

German defence minister adopts the political style of Italy's Berlusconi

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The plagiarism discovered in German defence minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg's doctoral thesis and his callous reaction to the criticism it aroused has provoked widespread outrage.

Writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, Heribert Prantl summed up what has so far been uncovered about the affair. Although Guttenberg's dissertation, on "Constitutional Steps of Development" in the US and European Union, was awarded the highest merit of "summa cum laude" by the University of Bamberg, some 270 pages of the 393-page work contained material from unacknowledged sources. "This constitutes such a serious degree of plagiarism that no more needs be said about the matter", commented Prantl.

However, there is indeed much more to say. A prominent right-winger, Guttenberg has obtained a university doctoral degree by stealing intellectual property. He reworked numerous quotations to conceal the fraud. He systematically deceived the university and is now treating the public in the same way.

When his dissertation was first criticised two weeks ago, Guttenberg repeated his assertion: "I completed the work to the best of my ability and most conscientiously". When further instances of plagiarism were revealed this month, he described the allegations as "absurd", but added that he was willing to check whether "or not a few of the footnotes were correctly formulated". He explained that the work "undoubtedly (contained) defects" two days later, and spoke of the "nonsense that I wrote" on February 21.

In European politics this degree of deception, distortion and disregard for legal norms has only found its equal in the figure of someone such as the Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. For many years Berlusconi has ruled by scorning democratic

conventions, intimidating the judiciary, and conducting his affairs in an openly illegal manner.

Now Guttenberg is operating in the same manner, albeit on a smaller scale so far. Like Berlusconi, he believes he is above the law. But this only shows that a constitutional state is being transformed into a despotic state, in which a self-appointed governing elite—responsible to no one—dictates policy.

In this respect, Guttenberg has won enthusiastic support from major media outlets. Like the Hugenberg press at the end of the Weimar Republic, the *Bild* tabloid agency acts as a propaganda organ to manipulate public opinion for the new ruling elite. A *Bild* headline thus claimed that 87 percent of German citizens backed Guttenberg, although a majority opposed him in a survey conducted by the paper's online edition.

This increasing scorn for legal conduct in German politics has deep objective roots. The global financial and economic crisis is rapidly accelerating social fragmentation. Hundreds of billions of euros were made available to banks and speculators, and these handouts are now being clawed back from the working class through harsh austerity programmes affecting all areas of life.

This social divide is shattering the society's democratic structures. The financial aristocracy's interests in maximising profits can only be enforced by implementing dictatorial measures against the opposition of the great majority of the people. This is exactly the kind of political course Guttenberg is pursuing. He is advancing the war in Afghanistan despite its rejection by over 70 percent of the population. He is transforming the country's military structure from a territorial defence force into a heavily armed and aggressive imperialist army. And he is being

groomed as a candidate for chancellor by the right-wing Union (Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union—CDU-CSU) camp.

In this context, Guttenberg's participation in a recent Hessian CDU rally is both interesting and informative. In the midst of an unabated storm of newly emerging facts arguing against him, he spoke on Monday evening in front of CDU members in the Hessian town of Kelkheim near Frankfurt am Main. He had been invited to speak by Roland Koch, the former prime minister of the state of Hesse and a leader of the conservative wing of the CDU.

Koch resigned his political office last year and accepted a lucrative position in the business world. He makes no secret of the fact that he opposes Chancellor Angela Merkel's policies, and advocates a much tougher approach to cuts in social services and a strengthening of domestic security forces. Together with other major CDU politicians, he stands at the ready for the establishment of a new right-wing party.

Koch encouraged Guttenberg, urging him under no circumstances to bow to pressure from the public and sections of the media. Instead, he should exploit the proven plagiarism by countering with a political offensive from the right. Koch did the same thing a few years ago, after his measures for illegally financing the CDU were detected.

This is precisely what Guttenberg went on to do in Kelkheim. Koch and his successor as state prime minister, Volker Bouffier, organised a celebrity event for him. Guttenberg was welcomed with gushing enthusiasm and standing ovations. He then made a staunchly right-wing speech, in which he described the racist rantings of Thilo Sarrazin (demagogic critic of multi-culturalism) as "good coin" and as "right and important". To the applause of the CDU right-wingers, Guttenberg asked: "Haven't we been grappling too much with foreign cultures and thereby forgetting about our own roots?"

Concerning the plagiarism in his doctoral thesis, he said the facts were not to be denied, and he had indeed at times lost concentration on the work and "written (a lot of) nonsense". But the real national scandal, he claimed, lay in the fact that a defective PhD thesis dominates the headlines, while news of the death of three young German soldiers in Afghanistan is downgraded to the level of a journalistic "side note".

"This is certainly not an example of first-rate journalism", shouted Guttenberg to the cheering CDU supporters as he went on the attack.

The working class should draw some important lessons from this scandalous display.

First, none of the established parties—including the Left Party—is willing or able to seriously oppose the insidious scheming and brazen grandstanding of the extreme right. And this is because all of them defend the capitalist profit system that underlies the right's arrogance.

Second, this haughty minister from a rich aristocratic family makes clear that the German ruling elite is once again preparing to do away with democracy. The working class must prepare for major confrontations. The criminal energy and mendacious cunning, adopted by Guttenberg and his followers in pursuit of their goals, reveal what is coming. One of the biggest lies currently being spread is that there is no money in the coffers and working people should therefore accept the government's drastic cuts in social spending.

The money must be appropriated from where it is: in the bank accounts and pockets of the rich and super rich. To achieve this, it is necessary to learn from the revolutionary struggles in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other countries in the Middle East, and above all build an internationalist, revolutionary socialist party.



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