany carrying out war in Afghanistan?

A basic social principle, reflected in the guidelines of the German constitution at the time of the founding of the Federal Republic after the Second World War, was that Germany should never again be the initiator of war. In the course of the subsequent six decades, millions took to the streets in Germany in order to underline their support for this position. Article 26 of the German Basic Law declares: "Acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between

nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be made a criminal offence."

The German parliament would never have agreed to a war combat mission in Afghanistan, and there is no mention of war in any of the decisions listing parliament's approval of German army deployment in Afghanistan. The German army's participating in a war means that parliament's agreement was obtained under false premises and must be declared null and void. The deployment is illegal and must be halted at once.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* made the following comment on Tuesday: "If the Afghanistan deployment is no longer justified by political circles on the basis on which it has been carried out for nearly a decade, then this strips away to some extent the contractual basis for a parliamentary army. When a property dealer sells a house declaring it to be in need of renovation and it then, colloquially speaking, turns out to be close to collapse, then the buyer has every right to appeal to the courts."

The second question is: By what means and against whom is Germany conducting war in Afghanistan?

In light of the corruption, lawlessness, and arbitrary behaviour of the Karzai regime, no credence can be given to the claim that the German army is supporting a legitimate government in Afghanistan against "terrorists." The growth of armed resistance, the appalling misery of the Afghan population—8 million suffer from undernourishment, 75 percent have no access to drinking water, last year's opium crop reached a new record of 9,000 tons—together with the growing brutality of the military intervention are typical symptoms of a colonial war, such as the Vietnam War.

In the meantime, Hamid Karzai, who was selected to

be the puppet of the occupation forces at the Petersberg Conference held near Bonn in 2001, has declared he is ready to change sides and work with the Taliban because the resistance to the occupation is gradually mounting and he fears for his own skin.

The German army is fighting in Afghanistan alongside the US army in order to secure German geostrategic interests in a region of crucial importance for energy supplies while proving its loyalty to NATO. That is the real content of Guttenberg's declaration that the German army is at war.

The minister is quite aware that his comments will do nothing to improve the popularity of the war. Already more than 70 percent of the population are opposed to the war, and this opposition will only grow as the original claims for the intervention of German troops—i.e., humanitarian and democratic aims—evaporate. In this respect Guttenberg's statement is also a declaration of war on the German population.

It is in this connection that one should study the comments made by Guttenberg's colleague, German cabinet member Dirk Niebel (Free Democratic Party). The development minister was part of a delegation in Kunduz at the time of the latest gun battle and spoke on behalf of the government at the funeral service for the three German soldiers. He used the occasion to bluntly blame the broad public opposition to the war for the precarious situation of the German troops and demanded that the German population throw its support behind the German mission in Afghanistan. The subsequent tragic shooting of Afghan security forces by German troops is an expression of the high degree of insecurity prevailing amongst German soldiers. This nervousness is directly bound up with the lack of support for the German mission on behalf of the German public, Niebel claimed.

Niebel told one newspaper: "The German soldiers desire more understanding for the fact that they have to take up arms, on occasion preventively. And they do not understand why they should justify their actions to the German public, or even face criminal charges."

This attempt to revive the "Dolchstoßlegende" (a stab in the back for German interests) has a long and inglorious history in Germany. During the First World War, two of its most prominent opponents, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, spent years in jail for their protest against the war, while right-wing veterans

of the war (Freikorps) invariably escaped punishment for their criminal attacks on war opponents.

The participation in the war in Afghanistan is bound up with the growth of militarism today. Niebel, who served for eight years as a paratrooper in the "Black Forest" Air Brigade 25 and remains a reserve officer of the German army, speaks on behalf of the military high command who are demanding more influence in social development. The growth of militarism is directly bound up with the intensification of the economic crisis and is aimed at opposition at home as well as its perceived enemy abroad.



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