Germany's Die Zeit: Publishing war propaganda in weekly installments

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Anybody opening the print edition of *Die Zeit* can expect a concentrated dose of war propaganda. The supposedly liberal weekly newspaper exemplifies a development that causes concern and anger for many people: the transformation of the German mainstream media into propaganda instruments for war and militarism. The September 18 issue provides eloquent testimony to this fact.

Under the martial title "We open fire", *Die Zeit* authors Hauke Friederichs and Matthias Nass defend German arms shipments to Iraq. Cynically, they write, "Germany is providing weapons to the Kurds. Breaking a taboo? No, crisis areas are full of German military hardware".

The authors explain that all German governments since reunification in 1990 have delivered large quantities of weapons to "areas of tension", without "much fuss being made". And "the federal government [always] argued on the basis of security interests". Emblazoned above the article, like an advertisement for the German defence industry, is the image of a machine gun, with the description, "Export hit: The German G36 assault rifle".

For Jochen Bittner and Michael Thumann, the arms shipments do not go far enough. They want to send soldiers. On page 3, under the headline, "It is starting again, but differently", they criticize the "false reserve" of the West regarding massive military intervention. Obama wants merely a war with "death at a distance, conducted mainly by aircraft and allies" …. "even though this time it was as necessary and right as never before, to intervene with full force ... and act harshly and decisively against IS [Islamic State]".

"The same mood of retreat as in Washington" also prevails in Berlin, the authors complain. "In the very country, where for months a serious debate has taken place about taking more responsibility and growing international influence, politicians are falling back on the oldest of all foreign and security policy reflexes: let the Americans deal with it. A new campaign against Islamists? Without us."

The German government was not even asked "whether the Bundeswehr [armed forces] could and wanted to participate in any kind of military operation". Nevertheless, by "pointing to the weapons deliveries to the Kurds in northern Iraq", they had excluded "all thoughts of further engagement", including sending "combat troops to Iraq" and "possible air attacks against IS". And "even though the government thinks air attacks against the IS forces are urgently necessary", and "although the Luftwaffe [Air Force] with its Tornado fighter jets, possesses attack and reconnaissance capabilities which could be well used by an international anti-IS coalition."

In earlier polemics, we have already noted that many German commentators and editorialists could easily have found a place in Goebbels' propaganda ministry. That was no exaggeration. Writers like Jochen Bittner act less as journalists than as imperialist propagandists.

Bittner co-authored the strategy paper "New power, new responsibility. Elements of a German foreign and security policy in transition", which provides the template for the new German war policy. If his current war fantasies became reality, it would be the first time since the Second World War that German pilots dropped bombs on a country that has never attacked Germany.

According to Mark Twain, "History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." In the Nuremberg Trials, the leaders of the Nazi regime were condemned for conducting a war of aggression. Now the German elite is once again pleading to abandon all inhibitions in

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order to pursue the economic and geostrategic interests of German imperialism by military means.

"If values ever meant anything in the Middle East, then that time is well past", Bittner and Thumann announce at the end of their article. "In order to fight IS, the West is allying itself with precisely those Arab regimes that suppressed and ended the Arab Spring. But at this time there are certainly more important things than the dreams of the people."

Herfried Münkler continues in the same vein on page 4. He proclaims a new age of "interests and wars", in which above all the European powers must return to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy, and that international law is not worth the paper on which it is written.

The hope that "military conflicts" would "only play a marginal role" in the 21st century, "may well have been an all too optimistic prognosis", writes Münkler. "The war in east Ukraine" speaks "instead for a return of wars over the world-political order", in which it is "once again a matter of territorial control". Since "the USA, the previous Globocop of the international order," is not playing "an outstanding role in the Ukraine war"; since it is "in the first place, a matter for the Europeans ... to limit the Russian options through their own hands" and "to work on the problems in their own periphery without the help of the US in future."

"Sooner or later that will also have consequences for the international laws of war", lectures the Humboldt professor. "The insistence on a legal system that is marked by the experience of two world wars, no longer suffices to regulate and limit violence in the new conflicts over world order". In the final analysis, "the traditional differences between wars of aggression and defence, or between inter-state wars and civil wars have lost their orienting power."

In reality, it is not international law that has lost its "orienting power", but the German bourgeoisie, and above all its journalists and academics, who have lost their inhibitions. Once again they are prepared to ignore and break international law. Seventy-five years after the German invasion of Poland and the terrible war of extermination against the Soviet Union, which cost the lives of 27 million people, they are once again calling for wars of aggression "to control territories". *Die Zeit*, together with other leading media, has taken on the task of mobilising support for this course and of pushing it through against the resistance of the majority of the population.

With his attacks on the historian Fritz Fischer, Münkler has played a central role in rehabilitating German militarism. His latest article is part of a *Die Zeit* series "Surrounded by wars", which was launched four weeks ago with an article by Bernd Ulrich.

Under the headline, "The world is mad and what are we doing?" Ulrich sketches out the image of a Europe surrounded by "crises" (Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, Iraq) and "opponents" (Russia and China), and demands, "It is time to re-order interests and ideals, certainties and feelings". The problem of the West lies "not in the strongrooms and in the rocket depots, its problem is mental. The West has wreaked a havoc in its own head during the past two decades its opponent could never have achieved."

In a nutshell: the ruling elite is perturbed by the fact that following the terrible experiences of two world wars, the great majority of the population is not prepared to let itself be roped in again by their renewed great power appetites and war plans. *Die Zeit* has set itself the goal of changing this. For this reason, they are "conducting an international debate over the changed world political situation, over the question if, and if yes, why the West still exists. How Germany, with its rapidly growing responsibility in Europe, should behave towards Europe and the countries around the EU. Which Western principles still apply, which have become obsolete? What would a *realpolitik* look like that really deserves this name and which was not always overtaken by the realities. Are there interests without ideals?"

There is something positive to be drawn from this *Die Zeit* "debate", which was already decided before it had even begun. It shows that the ruling class has not changed, and that one hundred years after the First and 75 years after the Second World War, it is preparing for new wars.

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