

The return of German militarism drives first national Veterans Day

Johannes Stern**18 June 2025**

On June 15, Germany held its first-ever national Veterans Day—a sinister milestone in the return of German militarism. Under the patronage of the federal government and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), the day was marked by over 100 events nationwide. The centrepiece was an official ceremony in Berlin, accompanied by martial displays in cities such as Hamburg and Kiel, and a live broadcast from the Bundeswehr's newly deployed combat brigade in Lithuania.

The new holiday aims at nothing less than the ideological entrenchment of the military within society—in preparation for new imperialist wars and the suppression of growing social unrest at home.

Just as in the United States, where Donald Trump is deploying the military and National Guard against protests, Germany's ruling class is also working at full speed to build an authoritarian state. The Bundeswehr plays a central role in this process. Veterans Day is intended to undermine the deeply rooted opposition to the military that stems from the crimes of German imperialism in two world wars and replace it with a culture of soldier-worship.

In Hamburg, hundreds of officer cadets marched onto the town square to be promoted to lieutenants in front of Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Hamburg's Mayor Peter Tschentscher (both Social Democrats, SPD). The martial spectacle was secured by rooftop snipers—a stark sign of how alienated the ruling class is from the population and how much it relies on violence and repression to enforce its militaristic agenda.

Speaking at the central ceremony in Berlin, Pistorius called it a “day of recognition and appreciation” for the troops. He made no secret of the fact that this was about permanently embedding the military into social life—and preparing the population ideologically for

future wars. “To ensure that this willingness is not lost—also in future generations—we finally need a veterans’ culture in Germany,” he declared, “because it creates precisely that visibility.”

Veterans Day should not remain just a symbolic event, Pistorius emphasized. What was needed, he said, was “more visibility, more recognition, and more concrete symbols.” One such symbol is the “veterans’ insignia,” already awarded to over 110,000 soldiers. The goal is to integrate military thinking, demeanour, and self-image into everyday life—soldiers are to be seen again as heroes of the fatherland, visible in public spaces, the workplace, schools, and universities.

The parallels with the past are unmistakable. Veterans Day evokes memories of the cult of hero worship in the German Empire and under the Nazis, where cult-like, fallen “war heroes” were celebrated to rally society for new wars of conquest. Today’s politics may be rhetorically more cautious, but they pursue the same goal: the total mobilization of the population for imperialist plunder.

This aim was already clearly stated in the Defence Policy Guidelines adopted in autumn 2023. They read: “The Bundeswehr will continue to cultivate reciprocal and ongoing exchanges with society and promote understanding that national defence is a task for all of society. An active culture of veterans and remembrance, supported by society, is a constant duty.”

In other words: society is to be militarized. Everyone is expected to contribute—whether by direct participation, ideological support, or acceptance of military violence at home and abroad.

The Defence Policy Guidelines, which now serve as a blueprint for the Merz government, encapsulate the new direction of German defence policy: “combat readiness as a guiding principle.” This means the Bundeswehr

must be prepared—in terms of personnel, technology, and psychologically—for wars with a “near-peer adversary,” i.e., direct confrontations with Russia or China, or even, if necessary, the United States.

“Our national defence requires a combat-ready Bundeswehr,” the guidelines state. This means “its personnel and equipment must be aligned with the demands of their challenging missions.” The benchmark is “constant readiness to engage in battle with the aim of success in high-intensity combat.” The confrontation with a “near-peer adversary” is not just something “we want to win, but we must win.”

The concept of “combat readiness” runs through all of the federal government’s security policy thinking. It includes not only rearming the Bundeswehr but also reorienting every sector of society for wartime capability—from the economy to education to cultural policy.

A particularly stark symbol of this course was the live broadcast at the Berlin ceremony from the Bundeswehr brigade in Rukla, Lithuania. Just weeks earlier, the federal government had celebrated, with a great propaganda fanfare, the first permanent stationing of German combat troops abroad since World War II. Pistorius and Merz presided over the ceremony, with Leopard tanks, howitzers, fighter jets, and waving flags. It was presented as a “service for peace, freedom, and security.” In reality, the deployment is part of NATO’s broader preparations for war against Russia.

The symbolism is unmistakable: German troops, in German uniforms, with German flags and German technology, are once again stationed in the East—just 30 kilometres from the Belarusian border and a little over 100 kilometres from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Eighty years after Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, German tanks are once again rolling across Eastern European soil. That this revanchist turn in German foreign policy has been carried out in near silence in official Berlin shows how united all the establishment parties are behind German militarism.

Germany’s new war policy is supported by every party in the Bundestag (federal parliament). The joint motion to establish Veterans Day in April 2024 was introduced by the SPD, Liberal Democrats (FDP), Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), and the Greens. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)—which has

long called for a return to the soldierly hero worship of the Kaiser and the Third Reich—sees its agenda confirmed. The other Bundestag parties have effectively implemented its demands.

The Left Party, meanwhile, tries to deflect mass opposition with token criticism—such as minor objections to Veterans Day—but in truth, it too supports the war drive. It voted in the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) for the massive €1 trillion war credits and then helped pave the way for Friedrich Merz to become chancellor. In decisive moments, it sides squarely with the ruling class.

The first national Veterans Day is therefore far more than a symbolic gesture. It marks an escalation in the militarization of German domestic and foreign policy. As social, economic, and geopolitical tensions intensify around the world, the German bourgeoisie is preparing for war abroad and domestic repression. The militarization of public life, the ideological conditioning of society, and the transformation of the Bundeswehr into a “combat-ready” army are all signs of a sweeping, authoritarian project.

The working class must oppose this course with determination. The glorification of militarism, the systematic war propaganda, and the transformation of society into a war machine can only be stopped by an international movement of the working class—based on a socialist program that links the struggle against war with the fight against capitalism.



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