Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung lobbies for militarism and war

Johannes Stern
26 May 2016

"Militarism means the dominance of military ideals and aims in politics and social life, such as, for example, through the one-sided emphasis of the right of the stronger, and the expression of the view that wars are necessary or unavoidable." This is the definition of militarism provided by the sixth edition of the political lexicon published by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Seventy-one years after the end of the Nazi dictatorship and the defeat of the Wehrmacht in the Second World War, influential sections of the German elite think it is time to resurrect the principles that pushed Europe into the abyss twice in the last century. A recent article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, headlined, "When will we finally get back on our feet?" provides eloquent testimony of this.

The daily, a mouthpiece for the Frankfurt banks, has provided a platform for Wolf Poulet, a former "tank force officer and general in the high command of the armed forces," whose views are entirely in the tradition of his historical predecessors in the Kaiser's army. He advocates an aggressive German foreign and war policy.

At the very beginning of his guest column, Poulet complains from the point of view of a well-integrated militarist, a Free Democratic Party (FDP) member and foreign policy adviser, "We Germans are obviously no longer in a position to deviate from the supposed path of the all-understanding do-gooders." And it is "this perpetual role of do-gooders, so to speak the 'Adolf Hitler apology 2.0,'" that has "put our country on a course that is hard for neighbouring countries and allies to tolerate."

Then he asks provocatively, "When will the Federal Republic of Germany be able to get on its feet with a self-confident, political attitude?" Of course, the "moralizing about atrocities committed in the name of Germany is right just as it was before … However, when can we trade the 'culture of guilt' that has lasted for 70 years for an appropriately self-confident and rationally directed state philosophy?"

In their exposure of the role of the Humboldt University professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party have shown how the German elite is systematically working to minimize the crimes of German imperialism in the 20th century in order to prepare the way for the return of an aggressive Germany foreign policy. Poulet's article makes it clear how far this process has already progressed and reveals the dangers it brings with it.

Poulet explicitly advocates a huge, highly armed army capable of waging war all over the world. He mourns the period of the Cold War, when the German army represented "a significant proportion of the conventional defences of Central Europe" and had "almost a million soldiers." The army was "respected" by the Soviet army for its military capability and had more than 4,500 tanks at its disposal for the purposes of "defence" against the Warsaw Pact. Today, only "between 225 and 300" remain, he complained.

In the last 25 years, the German army has degenerated to a "torso full of holes" in which only "a few small, brave units in all sections of the military forces have maintained their functionality." According to Poulet, political policy is responsible for this. He writes: "The principle is: make it sound good, ignore it and then cobble it together. Since the beginning of the '90s, the political elite have had the framework in place for dissolving the armed forces. The responsible committees in the German parliament have used the defence budget as a form of financial reserves almost

© World Socialist Web Site

every year. All the parties in government have assisted in this whenever one has taken a look into the budgets."

Poulet not only accuses the "political elite" of financially exhausting the army, but also of not really wanting to fight a war. "In addition to the material withering of the armed forces, the fearful flinching of the members of the government at any suspicion of a deployment of fighting forces is embarrassing," he writes. "As soon as the heat is on in a relevant region … the German foreign minister and defence minister react reflexively to reject action."

A section headed "Primacy of Politics" makes it clear what Poulet views as the real issue. In his view, the politicians currently in power are neither ready nor in a position, after the horrible experiences of two world wars, to make Germany into a leading war power, to accept the "primacy of the military" and to impose this on the population as under the Kaiser and the Nazis.

His anger is directed above all against former FDP Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, who is now dead, and current Chancellor Angela Merkel. In the war in Libya in 2011, they acted as though the issue was "the implementation of a no-fly zone against the Libyan ground troops" and were "so imbued with a preference for peace that Germany abstained from the vote like the Russians and Chinese," he complained.

"The military does not have a very good reputation" inside Germany either, complains Poulet. In 2006, "the sanctimonious *Bild* newspaper" increased its circulation by publishing pictures of "young [German] soldiers in Afghanistan posing with bones and skulls." The German media then immediately showed "their disgust and indignation," using phrases like "desecration of the dead" and "dead body parts." The chancellor immediately demanded "a heavy punishment for the guilty."

However, once the situation is considered more carefully, it becomes clear "that the Afghani population was not especially interested in the issue" and "that the old fossil bones came from a gravel pit." The fact that a "head of government of a middle power" judged soldiers in "such an unexamined way" is "only possible in Germany." It is always "about the defence against shame and fighting the bad guys and not wanting to be one of them."

It is clearly not enough for Poulet that the grand coalition is aggressively implementing a change in German foreign policy with the support of the opposition parties and the media, increasing military spending, and carrying out one foreign deployment after another. The consequences of his argumentation are clear: one must be ready once again to be "one of the bad guys," and, just as in the past, to commit war crimes and defend them against every criticism.

Poulet ends his article with a provocative "prognosis." He no longer trusts the "generation that grew up for the most part under peace" that is between 50 and 75 years old today, and "has ruled and influenced Germany for 25 years" to carry out the change he longs for. "Sustainable change" is "only to be expected with the rise of the young generation. It is tougher than us and no longer so sensitive about Nazis."

If Poulet and the German elite for whom he speaks are of the opinion that they will get a third chance to hurl the world into the abyss, they are mistaken. Even 70 years after the end of the Nazi dictatorship, the younger generation knows what horrible crimes the SS and the Wehrmacht perpetrated in the Second World War, and the great majority rejects militarism and war. However, his article serves as a warning. The German elite with the military at the head is once again ready, as the saying goes, to trample bodies under feet to defend the interests of German imperialism.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site