



Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961
Article by a Student on German Rearmament (November 16, 1950)

The Allied agreements of the war years and the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945 had declared that German demilitarization was an important war goal and had thus ruled out rearmament. But the rise of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Korean War led to a fundamental change in conditions, and the debate over a German contribution to European defense began sooner rather than later. The following article was written by a German student and published in the weekly magazine *Die Zeit* in November 1950. The student espouses the establishment of a West German army but demands that the outdated basic principles of the old German Wehrmacht give way to a modern, “civilian” soldiery. The student’s demands anticipate the concept of the “citizen in uniform,” which formed the basis for the reintroduction of conscription in the Federal Republic in 1956.

Youth on Rearmament

How “the Germans” feel about remilitarization is something one can learn about today in almost every statement by political speakers, at rallies, and in brochures. Ministers and party functionaries, priests and former officers are speaking out on the issue. But those who really should say something about it, namely, the German youth – which furnished the bulk of the soldiers in the last war and which would also have to make up any future army – isn’t speaking out on the subject, and when it does, then only with great displeasure.

It is not only displeasure at having to put one’s civil position (which may have just been won through hard-fought struggles) on the line once again for ideals like “the preservation of the West” – lofty ideals indeed, but ones that have already been used to deceive this generation once before. It is definitely no longer the pacifist attitude that dominated large segments of German youth from 1945 to 1947, above all under the influence of “re-education.” The young generation today is certainly convinced that Bolshevism can only be successfully opposed in the long run through the use of arms.

At an election meeting in Lübeck, the chairman of the German Brotherhood [*Deutsche Bruderschaft*], Beck-Broichsitter, declared that it was high time for ministers “who’d never smelled a shot of powder” to cede the floor and give former front line soldiers a chance to share their opinions on rearmament. That’s precisely the kind of thing we young people don’t want to hear anymore.

A man who plays around with mess-hall lingo and barracks-yard jargon is suspect to us; most of us no longer feel any desire to defend the West under the leadership of people like that. Militarism, whose distinguishing features include a special “officer’s honor” and the “gray uniform of honor” and whose principles include the depersonalization of the individual in the barracks yard, has become suspect to us. The young generation cannot see a difference between the honor of an officer and that of every human being. In their eyes, military service is a necessary evil, and the “gray uniform of honor” is usually seen as a very poorly fitting suit that humans throughout history have unfortunately had to wear from time to time instead of their civilian clothes.

For us, the overvaluation of soldiering is the core issue in military matters – we want the military, also in Germany, to finally assume a civilian character.

Of course, none of us would want to claim that an army could be built up without drills and discipline. But what would it be like if military training in the future were understood as vocational training, in which the skills needed for the military trade were taught and nothing more?

And there’s one more thing. Training soldiers to function as a mass, which often formed the core of recruit training in the past, no longer does justice to the demands of a modern war. The modern war often dissolves into “centers of combat,” “hedgehog positions,” and “spearheads,” in which the individual must act with a sense of responsibility. It was already a mistake to believe that the former German Wehrmacht fought so well in some places during the last two world wars because it had been “drilled in the old style.” The opposite is true: the soldiers fought well in places where they and their officers had thoroughly forgotten the barracks and mess hall jargon that also spawned the “shot of gunpowder” saying.

Source: “Jugend zur Aufrüstung” [“Youth on Rearmament”], *Die Zeit*, November 16, 1950.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap