The revival of German militarism

By Peter Schwarz

Last week, German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg introduced a new "combat medal" for the Bundeswehr (armed forces). Press reports have also called it a "decoration for combatants". It will be awarded to soldiers who have "actively participated in combat operations at least once or have faced great personal danger in acts of terrorist or military violence." It can be awarded posthumously.

The new order is symptomatic of the transformation that the Bundeswehr has undergone since German unification 20 years ago.

The Bundeswehr was founded in 1955 in the face of massive protests and opposition. Hitler's Wehrmacht had been disbanded in 1945 by the victorious powers after it had laid waste to half of Europe in a war of aggression that killed millions of people. Following those experiences, broad sectors of the population wanted to have no more to do with war and militarism.

In order to be socially acceptable, the Bundeswehr had to be restricted to defensive duties. It was, the Constitution declared, a "sovereign state". Hitler's Wehrmacht had been founded in 1935 in the face of widespread resistance. Guttenberg has publicly defended Köhler, stressing the "close connection between" security and German economic interests, in line with a classical imperialist foreign policy that does not shrink from the application of military force.

Guttenberg has systemically shredded the Constitution to carry on with the development of the Bundeswehr's defense policy. Reviewing history texts, one finds almost exclusively names with links to the aristocracy.

In post-war West Germany, the aristocracy was pushed into the background, but it remained in place. Guttenberg, whose family goes back to the 12th century, is well connected. His wife is a great-granddaughter of Otto von Bismarck. His mother, born Contessa von Eltz, had a second marriage to the son of Hitler's foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Before he went into politics, the current defense minister devoted himself to the administration of his family's wealth, which includes large forests and estates as well as interests in a private hospital group, and is estimated at 600 million.

The Bundeswehr still has a long way to go before it possesses the clout of former German armies. With an annual budget of $46 billion, German military spending is just one-twelfth that of the US. Even in relation to the size of the economy, Germany, which spends 1.3 percent of its gross domestic product on the military, allocates far less than the US (4 percent), France (2.3 percent) and Britain (2.2 percent). The two latter countries account for half of Europe's military spending.

But the new course has been set. It is only a matter of time before some shocking event is initiated by the state to attempt to break down widespread popular resistance to a massive increase in military spending for the re-tasked Bundeswehr.

The revival of German militarism, 65 years after the end of World War II, is a development of world political significance. It is inseparable from the deep crisis of world capitalism. As the financial and economic conflicts between the great powers worsen, militarism is on the rise everywhere.

The US has long tried to offset its declining economic weight by exploiting its military superiority. Washington's economic rival, Europe and Asia are responding by upgrading their own military capabilities, and—in the words of Guttenberg—by emphasizing the "close connections between security and economic interests."

The two world wars of the last century arose "inconsistently from the contradictions of the international capitalist interests," as Leon Trotsky noted in 1940. Another world war is unavoidable if working people do not stop the capitalist warmongers in time and take up the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

SWWS

Andries Anh

SWAPO party, dominated this Country from Colonialism, it maintained peace and Stability. It has built so many Schools in the Constituency; it has provided Water and Electricity. Time has come to bring back our Constituency back to SWAPO Party, We would not be what we are today, had it not been SWAPO Party Government. Let us vote for Karis Marengra, a SWAPO Party Candidate for Otjimbinde constituency.

Kautjimo Kavijitene

I like SWAPO very much. I am studying hard so that one day I become a leader in SWAPO Party. I like the History of SWAPO Party. I would like to call upon all those who turned 18 to give SWAPO Party mandate. Think and vote wisely. SWAPO is the People and the People are SWAPO. Viva SWAPO!!

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It is high time Otjimbinde comes back to SWAPO. SWAPO Party has done a lot in our Region. Let us give SWAPO Party mandate to develop our Region more. Today we enjoy peace and stability because of SWAPO Party Government. Vote for SWAPO party Candidate for a better future. Forget about other tribal parties that came and go, there misleading us the born free. Let us reject them forever.

Sofia Geelbooi

Come let's join hands and vote SWAPO Party for a better future. It is the only Party that can save our future for today and tomorrow. Please the born free of the constitu- ency give SWAPO a chance to carry on with the development, because it has laid down the foundation. We should re- fect other parties with the con- tempt as they are there to turn this country into chaos.

Uaeraa Kaukaua

I would like to call upon all the born frees Country wide to vote for SWAPO Party in the coming regional and local elections, the elections are very important for our Country and for our future, it is our voice to the central Government. Let's have one voice through SWAPO Party. Viva SWAPO!!