

German army peddles propaganda at heavy metal concert

By Gustav Kemper
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Approximately 70,000 heavy metal fans who had gathered for an open air festival in Wacken last week experienced a world premier when the Bundeswehr's (German army) musical choir appeared on stage.

Together with the popular heavy metal band U.D.O the Bundeswehr choir performed under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Scheibling. The German army is facing such a crisis in its recruitment campaign that it is now searching for new, out of the ordinary methods to influence young people.

The contrast between the exuberance of the heavy metal fans and their party mood, and the dull drill of the Bundeswehr could hardly have been greater. After heavy rain the festival had been turned into a mud bath. There is a major difference, however, between young people organising a friendly mud fight and crawling through the mud in army uniform carrying a backpack under the command of a junior officer.

While the heavy metal fans were more interested in their favourite bands and had little interest in the military propaganda, the media was effusive in its praise for the Bundeswehr's musical performance in Wacken. "At the Wacken rock festival, thousands of music fans celebrated the musicians of the Siegburg soldiers," enthused the *Rhein-Sieg Rundschau* a day later. "The premier by the Bundeswehr's choir at the world's biggest heavy metal festival... was a success and great advertising for the Bundeswehr," the newspaper went on.

German Admiral Michael Busse, who is also the regional commander at the armed forces commando base in Bonn, indicated that he was "extremely excited," and hoped that the previous rehearsals involving U.D.O. and the choir in Siegburg "send an unmistakable signal from the event here in Wacken."

In an interview on ZDF's "Drehscheibe" programme

Udo Dirkschneider, the U.D.O.'s frontman, who goes by the stage name "German Tank," said he thought it was "very good to show that the German army is open minded." This was "also very good for the German army." He had no problems with working with the army and regarded the joint performance as "a good public signal."

Dirkschneider has long-standing connections to the army and soldiers. But when he speaks about a "good signal" he is speaking for himself and not for the fans of his band. Already in the 1970s, Dirkschneider was playing concerts for American soldiers with his band at the time, Accept. Last year, his band filmed a music video on a German navy frigate and in February 2014 they played a joint concert with the German navy's North Sea musical choir.

"I think we are presenting something to the public which the world has not yet seen," stated the musical director and conductor of the choir, First Lieutenant Scheibling to ZDF. It was "an entry in the history books, in very private, personal terms, but also for music," he continued.

With his "entry in the history books" Scheibling is drawing directly on the speech given by German President Joachim Gauck at the Bundeswehr's leadership academy in June 2012, when he delivered the order, "Generals! Officers! Bundeswehr Soldier! Back to the heart of our society!"

The WSWS wrote at the time that Gauck wanted to quickly and energetically overcome the opposition to the return of militarism, preparations for war and a more aggressive domestic and foreign policy.

Since then, the German army has intensified its strivings to reach the heart of society. According to Bundeswehr's website, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Bundeswehr, the army opened "the

doors to their barracks and encouraged visitors with an attractive programme of experiences.”

The intervention in Wacken was to have been another “attractive experience.” The resounding heavy metal rock, however, with its shrill guitar riffs, steady drum beats and the staccato of rhythm guitars which emerged in the 1970s from hard rock and psychedelic rock, is an expression of rebellious youth.

If the army’s commanders believe they can exploit young people’s desire for action, in a society which offers only unemployment and the lack of any perspective, then they are seriously underestimating the political intelligence of many young people.

The crimes of the German army in the first and second world wars are well known, and the return of German militarism stands directly in this tradition. Colonel Klein who gave the order to bombard civilians in the Afghan village of Kunduz, is not seen as a hero, but a war criminal.

Despite the propaganda offensive which includes many new information centres and careers advisers, opposition to the German army among the general population is growing. This is why NATO has made the improvement of “strategic communication” the main subject of the air and space power conference, organised by the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC) to be held from 23 to 25 November in Essen.

In the invitation to the conference, the capabilities of the air force are praised and the winning of public opinion is declared to be a strategic goal. According to the statement the opponents of NATO are attempting to combat the overwhelming strength of the air force by influencing public opinion. In turn, NATO is dependent on the support of the population to be able to implement its military goals.

In one discussion at the conference, experts from politics, academia, the military and media will search for solutions to make better use of a range of information for the promotion of military goals. “This panel will bring together journalists and public relations experts from NATO to explore their understanding of the relationship between the media and military, as well as identifying methods with which the media and military power can reduce the impact of ‘disinformation’ (originating from the enemy) with a stronger, joint approach.” it states on the JAPCC’s web site.

A special topic of the conference will be how Russia uses important media campaigns to undermine and discredit NATO. The goal of this agenda is to directly target any critical reporting about the machinations of the ruling elite, their intelligence agencies and military forces. The recent investigation by the federal prosecutor in to the Netzpolitik.org blog on charges of treason must be seen in this light.

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