

# Germany resurrects conscription

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German politicians and the media have responded to the exposure of a neo-Nazi terrorist cell in the army (Bundeswehr) by calling for a reintroduction of military conscription.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) parliamentary deputy Patrick Sensburg told the newspapers of the Funke media group Thursday that the citizen in uniform was “a reliable early warning system for the recognition of extremism from both left and right.” The reintroduction of conscription was therefore not only necessary due to security grounds, but the civilian population is “also the immune system against hostility to democracy.”

Historian Michael Wolffsohn declared at the beginning of May in an interview with *Tagesspiegel* that the main cause of the scandal in the army was “the abolition of general conscription.” This political decision was “responsible for the army now lacking the very normal citizens.” It had “opened the gates for the inflow of extremist personnel, who want to gain easy access to weapons and military training. Poets don’t join the army voluntarily.”

The arguments from Sensburg and Wolffsohn, both of whom have close ties to the military, are cynical and wrong. German history shows that conscription has absolutely nothing to do with the struggle for democracy and against extremism. On the contrary, the reintroduction of conscription prior to World War II in the law on the construction of the Wehrmacht adopted on March 16, 1935, marked a turning point in the rearming of German imperialism under Hitler.

A comment in the weekly magazine *Stern* headlined “Reintroduce conscription” shows that the ruling class is pursuing the same goals now as then. What is involved is the massive rearmament of the army and the recruiting of cannon fodder for new and major wars.

“But we cannot trust our security to a force which must take those who come forward and cannot rely on

those who they really need,” *Stern* wrote. “Germany’s security doctrine is currently changing radically, not least because Putin’s Russia is pursuing an aggressive great power policy. The defence budget is being increased, army units are being expanded once again, tank units and artillery, which for some time were considered obsolete, have to be rebuilt. This cannot be achieved with a fully voluntary force.”

The attempt to celebrate conscription as an instrument for democracy or a way to guarantee the cleaning out of neo-Nazis from the army was a lie from the outset. At its founding on November 12, 1955, the Bundeswehr was called “New Wehrmacht” (it was officially renamed Bundeswehr only in 1956), and its original name, in spite of conscription, was its programme from the beginning.

Here are some facts and figures. The 44 generals and admirals appointed prior to 1957 were all drawn from Hitler’s Wehrmacht, overwhelmingly from the army’s general staff. In the officers corps in 1959, 12,350 former Wehrmacht officers were to be found among the 14,900 professional soldiers, 300 of whom came from the leading bodies of the SS.

Historian Wolfram Wette wrote in a study titled “Militarism in Germany: History of a warrior culture,” “This continuity of personnel represented a severe burden for the army’s internal life.” Wette added, “For a long time within the officer corps of the army of the Federal Republic, the predominant, if not pervasive, tendency was to orient towards the pre-1945 traditions.”

With Germany’s reunification 25 years ago, this “predominant tendency” was further strengthened. The systematic restructuring of the army into an intervention force capable of waging war, which would defend German imperialist interests around the world, necessitated the revival of the old militarist traditions from the Reichswehr, the army under the Kaiser, and

Wehrmacht in the Bundeswehr.

As early as 1991, prior to the first foreign intervention by the army, a general stated, “Everything must be directed towards ensuring the army’s capability for war, training, equipment and structure. Ethos, education and motivation must be included.”

In 2004, prior to assuming the position of inspector of the army, Lieutenant General Hans-Otto Budde appealed for a new, or more accurately old, type of soldier, “The citizen in uniform has served his time ... we need the archaic fighter, and those who can wage hi-tech war.”

Since former German President Joachim Gauck and the government officially announced the return of German militarism at the Munich Security Conference in 2014, contributions regularly appear in official volumes on German foreign policy calling for war and violence in the typical tradition of the Wehrmacht.

In a volume titled “Germany’s new responsibility,” which contained articles from President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (both CDU), and leading Green and Left Party politicians, it was noted with frustration that in Germany “the neurotic desire to remain ‘morally clean’” pervades almost all debates on domestic and foreign policy.

“Whoever goes to war must in general be responsible for the deaths of people. That includes the deaths of non-participants and innocents,” it stated. Precisely “in times of new strategic uncertainty,” it was necessary “to emphasise [again] the military, not only because it demands such stern tests of societies, but because it ultimately remains the most consequential, and therefore the most demanding, perhaps even the crowning discipline of foreign policy.”

It went on to note that in the years to come, Germany would “have to offer significantly more politically and militarily” and confront “foreign and security policy questions ... of which the country has not even yet dared to dream. Perhaps even not in its nightmares.”

With the neo-Nazi conspiracy in the army and the call for the return of military service, these “nightmares” are taking on a threatening form. They can only be banished by the construction of an international anti-war movement. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) fights in Germany to provide the widespread

opposition to the return of militarism with a revolutionary and socialist programme, and to stop the ruling class offensive for fascism and war.



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