

German army opens “career centre” in the heart of Berlin

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Anyone emerging from the metro station at Friedrichstrasse in the middle of Berlin on Wednesday morning would have stumbled unexpectedly and unintentionally into the arms of the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces). Surrounded by some officers, soldiers and journalists, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) was opening the new “Bundeswehr Career Centre”. In future, every student, worker or tourist who takes the side exit of the Friedrichstrasse station will walk past the Iron Cross, which decorates the centre along with the glowing blue text “Bundeswehr: We. Serve. Germany”.

This recruitment centre is the culmination of an extensive advertising campaign by the Bundeswehr over the last few months, and which is meant to anchor the military interests of the German government in society. The press handout provides information about the purpose of the facility: “The capital city studio and showroom of the Bundeswehr Berlin aims to be a modern, open and fixed platform, where a continuous dialogue between the Bundeswehr and the public takes place.”

The “showroom” comprises a small reception area where young people can learn about supposedly attractive career opportunities with the “employer brand Bundeswehr”. The place is “an easily accessible point of contact for advice, a meeting place for different formats, events and activities ... in a central location in Berlin”, the press release adds.

Some students sit between screens with video advertising, brochures and a uniformed soldier doll, giving the opening of the Career Centre a “citizen-friendly” feel. In an interview with the defence minister, and then in a question and answer session with an officer of the Guards Battalion, they are presented with exciting career opportunities.

The Bundeswehr recruitment campaign is a central part of Germany’s new foreign policy. Earlier this year, at the

Munich Security Conference, von der Leyen, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD, Social Democratic Party) and President Joachim Gauck announced the end of military restraint. Germany, according to its economic size, must take “more responsibility” internationally and, if necessary, intervening militarily.

As before the First and Second World Wars, the return to aggressive great power politics requires the militarization of society. In 2012, in a speech at the Bundeswehr Staff College in Hamburg, Gauck had called for more recognition for German soldiers, whom he called “courageous citizens in uniform”.

“The Bundeswehr in the Balkans, in the Hindu Kush and the Horn of Africa, in action against terrorism and pirates—who would have thought something like this was possible 20 years ago?” asked Gauck. “You, dear soldiers, are being trained today with the clear perspective you can be sent into such operations—with all the dangers to body, soul and life. You have a right to demand that we make ourselves aware of what is demanded of you and what tasks we expect from you in the future. All this should not be debated solely by the command staff and also not alone in parliament. It must be debated where our armed forces have their place: in the middle of our society”.

Gauck complained that his plea for German military operations has met with little enthusiasm in the population. One problem is the “spatial distance”, he told his audience. “Many Bundeswehr facilities had to be kept closed. As soldiers, you are less present in the everyday life of our cities and communities.”

The Berlin Career Centre is now to bridge the “spatial distance” of the Bundeswehr with the population, and make militarism a visible part of social life once more. Parallel with the suspension of conscription in 2011 and the conversion of the Bundeswehr into an efficient

professional army, the military has massively expanded its advertising offensive.

A Federal Office of Personnel Management of the Bundeswehr is responsible for a total of 16 career centres and 110 career consulting offices. The Berlin “showroom”, publicly accessible, is the first career centre working with new advertising methods in the heart of the capital.

At the end of October, the government introduced the “Act to increase the attractiveness of service in the Armed Forces”. It has approved the Ministry of Defence spending a further €120 million in the coming year to improve training, working conditions and equipment of the Bundeswehr. In 2016, the budget increases to €300 million. The Bundeswehr is advertising for recruits on public transport, on television, in schools and universities. The campaigns are specifically addressed to young people, who would sacrifice their lives for future German wars. In videos, they are sold military missions abroad as an exciting adventure.

The head of the new Career Centre and the “Centre for Recruitment EAST”, Ulrich Karsch, sees a direct link between the recruitment of young people and the increase in foreign missions. In *Zeit Online* he said back in 2013: “We are an operational army. It’s no use if we generate young people who are not willing to go abroad.”

Despite the fuss and broad media support for the rearmament of the Bundeswehr, these plans meet with scepticism, even among young soldiers. Many recruits volunteering for military service leave within the six-month probationary period. At the beginning of 2013, the dropout rate was over 30 percent.

The vast majority of the population rejects the aggressive new foreign policy. The media and the military are intensifying their Bundeswehr “attractiveness campaigns” in order to break down the resistance against war, and to once again sacrifice the lives of young people on the altar of Germany’s imperialist interests.



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