A whiff of fascism—German tabloid demands war against Syria

Peter Schwarz
16 September 2013

The German media ranging from the Green *taz* and the social-liberal *Die Zeit*, to the conservative *Die Welt* have reacted with undisguised anger and disappointment over the postponement of US military action against Syria, as we pointed out four days ago. Now, the *Bild* newspaper, one of the flagships of the Springer press empire, has leapt into the fray and surpassed all others. The tabloid's comment which castigates the US president for his alleged impotence and inaction in Syria has unmistakably fascist undertones.

Franz Josef Wagner, Springer's official "chief columnist" since 2001, denounces Barack Obama as a "wimp" for far failing to bomb Syria. After referring to "children killed by gas," Wagner wrote in his daily *Bild* column *Mail from Wagner*: "You are the most powerful man in the world. Why don't you just stop this in no time? **A push of a button. Drones**. The most powerful man in the world could obliterate the evil." (emphasis in original)

Wagner invokes racist prejudices in his depiction of the "wimp" Obama. "You were born in Hawaii. Mother a hippie. Father a black," he writes. America is "the policeman of the world," but Obama is "a weak cop … His problem is that he does not get out the baseball bat."

The reference to the baseball bat is an appeal to neo-Nazis who favor this weapon when they chase and beat up immigrants or political opponents. This is also the chosen method for revenge in Quentin Tarantino's repellent *Inglourious Basterds*. In one of the film's most brutal scenes, an avenger smashes the skull of a Nazi with a baseball bat.

Franz Josef Wagner is known for his abusive comments. Ten years ago, on his 60th birthday, the *taz* wrote: "He is regarded as choleric, virile, impulsive, reactionary, hysterical, cynical, chaotic, and therefore intolerable." It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the whiff of fascism in Germany's largest-circulation tabloid as merely a personal quirk of Wagner.

Bild goes to great lengths to deliberately incite backwardness and appeal to its readers at the lowest intellectual level, but the editors and publishing manager know exactly what they are doing. Springer CEO Matthias Dopfner is an educated man. He studied musicology, German literature and theater studies and received a doctorate.

Bild editor Kai Dieckmann broke off his studies in history, German and politics but has since cultivated a dense network of political connections. He played a major role in drafting the memoirs of former conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The Springer Press and its off shoots have close relations with leaders in the boardrooms of big business and politics. Its official receptions regularly feature the top echelons of government, political parties and big business. Since the resignation of former President Christian Wulff—whose rise and fall was largely engineered by Kai Dieckmann—it is clear that *Bild* can also operate as a kingmaker.

One must take seriously the manner in which the paper now employs fascist clichés to agitate for war against Syria. The paper was notorious for stirring up a pogrom atmosphere against the student protests in 1968 that led directly to the assassination attempt of student leader Rudi Dutschke.

"Confiscate the Springer Press" was one of the central demands of the student movement at the time.

Today, most of the ex-student radicals of that period have made their peace with *Bild*. The Greens, the heirs of the German student movement, also agitate for an imperialist intervention in Syria. When *Bild* yet again

© World Socialist Web Site

seeks to stoke up a pogrom atmosphere it is preparing to counter a powerful mass anti-war movement that has not yet found a conscious political expression. It is responding to the profound tensions in a deeply divided society, which must find expression in fierce class struggle, sooner or later.

In this context even US President Obama, who for weeks has been actively campaigning for a military strike against Syria and has assembled a gigantic armada in the eastern Mediterranean, is considered a "wimp". "A push of a button, drones", "stop this in no time" and "get out the baseball bat"—this is the reflex of *Bild* and the ruling elite behind it, to mounting social tensions.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site