

The Civil Clause: No military research in civilian research institutions

Civil clauses as lessons learned after 1945, or: Why civil clauses are historically antifascist achievements.

The rise of (German) militarism and the shedding of the mask of “value-led politics”

Since the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine and the subsequently proclaimed “turning point” (“Zeitenwende”) in German state policy by chancellor Olaf Scholz¹, militarist tendencies are increasing steadily. At the time of writing, the ruling parties (christian and social democrats) have announced changes to the german basic law to allow unlimited military spending through state debt. This is accompanied by a massive infrastructure funding package of 500 billion² (also financed through debt) to prepare Germany for its role as a turntable for NATO operations against Russia. This is flanked by an equally massive armament program “ReArm Europe”³, calling for investments in defence of up to 800 billion euros, initiated by the EU commission under the german christian democrat Ursula von der Leyen.

Yet, money itself is not enough for the European warmongers. German military commanders and politicians alike are speaking of the necessity of a “mental turning point” (“mentale Zeitenwende”) with respect to “defence”⁴. “We must prepare for war!” said German defence minister Pistorius in 2023⁵. A year later, the stationing of new mid-range missiles on German territory was announced at the NATO summit in Washington⁶. While in 1979 the NATO double-track decision was accompanied by lively debate in parliament and in public, today the decision to station missiles that can hit targets deep inside Russian territory in a matter of minutes is announced in passing without a hint of democratic participation and discussion.

These anti-democratic and militarist developments in German foreign and defence policy go hand-in-hand with the tightening of so-called “internal security” by the state. Public debate of Germany’s role in the ongoing Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people is silenced and

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<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250307120951/https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/03/07/special-funds-for-defence-legislative-change-in-the-fast-lane>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/sv/statement_25_673

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20241102210700/https://ip-quarterly.com/en/no-time-lose-how-germanys-zeit-enwende-defense-can-succeed>

⁵ <https://www.bmvg.de/de/mediathek/verteidigungsminister-wir-muessen-kriegstuechtig-werden-5701664>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250116031727/https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-09/news/us-deploy-in-termediate-range-missiles-germany>

critical voices are harassed by police⁷ or even prohibited from entering the country⁸. People speaking in favor of international negotiations to end the bloodshed in Ukraine are denounced as “Putin-understanders”⁹, “ragged pacifists”¹⁰ and “fallen angels”. The German reservist association and the christian democrats¹¹ are calling for the reactivation of mandatory military service for young people, some going even so far as to demand its extension to include women.¹²

Following the diplomatic farce which was the meeting of Selensky and Trump at the White House, calls of European leaders have grown louder for Europe to become a “global power”¹³. This means shedding the long-worn mask of “values” and the “rules-based world order”, and speaking openly and clearly of economic and political (state) interests. Accordingly, this does not mean distancing oneself from the autocratic oligarchy that the United States now effectively admits to being. In a recent speech¹⁴, US minister of defence Pete Hegseth openly discusses the division of labor which the United States now demands of Europe: as the US concentrates its efforts to contain and roll back the economic and political rise of China, european countries are expected to come together as a highly-armed anti-Russian bulwark and to secure valuable rare earths in Ukraine for US-exploitation¹⁵. German commentators have demanded the creation of a “ministry for German interests” to better use development aid to force economic and political concessions from developing countries¹⁶.

At the same time, the political right in the US and Europe is rising rapidly. The recent federal elections in Germany ended in around 20 % of the votes being cast for the extreme right-wing party AfD¹⁷. At the same time, the traditional parties of the so-called “center” have shifted ever farther to the right. Calls to weaken or outright dispose of the right to asylum in Germany

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250220112808/https://www.palestinechronicle.com/berlin-police-force-relocation-of-un-rapporteur-albaneses-palestine-event/>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250131140835/https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/05/gaza-war-surgeon-ghassan-abu-sitta-feels-criminalised-denied-entry-france>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250305213935/https://www.dw.com/en/german-term-putinversteher-goes-international/a-61381725>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250207100907/https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/netzpolitik/ukraine-krieg-de-r-deutsche-lumpen-pazifismus-kolumne-a-77ea2788-e80f-4a51-838f-591843da8356>

¹¹ <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/wehrpflicht-debatte-102.html>

¹² <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/wehrpflicht-frauen-100.html>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250310021720/https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/28/european-leaders-throw-support-behind-zelenskyy-after-heated-trump-meeting>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250307060752/https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250312040809/https://theconversation.com/us-ukraine-deal-highlights-ukraines-wealth-of-critical-minerals-but-extracting-them-isnt-so-simple-250996>

¹⁶ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 08.03.2025, p. 8

¹⁷ <https://bundeswahlleiterin.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2025/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>

spearheaded the political discourse prior to the election¹⁸. The polemic against the unemployed and poor is reaching new heights^{19,20}, especially with respect to the question of how to finance these massive armaments programs. Spokespeople for capital interests are calling for cuts to workers' rights²¹ and an increase in the age of retirement²², massive layoffs in industry²³ and service²⁴ are taking place, and the social safety net is being perforated beyond recognition.

Science in service of the mighty and wealthy?

Science is part of society and society is shaped by science²⁵. For this reason it is only natural that everything described above also affects the way science is perceived and practiced. Civil clauses are the antithesis to the military-industrial complex (MIC)²⁶ which is now reaching its tentacles into every last nook and cranny of the scientific establishment.

No wonder, as these are the actors who profit the most from uninhibited arms research. Rheinmetall, the largest German arms manufacturer, considers civil clauses “a relic of the past”²⁷. In a parliamentary hearing concerning a draft law by the liberal party which is a 1-to-1 copy of the Bavarian “law for the promotion of the army”, the Association of Hessian business associations has spoken out for the ban of civil clauses. Arguing that “security is the basis for economic success and competitiveness”, the association asserts that civil clauses “lead to false results and inhibit innovation”.²⁸

The president of the Fraunhofer Society, which conducts R&D for the private (defence) industry, has questioned the necessity of civil clauses and argued for their replacement by “peace clauses”.²⁹ This perfidious redefinition of “peace” to include the preparation for war with all

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250215174857/https://www.dw.com/en/germany-far-right-decide-vote-on-anti-migration-proposal/live-71441622>

19 https://www.lbbw.de/article/to-the-point/fact-checking-germanys-social-benefits_ajkgn1tu8p_e.html

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<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/60890/germany-to-reduce-welfare-benefits-for-asylum-seekers-in-2025>

21 <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/allianz-boss-calls-germany-withdraw-131724815.html>

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-approves-pension-reform-incentivize-later-retirement-2024-09-04/>

23 <https://web.archive.org/web/20250202101531/https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cje9kv3q94po>

24 <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/germanys-deutsche-post-announces-job-133322429.html>

25 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bernal/works/1930s/socialscience.htm>

26 <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address>

27 <https://archive.is/R4FdV>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250313161113/https://www.vhu.de/themen/bildung/vhu-fordert-anpassung-der-hessischen-forschungspolitik>

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https://www.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/zv/de/ueber-fraunhofer/wissenschaftspolitik/221124_Gesamtfoliensatz_MR%20Verteidigung.pdf

technological means necessary is also part of the current effort by the state government in North Rhine-Westphalia to renew higher education legislation.³⁰

Similar tones were struck by the now ex-minister for science and education Bettina Stark-Watzinger and her ministry: geopolitical interests should enjoy highest priority in science policy. According to Stark-Watzinger, civil clauses should be re-evaluated to better fit science into a “strategic approach” with respect to “security”. Moreover, scientific universalism is pushed aside to make way for the new bloc confrontation: “our” science should be better “protected against China”.³¹ The EU commission has created a list³² of scientific areas which are designated as “critical” in predicted geopolitical altercations. This has direct consequences for scientific cooperation, as scientific research considered “dual-use” (including basic research) would have to be shielded from alleged spying eyes of “systemic rivals” (China, Iran, Russia etc.). According to the German ministry for science and education (BMBF), the US and Israel are exemplary in their “synergy” of civil and military institutions.³³ Interestingly, the real-life impact these synergies have had on the destructiveness and inhumanity of warfare is not mentioned. The development of AI-assisted targeting systems in the Israeli military that have led to countless civilian deaths³⁴ is just one of many examples.

The BMBF has also called for the opening of research funding towards military financiers. This is notable, as it complements the catastrophic state of German public (higher) education. According to the German Education Union (GEW), at least 130 billion euros³⁵ are necessary to close the gaping financial chasm in the education system. Dilapidated university buildings are left to collapse³⁶, the race for research funding is becoming more and more competitive³⁷ and students are working twenty- to thirty-hour weeks alongside their studies to just get by financially, as the cost of living increases steadily^{38,39}. The BMBF may preach about “freedom of science”, but in this highly precarious system marked by competitive struggle and rivalry these are but empty words. The incentive to (involuntarily) turn to military research is becoming greater by the day as basic funding for civil R&D is cut.

At the same time, the potential for critical reflection is dampened. If students are not able to stop and think for five minutes in their race to collect credit points and quickly finish their studies (as student loans by the state are firmly bound to studying in “standard time”), how do we actually shape mindful and conscious future scientists who think about the consequences of their work? The same is true for postgrads and postdocs working not only under immense financial

³⁰ <https://www.mkw.nrw/hochschulstaerkungsgesetz>

³¹ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 21.08.2023, p.8

³² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023H2113&qid=1741882874039>

³³ https://www.bmbf.de/DE/Forschung/International/Forschungssicherheit/forschungssicherheit_node.html

³⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20250311210559/https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/>

³⁵ <https://www.gew.de/aktuelles/detailseite/verzweifelter-zustand>

³⁶ <https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/aktuelles/news/2023/schliessung-des-landgrafenhauses>

³⁷

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230720162451/https://sciencebusiness.net/news/basic-science/germanys-excellence-strategy-raises-concerns-about-creation-elite-tier>

³⁸ Federal Ministry of Education and Research, The student survey in Germany: 22nd Social Survey

³⁹ <https://moses-mendelssohn-institut.de/aktuelles/SoSe2025/>

pressure, but also under the stifling motto of “publish or perish”. Keeping your mouth shut in controversial political matters has become the norm to not fall from academic grace. The case of Benjamin Ruß, who was denied a job at the Technical University of Munich because of past political activities⁴⁰, should come as a warning sign to anyone who remembers the numerous professional bans in the seventies in West-Germany.⁴¹

Concurrently, the repression against critical voices in the matter of Palestine is especially severe at German universities. Calls from students for their respective universities to speak out against the ongoing genocidal violence are met with police brutality⁴² and threats of exmatriculation⁴³. Ghassan Abu Sittah, doctor and rector of Glasgow University was prohibited from entering Germany to attend an international panel on Palestine in Berlin. A scientific conference about the “silencing of Palestine” was ironically denied meeting spaces at the University of Frankfurt.⁴⁴ This stands in stark contrast to the civil clause in the universities’ constitution, which mandates that “teaching, research and studies are bound to civil and peaceful objectives”.⁴⁵ Working together to discuss and find approaches to peaceful solutions for the war and beyond should be a central matter of contemporary academia.

Science for everyone!

Recently, Berlin’s senator for science Ina Czyborra spoke in an interview about the possibility of closing down the faculty for humanities at the Technical University of Berlin (TUB).⁴⁶ According to Czyborra, this could free up financial means to compensate for cuts in higher education funding. This would mean an effective roll-back of antifascist consequences from Nazi terror and militarism: the humanities faculty at TUB was explicitly founded to promote societal responsibility in science at an institution that previously helped develop the V2 rockets that were used by the Nazis to bombard London and Antwerp.⁴⁷ Czyborra’s suggestion makes painfully clear the (wilful) forgetfulness pervading current debates to make science compatible with preparations for war.

The same can be said about the calls for bans against civil clauses. The first of these clauses were put into place at TUB and the Nuclear research centre in Karlsruhe through allied forces right after the end of the Second World War. Research and teaching should henceforth promote peace and amity between peoples. This was part of a broader movement to demilitarize

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20250131234103/https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1184159.berufsverbot-benjamin-russ-antikapitalismus-als-ausschlusskriterium.html>

41 https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=898

42 <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/protest-camp-pro-palaestinisches-fu-berlin-100.html>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20240911022722/https://taz.de/Neues-Hochschulgesetz-in-Berlin!/6031078/>

44 <https://www.fr.de/frankfurt/konferenz-aus-uni-sperrt-palaestina-93508568.html>

45 <https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/67690075/grundordnung.pdf>

46 <https://archive.is/pUfS5>

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https://web.archive.org/web/20240415025805/https://www.static.tu.berlin/fileadmin/www/10000000/Ueber_die_TU_Berlin/Geschichte/Eroeffnungsansprache_TUBerlin_Nares.pdf

Germany and make it “an equal partner in a united Europe” to “promote world peace”, as articulated in the new basic law of 1949.⁴⁸ Only in conjunction with the fulfillment of human dignity (Art. 1) and the principle of a *social* state order (Art. 20) can freedom of science (Art. 5) flourish and be of use to all humankind, as is stated on a global level in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴⁹ and in the preamble of the UNESCO constitution⁵⁰.

Thus, civil clauses are to be seen as the *fulfillment* of the fundamental principles underlying worldwide social, economic, ecological and cultural development. Accordingly, efforts to cancel or otherwise annul them are *reactions* by a tiny minority of the economically and politically advantaged against the greatest majority of peoples seeking to live in peace and prosperity with each other, not in competition and chauvinism against each other. The movement for civil clauses can thus be understood as a manifestation of the peace movement in higher education.

The idea of cooperation in science to solve the world’s most pressing problems has been a guiding light throughout the (first) Cold War and helped level international relations in times of mutual suspicion and even “mutually assured destruction”. This took place e.g. through the cooperation of scientists from the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the soviet Joint Institute for Nuclear Research (JINR).⁵¹ Another great example are the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, brought to life by Bertrand Russell and Joseph Rotblat and continuing their work to this day. The talks between scientists through this forum were indispensable for the development of arms treaties such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention. The acknowledgement that science and society form an inseparable bond also led to the 1957 declaration of the “Goettingen Eighteen” in Germany, who spoke out against the nuclear armament of Germany⁵² and sparked one of the largest peace-movements in German history including the traditional “Easter Marches” for peace which still take place today.

It is in this tradition and on the shoulders of giants, that the civil clause movement in Germany continues its work for the realization of the lessons from 1945. Our understanding of science is one that seeks to overcome the structural violence that hinders the ninety-nine percent on this planet from working together on civil foundations for the benefit of all. We are united in the conviction that a world beyond the logic of war is possible and necessary. As documented in the “Frankfurt Declaration” from our last nationwide meeting⁵³, the furthering of international cooperation and science diplomacy is our goal:

⁴⁸ https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html

⁴⁹ *“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”*

⁵⁰ *“In consequence whereof they do hereby create the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind for which the United Nations Organization was established and which its Charter proclaims.”*

⁵¹ <https://cds.cern.ch/record/186009>

⁵² <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/the+manifesto/54320.html>

⁵³ http://zivilklausel.de/images/ENG_FRANKFURTER_ERKLARUNG.pdf

- *Civil clauses must be further expanded and adopted. They provide generalizable criteria for international cooperation not only with China but also with Turkey, Iran, Israel, France, and the USA. In all collaboration, the focus must be purely civil and oriented towards a world of peace.*
- *To break down stereotypes and enable critical work on stopping climate change, scientific cooperation with Russia must be resumed.*
- *As the complete destruction of academic infrastructure in Gaza continues, intensified efforts by the scientific community, for the advancement of peace and immediate reconstruction, are required. Scientific cooperation with universities in both Israel as well as Gaza and in the West Bank must be promoted. This cooperation must contribute to international mutual understanding.*

It is our conviction that meaningful societal change can only take place through the hands and minds of involved people. This is why the fight for civil clauses must always be thought together with the fight for democratization and social progress in our academic institutions. Public funding must meet the needs of researchers and students, mechanisms promoting competitiveness (such as the so-called Excellence Strategies) must be rolled back. Employment conditions must be improved, and unconditional, adequate financial support programs for students must be introduced. Curricula must be changed from the ground up to rid them of examination marathons which lead to nothing but bulimic “learning”. We want everyone to be part of the collective effort towards universities that contribute to the education and growth of responsible and compassionate individuals!

What now?

Since the beginning of the “Zeitenwende” 2022 and the subsequent seminal report by the German Academy of Science and Engineering⁵⁴ calling for the retraction of civil clauses, the activities of the civil clause movement have gained momentum. One of the initiating conflicts was a draft coalition agreement of the new Hessian state government in 2023, which formulated the intent to support university rectorates in “reviewing” current clauses. This led to the publication of an open letter calling for the realization of existing civil clauses and democratization of university structures, signed by a long list of organizations, professors, students and others.⁵⁵ In Frankfurt and Kassel, the letter led to the founding of interdisciplinary lecture series on war and peace.⁵⁶⁵⁷ Last year, the movement came together in the small town of Fulda to intervene at a meeting of the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) and discuss the topic of science for peace with the attendees. The event left us with the strong impression that the German rectorates are split in the question. The “Zeitenwende” discourse has left many leading figures in academia intimidated and afraid to speak out for peace and it is one of our objectives

⁵⁴ C. M. E. Wörner, J.-D./Schmidt, “Security, Resilience and Sustainability (acatech IMPULSE)”, 2022.

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https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUmAHLVgtluekaPy-CcHeoWLAJ_mJjrA1FAKjrN6ejmmejdg/viewform

⁵⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/zivilklausel.initiative.ffm/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnMCZrIcS8aUevBu0eS3gKA>

to enable a critical public discussion on the ongoing militarization of higher education. We stand in solidarity with Geraldine Rauch, rector at the Technical University of Berlin, who has made clear her conviction to stand for peaceful higher education institutions.⁵⁸

We are involved in the fight against the “law for the promotion of the army” in Bavaria and are working together with colleagues from science4peace in Hamburg against the opening of DESY for military research. Recently, fellow students from the student council for physics in Cologne organized an information booth at a meeting of the German Physical Society (DPG) on the topic of science and geopolitics, leading to fruitful discussions with fellow physicists. Through student councils and parliaments as well as participation in faculty boards and other committees, we aim to bring the discussion about civil clauses into the center of our student bodies. On a federal level, the Free Association of Student Unions (fzs) has spoken out for the implementation of civil clauses in German universities and colleges. Our efforts to have our universities speak out in favor of a peaceful solution to the Israeli war against Palestine and initiatives to rebuild the wartorn educational system have brought us into contact with the Palestinian solidarity movement. Together, we aim to promote German-Palestinian-Israeli cooperation in science to further friendship and understanding between peoples.

Owing to its central role in the development of means of production, critical science has always been tightly intertwined with the labour movement.⁵⁹ This is why we are in contact with peace-minded union members from the Education and Science Workers' Union (GEW), United Services Trade Union (ver.di) and Industrial Union of Metalworkers (IG Metall). In times where the economic crisis and its effects on industry is to be solved through the militarization of factories⁶⁰, we seek to promote the conversion of military production into the civil realm through science.

Our fight for the social development of society through peaceful science has born fruit even in these challenging times: the Academy of Media Arts Cologne has recently passed a new civil clause for its constitution.⁶¹ At the same time, none of the existing civil clauses have been retracted. This is great news and a sign that our work encourages others to take part and together be active subjects for social change. It also inspires us to broaden and deepen our nationwide network, to increase our activities together with fellow students, professors, scientific workers and colleagues from other areas. How it goes on depends on us!

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<https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/forschung/sollten-deutsche-hochschulen-auch-zu-militaerischen-zwecken-forschen-duerfen-5093>

⁵⁹ See for example W. Abendroth, J. Huffschnid

⁶⁰ <https://www.deutschland.de/de/videos/tanks-instead-of-railway-vehicles-at-the-alstom-factory-in-goerlitz>

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https://web.archive.org/web/20250315150103/https://www.khm.de/download.67013a287afcaa92c34b6c4108912905_1/