

Prominent German journalist beats the drum for nationalism and war

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27 January 2016

Since the beginning of the year, there has been a veritable media barrage in Germany to push the axis of official politics to the right. The various media outlets compete in stirring up hatred against refugees, calling for a strong state and for more military missions. Above all, the New Year's Eve events in Cologne have been blown out of all proportion and systematically exploited.

A prime example of this type of witch-hunting journalism is the article "The fatal indifference of the ruling class" by *Die Welt's* editor-in-chief Stefan Aust, which appeared in the Sunday edition. He sums up many of the themes that are also found in other editorials, and provides a revealing insight into the fears that preoccupy the ruling elites, and the reactionary measures they are considering in response.

Aust counts no fewer than six crises, which Germany currently faces: the "Russian hunger for power," the "fight against terrorism at home, but also around the world," the "international financial and economic crisis," the "euro crisis," "Europe's identity crisis" (in this he includes, *inter alia*, the "'Trump-ification' of European politics" and the "strengthening of right-wing and left-wing populist forces"), and the "refugee crisis."

The answers that Aust suggests to resolve these crises fluctuate between hysteria and delusions of grandeur. They could be reduced to the formula: "Back to the 1930s". He advocates war on at least two fronts—against Russia and the Middle East; the driving into bankruptcy of highly indebted euro states; the practical abolition of the right of asylum and the closing up of borders.

His article ends by saying, "In the rigidity of the East-West confrontation during the Cold War we have forgotten that calm winds behind the superpowers were

not the norm." Now, for "a long time," we will again have to live with conditions such as those described in the last century by the pacifist writer Erich Maria Remarque, "Never have there been more false prophets, never more lies, never more death, never more destruction and never more tears than in our century."

Aust proposes an uncompromising course against Russia, which he accuses of "hard-hitting power politics" because of its response to the 2014 coup in Kiev staged by Berlin and Washington. "He [Russian president Vladimir Putin] can only be stopped and tamed by deterrence", Aust writes. "No round table is needed, as Germans favour, but a *realpolitik* as pursued from Harry S. Truman up to Helmut Schmidt."

US President Truman opened the Cold War against the Soviet Union in 1947, which ended, luckily, without a nuclear confrontation and the annihilation of Europe, although it almost came to this several times. Now, Aust wants to risk a new nuclear war.

He fiercely attacks the German population who have wanted nothing more to do with war "since the madness of the Nazis". "They don't want to have anything to do with it, do not understand its mechanisms and thus can respond only inadequately to it."

Aust becomes increasingly bitter and angry. "When a crisis erupts—in Europe especially—German society is in fear and would prefer to sit it out with a toddler's trick: I'll cover my eyes, then the others will not see me," he rages.

That should change. Significantly, Aust utilises the arguments and terminology of Humboldt University professor Herfried Münkler, whom he also explicitly quotes. The WSW has long identified Münkler as one of the spokesmen for a new aggressive German war

policy.

In the postwar period, and under the protection of America, “German society had transformed itself into a post-heroic society in which realpolitik hardly applies”, complains Aust and proclaims an era of permanent war: “In the past, people lived either in war or in peace. Today, peace and war prevail at the same time.”

Aust retrospectively declares the European Monetary Union and the issuing of loans to Greece to be a big mistake. He justifies this especially with the declining “economic power of the West”. One has the impression, he writes, “that the leading economies have still not done their homework.”

By this, Aust means mainly a policy of everyone for themselves. From a German perspective, it was wrong to water down European Union (EU) treaties and to allow the European Central Bank to indirectly carry out state funding, he says. “Now it is operating as a money-printing machine, which hastens to aid the deeply indebted southern countries.”

Aust wages a particularly nasty campaign against refugees. He accuses the federal government of having broken its own laws by taking in refugees. “The consequences are felt everywhere: open borders for millions of people—from Syrians in distress up to terrorists of the Islamic State (IS), with no end of the trouble in sight.”

Aust is clear that his agitation for war and against refugees meets with rejection in wide layers of the population. In a revealing sentence, he more or less openly admits that the campaign being conducted by politicians and the media following the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne was aimed at pushing the government’s policy to the right. “Since the events of New Year’s Eve in Cologne, the pressure on the government to initiate a turn is in any case greater,” he writes with satisfaction.

The fact that Stefan Aust has placed himself at the head of the current right-wing campaign is significant. Aust started his journalistic career in 1966 as editor of the weekly magazine *Konkret*, which was close to the banned German Communist Party, and was funded in its first years by the Stalinist regime in East Germany. It then became a mouthpiece of the 1968 protest movement. Among his then colleagues at *Konkret* was Ulrike Meinhof, the later founder of the terrorist Red Army Faction.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Aust worked for the TV magazine programme “Panorama,” for which he produced strong investigative reports. For example, in 1978 he brought down the Baden Württemberg state premier Hans Filbinger by proving that as a naval staff judge he had passed death sentences against deserting Marines shortly before the end of the Second World War.

From 1988, Aust headed the editorial board at Spiegel TV. From 1994 to 2008, Aust was editor-in-chief of *Der Spiegel*, Germany’s largest news magazine. In 2013, he finally became editor-in-chief of *Die Welt*, part of the right-wing publishing house Springer-Verlag.

Aust’s transformation into a right-wing agitator is symptomatic of a whole layer of former liberal or leftist intellectuals who, with the growing crisis of capitalism, draw ever nearer to the state apparatus. Faced with growing social inequality and imperialist conflicts, they seek to defend their social privileges by arguing for war and the “strong state” that inevitably accompanies it.



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