

German Defence Minister prevented from speaking at Berlin's Humboldt University

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On April 10 protesting students prevented Germany's Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière from delivering a lecture entitled "Army of Unity—The contribution of the Bundeswehr to social cohesion".

Some 300 students had come to the lecture in the auditorium at Berlin's Humboldt University on Wednesday evening. In the presence of university president Jan-Hendrik Albertz, a group of participants responded to the minister's presence with rhythmic clapping and chanting. Some people with symbolic red splashes on their T-shirts lay on the stage posing as war victims. Banners were unfurled reading "Make War on War!" and "Never again [should war proceed from] Germany!" After half an hour, de Maizière and his bodyguards left the hall.

In December last year there was a similar incident at the University of Leipzig. De Maizière was unable to deliver his scheduled lecture, but went on to hold discussions about the Bundeswehr with members of the audience for an hour. In Berlin, both he and University President Albertz also tried to get a discussion going, but failed.

So far, no one has admitted responsibility for organising the protest against de Maizière. The youth wing of the Left Party has organised similar actions against the Bundeswehr at schools in the past.

The perspective of these protests is extremely limited. While the Left Party is supporting the war preparations against Syria, and has helped the pro-war Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Green Party achieve majorities in several state legislatures, their youth movement encourages illusions among young people that militarism can be halted through personal confrontations with the defence minister.

In reality, the growth of militarism, which can be observed in every capitalist country, is inextricably

linked to the global crisis of capitalism. Faced with economic conflicts and social tensions, the imperialist powers are resorting to military force in order to defend their interests, just as they did a century before.

The struggle against militarism and war is therefore inextricably linked to the mobilization of the working class to overthrow capitalism—which the Left Party and its youth movement categorically reject.

Defence Minister de Maizière is one of the closest associates of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The son of a general in both Hitler's Reichswehr and the post-war Bundeswehr, he had previously headed the Chancellery and was interior minister before taking on the defence ministry in March 2011, where he succeeded Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg.

Guttenberg was forced to resign following a plagiarism scandal, after he had failed to bring about Bundeswehr reforms, despite flamboyant announcements and a falling out with the military brass after sacking Inspector General Wolfgang Schneiderhan and State Secretary Peter Wichert.

De Maizière has since systematically driven forward the transformation of the Bundeswehr into an international military force. He is well aware of the groundswell of opposition in broad layers of the population and is therefore using every opportunity to win public support for militarism. He will certainly not be deterred by incidents such as in Berlin and Leipzig. He commented on the incident in Berlin saying that he would continue to speak at universities. "I do it gladly. Not everywhere is like Berlin," he said.

It is only a matter of time before de Maizière abandons his posture of tolerance and returns to the old traditions of German militarism, persecuting and imprisoning his opponents. As interior minister, he had massively increased the state's repressive apparatus.

Under de Maizière, there are currently more than 7,000 of the Bundeswehr's 196,000 soldiers deployed abroad, including about 4,500 in Afghanistan and 1,300 in Kosovo. The rest are in the Baltic States, stationed in Lebanon and in several African countries. The colonial war in Mali, instigated by Paris, is being supported by the Bundeswehr with personnel and logistics. On the initiative of de Maizière's ministry, the Bundeswehr wants to purchase its own combat drone aircraft.

De Maizière's goal is to beef up Germany military capabilities, so that German imperialism can build on its former traditions and enforce its claims in Africa, the Middle East and other regions of the world with military might.

However, this aggressive foreign policy confronts a huge obstacle—the deep aversion of German working people to war and militarism on the basis of the experiences of two world wars and twelve years of fascist dictatorship.

After more than a hundred deaths of German service personnel in foreign missions and the massacre of innocent civilians in Kunduz, this aversion can be seen, among other things, by the inability of the Bundeswehr to fill 7,000 vacancies despite the fact that three million Germans are unemployed. Only a handful of young people are interested in a career as a professional soldier. After 2011, when it became obligatory for new military personnel to explicitly commit to deployment abroad interest waned even further.

To break down this opposition, de Maizière has sought to place the Bundeswehr “in the mainstream of society”, as requested by President Gauck. To this end, his ministry has commissioned a consultant to promote the “brandname Bundeswehr” and refocus its public relations.

As part of this strategy, the remaining 52 induction offices and five recruitment centres were closed in November 2012 and replaced by 16 “Career Centres” and 110 “Career Consultancy Bureaus”, and up to 200 mobile Bundeswehr offices. The Career Centres in Berlin, Hannover, Dusseldorf, Munich, Stuttgart, Erfurt, Wilhelmshaven and Mainz have been supplemented by so-called Assessment Centres, where candidates can be tested for their suitability.

In addition, the Bundeswehr's human resources department has been cooperating for some time with the Federal Employment Agency (BA), whose job

advertises now also include vacancies in the military. The Bundeswehr has organised special briefings for BA jobs advisers.

The Bundeswehr has created promotional videos with rock soundtracks; promoted violent films like Till Schweiger's *Guardian Angel* (de Maizière appeared personally at the premiere), and tasked partners like the youth magazine *Bravo* to promote militarism among young people in the form of so-called “BW [Bundeswehr] Adventure Camps”. In August 2012, two mechanized infantry battalions from Bavaria and Saxony organised “holiday camps” where a total of more than 80 teenagers and young adults participated.



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