

German professor Herfried Münkler agitates against refugees

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The surge of desperate refugees from the Middle East trying to make it to Germany and other Western European countries has been met with a surge of popular sympathy, including a flood of donations and offers to house migrants.

The expressions of sympathy for the thousands and thousands fleeing the consequences of the imperialist-backed devastation of Syria and other countries has triggered concern within the German ruling elite. They rightly see this expression of humanity, even when it is spontaneous and politically undeveloped, as a threat to their ruthless war policies, attacks on social programs and domestic repression.

While Chancellor Angela Merkel is anxious to conceal her right-wing policies behind feigned sympathy for refugees, calls for her to commit herself to an openly xenophobic campaign are growing.

Political scientist Herfried Münkler is among the agitators. In a guest commentary published in last Friday's *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Münkler calls for an anti-refugee campaign aimed at tightening asylum policies, justifying new wars in the Middle East and expanding cooperation with the bloodiest dictatorships. His intentions are unmistakable, even if he dresses up his tirades in repellant pseudo-professorial babble.

The Humboldt University professor begins with the completely hollow assertion that refugees are provoking a diffuse fear among large parts of the German population. He ascribes such fears not only to those who shout hate speech, but also those who give aid to refugees. Münkler accuses relief workers of trying to "work away" their fear.

According to Münkler, the cause of this fear is to be found in a supposedly lax asylum policy: "One side has naively believed that the number of refugees would decline again all by itself; the other side has put up

moralistic prohibition signs to block any discussion on how to deal with the problem."

The message is clear. While entire countries in the Middle East are bombed to rubble by the NATO powers, tens of thousands of refugees die at European borders, and asylum seekers in Germany are crammed into undignified camps and even tortured, the professor wants to tear down supposed "moralistic prohibition signs" to solve the "problem".

With this inhumane rhetoric, Münkler stokes demands for a drastic tightening of asylum laws. On Tuesday, the Ministry of the Interior put a constitutional amendment into play that would remove legal protections and further limit the long established fundamental right of asylum.

However, Münkler does not simply want a tightening of refugee policies. He is in favor of using the refugee issue to push through a whole series of reactionary political measures.

For this purpose, Münkler has adopted his concept of "widespread fear". To overcome this fear, he does not propose, for example, clarification of the issues or opposing right-wing propaganda. On the contrary, he calls for turning supposedly diffuse anxieties with regard to refugees into a fear "that is directed toward a definite threat or danger." According to Münkler, on this basis one can take measures to counteract the root causes of the fear.

The professor first assumes a general anxiety which he then seeks to translate into a concrete fear of the supposed refugee problem. What Münkler develops with his elaborate formulations and kitchen sink psychology boils down to the old and banal strategy of making immigrants scapegoats for fundamental social problems.

Münkler is explicit about this. For Münkler, the

“peaceful times in Germany” are over not “because global capitalism is ruining the middle layers of society economically” (which was just confirmed in a recently published study), but because of “fear of refugees”!

Münkler made clear his thoughts on the matter in an interview last Friday with *Deutsche Welle*. He explained that the insufficient integration of refugees was at the root of growing anxiety. According to Münkler, the “native population, or the so-called Bio-Germans” (original: “Bio-Deutschen”) will not permanently accept immigrants if they do not conform to the “work ethic of a central European society.”

Until recently, one only read such passages in extreme right-wing rags like *Junge Freiheit*. Münkler declares here that, compared to “Bio-Deutschen,” immigrants from certain regions should be regarded as a kind of work-shy riff-raff that one either puts to work or gets rid of. Otherwise, Münkler prophesizes, there will be “dramatic consequences.”

This racist position is especially repellant when one considers the history of the “central European work ethic” to which Münkler refers. The professor is undoubtedly aware that in June 1938 the Nazis employed similar arguments as a part of their campaign against the “work-shy Reich” during which more than 10,000 young men, slandered as asocial or lazy, were sent to concentration camps.

Münkler wants to make the fear he is striving to create into something useful to an aggressive foreign policy. It was a big mistake, Münkler now believes, not to have immediately provided military support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in a fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. According to him, that led to a spike in the number of refugees.

In reality, the FSA, with the backing of Germany and the US, ignited the civil war which led to the destabilization of the entire country. Behind their support for the FSA, just as in the Iraq war and the intervention in Libya, were the interests of imperialism. Münkler is prepared to see those interests enforced by any means necessary.

It would be “politically stupid” not to cooperate “with very unpleasant partners,” he told *Deutsche Welle*. Münkler finds that the regime in Iran, the brutal monarchy in Saudi Arabia and even the bloody al-Sisi dictatorship in Egypt could serve Germany well.

Münkler’s advocacy for war and dictatorship is not

new. In an article written for the German foreign ministry in May 2014, he called for a foreign policy oriented less toward Germany’s values and more toward its interests. He wrote that the “democratic vulnerability” of German politics could only be overcome through an offensive campaign for those interests.

The professor had already begun to foment fear of refugees at that time. He wrote, “The greatest challenge to national security in the twenty-first century will not come from hostile military forces threatening our borders, but from the crossing of those borders by immense waves of refugees. Such a massive outbreak will not benefit the economic prosperity of Europe, but will overstrain the social welfare systems of European countries and place the social order in doubt.”

When student groups Münkler-Watch and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) criticized the positions of professors as militarist and hostile to refugees, they were vehemently attacked in the media. The criticisms were called unfounded, the students crazy.

Now Münkler openly adopts the positions of the extreme right and spreads racist theories of work-shy foreigners. Both the publicly funded *Deutsche Welle* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which compared Münkler-Watch to the right-wing extremist Pegida movement, publish this filth without comment.



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