

Germany's new war minister and Stern magazine

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29 September 2014

On September 1, 2014, the German federal government resolved to deliver weapons to the war zone in Iraq. In doing so, it took another major step towards reviving German great-power politics. The media were absolutely delighted with the decision.

A front cover of a recent edition of *Stern*, surpassed only by *Der Spiegel* as Germany's news magazine with the largest circulation, featured a photograph of Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), with the title "Minister of War". Von der Leyen together with President Joachim Gauck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) officially announced the revival of German militarism earlier this year.

In an article titled "Open fire", *Stern* welcomes the fact that the arms shipment to northern Iraq means "the end of the restraint so carefully cultivated in this country for six decades". A window has been opened "and it will be difficult to close this window ever again".

The magazine is only too well aware of the "imposed" restraint following the Second World War. After all, former Nazi big shots in the press industry participated in the founding and later growth of *Stern*. Now the news magazine is reflecting on its Nazi roots—and finding it has something in common with what it terms the "war minister".

The political roots of Ursula von der Leyen

Von der Leyen emerged from the Lower Saxony branch of the CDU. She is the daughter of Ernst Albrecht, who was premier of that federal state from 1976 to 1990 and exhibited a pronounced tendency towards elitism and the ideology of National Socialism (Nazism).

In 1976, Albrecht's book, *The State, Idea and Reality: Outlines of a political philosophy*, was published by the national-conservative Seewald Verlag. The work expresses his contempt for democratic legislation and the broad masses of the population, "the mob", as well as his preference for Old Testament forms of rule.

"If we succeed in bringing people of above-average capabilities to governance," he writes, "an autocracy or the rule of the few will be able to create a better order than the rule of the people".

"The rule of the people", he grumbles, "especially direct rule, is

essentially such that decisions are not determined by the insight of the insightful (elite), but rather by the common average level based on the majority of the population".

This mentality of a maturely ruling elite was associated with National Socialist mindsets in the Lower Saxony CDU. In the 1950s, the Lower Saxony CDU admitted into its ranks members of the extreme right-wing German Reich Party and Socialist Reich Party, as well as the national-conservative German Party.

In 1976, Albrecht made Hans Puvogel his minister of justice. During his tenure, Puvogel was particularly active in combatting notions of more liberal penal and rehabilitation systems. He had already set out justification for his stance in a 1935-1936 doctoral thesis. There, he wrote of the "inheritance of criminal tendencies", of "constitutionally predisposed criminals" and "inferior people", who would have to be "eliminated from the community". "Only a person of value to the race" would have "a right to exist within the national community".

The state government under Ernst Albrecht used every opportunity to court former Nazis. In a 1978 speech, Deputy Premier Wilfried Hasselmann (CDU) greeted the Association of Knight's Cross Recipients, a league of former Wehrmacht (Hitler's army) officers and SS men, certifying that they had "shown courage and given an example to others". Hasselmann declared he was "deeply impressed by the solidarity of your order. You have fulfilled your duty as soldiers in an exemplary manner. This will continue to be evident to a younger generation".

The Lower Saxony CDU member, Hans Edgar Jahn, stood as candidate for the first European elections in 1979. The 1943 publication of his book on European policy-making, *The Storming of the Steppes - Jewish-Bolshevik imperialism*, was seen to have qualified him for this position. The book predicts the final destruction of Judaism and the assemblage of the all "Germanic peoples" around a common hearth. "But even after thousands of years", writes Jahn, "humanity and especially our youth will sound one particular name with respect and awe: Adolf Hitler".

Albrecht's daughter, Ursula, thinks much of her father, who is now suffering from dementia. In 2003, she stated in an interview that he was for her "a wonderful counsellor". She said they shared a common "core belief", which was based on "Christian and traditional family values".

Von der Leyen has carried this conviction throughout her political career, beginning it where her father once ruled. When he lost the premiership of Lower Saxony to Gerhard Schröder (Social

Democratic Party, SPD) in 1990, she felt it was an affront on the part of voters and joined the CDU at 31 years of age. In a later interview, she said she had thought at the time: “An intolerable disgrace”.

Already by 2003, she had been appointed to the post of minister of social affairs, women, family and health in the Lower Saxony state government, led by the CDU. She distinguished herself mainly by pushing for cuts in social spending. She managed, for example, to abolish benefits for the blind.

The social attacks, begun by the SPD-Green Party government under Gerhard Schröder in 1998, were continued by the CDU-SPD coalition under Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) from 2005. As federal minister for family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth, von der Leyen pressed through parental allowance benefits, specifically designed to encourage higher income earners to produce more children, while financial support for poor mothers and fathers was reduced.

As minister of labour and social affairs from 2009 to 2013, she later ensured that funds for the unemployed were curtailed and financial penalties for recipients of unemployment benefits implemented more efficiently. Many “reforms” (i.e., social cuts) later, she took over the post of defence minister to advance the economic and geopolitical interests of German imperialism throughout the world. Faced with widespread anti-war sentiment within the population, she has devoted herself to the revitalisation of German militarism.

The murky origins of *Stern* magazine

Stern news magazine, which is particularly committed to urging war against Russia in the Ukraine crisis, also has its roots in the tradition of Nazism. In October 2013, on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Henri Nannen, *Stern*’s founder and long-time head director, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) newspaper published a revealing article under the title “*Stern*’s Nazi roots”.

The author of this article, Tim Tolsdorff, has written a book about the Nazi era cliques and networks that contributed to the emergence of *Stern*. As in most areas of society, people who had grown up and advanced their careers in the media under the Nazis were easily able to continue their jobs after 1945.

Today’s *Stern* was modelled on a kind of mass-circulated illustrated magazine that bore the same name back in 1938. It was directed by Kurt Zentner, who made a career under the Nazis with the Ullstein publishing firm and later the Deutscher Verlag. After that, Zentner worked with Henri Nannen.

Nannen was active in the Nazis’ propaganda companies in Italy, where he agitated against the Western allies. After the German defeat, he was able to evade the “de-Nazification process” of the Western occupying powers and had little difficulty launching publishing projects, such as the *Hanover Evening Post*. Heading production of the *Post* was Carl Jödicke.

Jödicke, a former member of the NSDAP (Nazi party) and SA (Hitler’s paramilitary army), had risen to director of the

newspaper, following the Ullstein’s “Aryanisation” (the Nazis’ expulsion of Jewish business owners). In this period, he also collaborated with Josef Goebbels’ propaganda ministry. After the war, he helped Nannen obtain a license for the new *Stern*, whose publication finally started in the Western occupation zone in 1948. As Jödicke maintained relations with many media people from the Nazi era, he was able to bring some of them into contact with Nannen. These included the graphic designer Karl Beckmeier.

Beckmeier had already worked for Kurt Zentner, chief editor of the Nazi *Stern*. In addition to Beckmeier, Nannen drew other Nazi media people to his new magazine. The journalists, Armin Schönberg and Hubs Flöter, were given a job with *Stern* straight away. Employed as an illustrator was Günter Radtke, who had already offered his talent to the service of the Nazis—as draftsman for the 1936 Olympic Games and various Nazi magazines.

Working with this circle of former Nazis, Nannen was able on occasion to raise his magazine’s circulation to the largest in the German Federal Republic. Chronicling the early history of the new magazine, FAZ author Tim Tolsdorff writes: “The war was systematically viewed as consisting of two separate dimensions: the honourable war and the criminal Nazi leadership. The Holocaust was largely excluded from coverage in the early years”.

It was not long before *Stern* began publishing its political views more confidently. In 1951, it spoke out against the conviction of ex-generals Erich von Manstein and Albert Kesselring as war criminals. “Furthermore,” writes the FAZ, “interest groups in the United States and Britain became involved in the *Stern* campaign, which was aimed at paving the way to (West German) rearmament. A relevant detail: Henri Nannen had served under the command of Kesselring in Italy from 1944”.

The campaign was successful. Following his release from prison, von Manstein was employed as unofficial adviser to the Bundeswehr (German army) from 1953 to 1960. The funeral oration for Kesselring, who died in 1960 without ever having renounced his loyalty to Hitler, was given by the then-air force chief of staff and former Wehrmacht general, Josef Kammhuber.

It was not until the student protests of 1968, which were partly directed against former Nazis in high positions of the state and society, that Nannen was forced to publicly confront his past and Nazism. But this did not involve a break from that past.

Nannen’s successors in today’s *Stern* are Thomas Osterkorn and Andreas Petzold. The former was a police reporter for the *Hamburg Evening Newspaper* before he joined *Stern*. Petzold first worked for the army’s press department and the magazine *Heer* (Army). He then moved to various tabloids where he held high posts. Both these reporters are well acquainted with the outlook and attitude of the police and army, and also support Germany’s new aggressive foreign policy—as the *Stern* article and cover with Germany’s female war minister makes very clear.



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