

German defence minister promotes militarism

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The Dresden Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), ironically, was the site chosen by Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière November 1 in which to call for the expansion of German militarism. Ruins of the church, destroyed by Allied air raids on Dresden in 1945, had served in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as a memorial to the war, and was completely rebuilt with the aid of international donations following Germany's reunification in the early 1990s.

De Maizière spoke at the Frauenkirche's regular forum on the topic: "Acceptance of international responsibility—Germany's role in the world of today". The main inner area of the church was well filled, and a few observers occupied positions in the upper galleries. Among the several hundred members of the audience were also a few dozen individuals in military uniform, identified by the moderator as students from Dresden's Army Officers Training School, who were led by their brigadier general.

Before the lecture began, an elderly man unexpectedly addressed the gathering and pointed out that the ruins of the building had up to a few years earlier served as a reminder of German megalomania and war crimes. Now, he said, the defence minister was using the site to prepare for a renewed deployment of German soldiers throughout the world. He referred to the Kunduz massacre by German forces in Afghanistan that had claimed the lives of over a hundred civilians and protested against the fact that war propaganda was now being conducted in the church.

The man was interrupted by heckling, which developed into concerted whistling and hissing until he was forced to leave the church. His female companion cried out to the audience, "Shame on you!"

De Maizière employed the ecclesiastical setting to reinforce his militaristic propaganda with biblical references, quotes from Luther and anti-communist

prejudices. He appealed to irrationalism, vague fears and "the certainty of faith in a world of uncertainty" to campaign for the worldwide deployment of the Bundeswehr (German army) as "a key instrument of German security policy".

By focusing on hope and faith and condemning any kind of scientific certainty as a characteristic of totalitarian regimes, he attempted to challenge the anti-militarism deeply rooted in broad sections of the German population following the experience of two bloody world wars.

"National Socialism and Communism", said de Maizière, "were characterised by a world view that had a ready explanation for everything—and thus offered security and certainty, while demanding fanatical adherence in return for this kind of certainty. But precisely this promise of absolute certainty exposed their totalitarian character—and thereby their contempt for the freedom of the individual. After all, what does total certainty ultimately mean? What would we get from achieving complete certainty about the answers to all our existential questions? The result would be slavery".

The defence minister linked this appeal to scepticism, ignorance and religious mysticism with an argument for global deployment of the Bundeswehr to fight for German interests "in a world of uncertainty". "We have become more vulnerable. World trade and global communication networks can be interrupted easily and without requiring significant financial backing", he said. He then went on to plead for foreign and domestic security policies that were "value-based and serving specific interests" and explicitly included the application of military resources.

De Maizière concluded his lecture with a call to strengthen the German army. Its operations deserve to be granted "social esteem", he said. "We need to take responsibility as a society for those who, for their part,

take responsibility for Germany's security and interests". He called for a broad public debate to create "the necessary awareness" and produce a "social consensus ... in order to do justice to Germany's role in the world today".

De Maizière's appearance in the Frauenkirche is part of a marketing campaign to improve the image of the armed forces and win over public opinion for the launching of more aggressive militarism. The defence minister underlined this clearly in an article he published in the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper on November 20. In the piece he called for German security and defence policy to be discussed in "schools, universities, churches and wherever public debate is conducted".

The article argued against the complaint by foreign newspapers that the Germans were "militant pacifists and moralisers". De Maizière openly advocated the military defence of economic interests and complained: "Economic interests are sometimes regarded in our country as ethically dubious, as is the safeguarding of any of our interests". He claimed, in fact, that the issue involved a "German 'cardinal interest'. Inhabiting the most populous country in Europe, its strongest economy and the world's second largest export nation, we Germans are dependent on international stability".

Looming behind de Maizière's propaganda offensive is the profound crisis of world capitalism. In view of the euro crisis and international recession, tensions and conflicts among the great powers are increasing. Germany's ruling class has come to the conclusion that it can defend its economic interests by extending its military power at home and abroad.

Although 6,000 German soldiers are already serving in 12 different locations on three continents, the government is currently pressing for further Bundeswehr missions in Mali and on the Turkish border with Syria. The ruling elite is absolutely determined to involve Germany in future wars—whether in Africa or against Syria or Iran—in order to make certain that it can share in the division of spoils.



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