

Germany's right-wing *Bild* newspaper agitates against China

By Peter Schwarz
23 April 2020

The accusation that the Chinese government's policies are to blame for the coronavirus pandemic and the economic damage it has caused is now being raised by governments and media outlets around the world. However, it has no basis in fact.

The accusation serves to divert attention away from the ruling elite's failure to deal with the pandemic, while at the same time whipping up public opinion for war with China. The US and European imperialist powers want by any means necessary, including military force, to prevent China from emerging from the pandemic economically and geostrategically strengthened.

In the United States, both President Trump and the opposition Democrats support the China bashing. Last week, Trump justified his decision to suspend funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) for their alleged dependence on China. Many leading media outlets are spreading the conspiracy theory that the coronavirus was made in a Chinese laboratory. Or they claim that the disease has only spread so widely around the world because China failed to make information about it public for six days in January. The Democrats accuse Trump of being too soft on China.

In Germany, the *Bild* newspaper and its editor-in-chief, Julian Reichelt, are leading the anti-China campaign.

On 15 April, the widely-sold tabloid published a piece entitled "What China owes us: a coronavirus bill." The article calls on China to pay for losses ranging from the tourist industry ("a decline in sales of €24 billion in March and April alone"), retail ("€1.15 billion of lost sales per day"), and many other sectors, including Volkswagen ("losses of €2 billion per week"). In addition, there are multi-billion euro costs to the federal budget and the decline in GDP, which depending on the extent of the downturn, could range from €1,784 to €4,305 per head of population. *Bild* declares it a "fact" that the coronavirus spread from Wuhan around the world "because the Chinese government suppressed important information for a week." It states that "Renowned international law experts" are "of the opinion

that China violated its obligation to share information with the World Health Organisation." Due to this delay, it continues, "health systems around the world lost a lot of time to prepare themselves for the pandemic." The affected states have therefore "the right to sue China for compensation in an international court."

The tabloid explicitly bases itself on the neoconservative British Henry Jackson Society, which called on the G-7 states to sue China for £3.2 trillion (€3.7 trillion).

The Chinese embassy in Berlin answered *Bild* and Reichelt in an open letter. In it, they refuted the accusations based on publicly available data confirmed by the WHO.

As early as 31 December, 2019, Chinese authorities informed the WHO, and from 3 January, 2020, the United States and other countries, regularly about "lung infections of an unknown origin in Wuhan." At the time, 44 cases were known. SARS-CoV2 was first identified on 8 January, and on 11 January, China published the gene sequencing for the virus online and transmitted the genetic data to the WHO. On the basis of thorough epidemiological research, China confirmed on 20 January that the virus was capable of human-to-human transmission, and three days later it imposed a quarantine on Wuhan.

"Many countries that now have to combat COVID-19," wrote the Chinese ambassador, "had time to prepare for the cross-border transmission of the virus after China reported its outbreak within the framework of IHR regulations." The accusations are aimed at "distracting attention from their own mistakes and weaknesses."

This is undoubtedly the case. Long after the character and scale of the pandemic were known, the American and European governments allowed weeks to pass, during which they downplayed the pandemic as a "flu," pursued a policy of "herd immunity," and avoided taking even the most minimal preparatory and protective measures. Had China issued a warning a week earlier, nothing would have changed in this response. *Bild* editor Reichelt responded to the embassy letter with an hysterical letter to Chinese President Xi Jinping, which he also published as a video on

16 April. The letter is full of accusations, insults, racist statements and imperialist arrogance.

For example, Reichelt accuses Xi of “shutting down any critical newspapers or websites, but not the stalls where field mouse soup is sold.” He has turned his country into “a world champion in stealing intellectual property. China enriches itself on the inventions of others, instead of inventing itself.” “The greatest Chinese export hit, one that nobody wanted but which has still travelled around the world” is the coronavirus.

Reichelt is an expert in waging filthy propaganda campaigns. Even the conservative *F.A.Z.* described him in 2017, after a television appearance on the Syrian war, as a “war propagandist” who operates “like a revolver journalist,” “whips up emotions and always looks for enemies.”

Reichelt is not acting on his own initiative. *Bild*, and its sister Sunday paper *Bild am Sonntag (BAMS)*, have served the ruling elite for decades as mechanisms for waging filthy propaganda campaigns to support the implementation of reactionary policies. Former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder uttered the infamous sentence that all he needed to govern was “*Bild*, *BAMS*, and the telly.” Public figures and anyone with a reputation rush to attend the annual *Bild* press ball.

The 39-year-old Reichelt, who began his career as a trainee at the *Bild* and completed his training at the publisher’s own Springer Academy, was appointed to head Germany’s bestselling tabloid by Kai Dieckmann. Dieckmann was long considered a close associate of the publishing house’s heiress, Friede Springer, who in turn enjoys close ties to German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Other media outlets have joined in the anti-China campaign, perhaps with less vulgarity than *Bild*, but with a much clearer political agenda.

For example, *Der Spiegel* reported with alarm on China’s international aid efforts. The Chinese state leadership’s propaganda machine is pulling out all the stops to “shift the public perception of China in this crisis to its benefit,” it charged. They are portraying themselves “above all as effective fighters against the virus and a solidarising helper who is always there in an emergency when they are needed.”

Every line of the article reflects the fear of German imperialism of losing ground to China. Serbian President Alexander Vucic kissed the Chinese flag when a delivery of aid arrived, *Der Spiegel* worriedly noted. China is also active in the EU, “Spain, France, Austria, Germany, and Italy have all received medical equipment, doctors even went to Italy.” Relations between Rome and Beijing were already close prior to the crisis, with Italy becoming the first Western European country to back China’s new “Silk

Road” *Der Spiegel* noted that *China’s* offensive is being watched with concern in the German government. In this regard, it referred to a secret paper from the Defence Ministry that accuses China of a campaign of disinformation. Even China’s determined efforts to develop a vaccine, and its deploying of more than 1,000 researchers to tackle this task is interpreted as a hostile act by the Defence Ministry. The development of a vaccine is aimed at proving “that China leads the world today in biomedical science, ahead of the United States.”

We have long been in a competition of systems, notes *Der Spiegel*, citing FDP foreign policy expert Johannes Vogel. For some “who refused to accept it, they’re just realising that now.”

The fact that this “strategic approach” includes military means is shown by the Defence Ministry’s decision to publish the paper on China. The coronavirus crisis is accelerating to the limit all of the contradictions of world capitalism, which have been maturing for some time. This applies to the class struggle just as much as it does to the rivalries between the major powers.

The plans for war against China, which have long been pursued by the United States and NATO, are assuming ever more dangerous forms. This is confirmed by the hysterical agitation of the *Bild* newspaper. It recalls the notorious Hun speech with which Kaiser Wilhelm II sent German troops to crush the Boxer Rebellion 120 years ago.

The danger of a catastrophic war can be stopped only through an independent movement of the international working class, which links the struggle against militarism and war with the fight against their source in the capitalist system.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>