

JUNGE FREIHEIT

WOCHENZEITUNG FÜR DEBATTE

Lecture In The Reichstag: German Colonialism As A Success Story



December 12, 2019

<https://jungefreiheit.de/wissen/2019/der-deutsche-kolonialismus-als-erfolgsgeschichte/>

No celebration without Meier. True to this motto, the usual suspects again demonstrated on Wednesday evening in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin. What they were protesting for or against was not clear at first glance. In addition to the usual "FCK AfD" signs and Extinction Rebellion flags, a "Colonialism Kills" poster pointed to the occasion.

The 50 mostly young people who seemed a bit lost were driven to the barricades by a lecture by the American political scientist Bruce Gilley. The professor from Portland State University spoke at the invitation of AfD members of the Bundestag Petr Bystron

and Markus Frohnmaier about "The balance sheet of German colonialism". His thesis that German colonialism was a success story from which the natives had benefited and which is still perceived as such in the former colonies caused outrage among German historians, journalists and obviously also the demonstrators.

As evidence of this, Gilley referred to the improved security situation in the territories under German rule during his speech to an audience of almost 60 people. In addition to the development of an infrastructure and jobs, it was above all women who were able to report crimes for the first time and were able to claim progressive rights for the time. The establishment of bases in the African colonies, in the Pacific and in China was a pull factor. Locals therefore deliberately moved near the German settlements that promised progress and prosperity.

Withdrawal of the colonial powers was "tragic".

Objections that the European colonial powers had deprived the natives of their rights, Gilley countered calmly with reference to the conditions before the arrival of the whites in Africa. What rights did a person have in an archaic tribal society at the level of the Stone Age? Life was shaped by permanent tribal wars, after which the loser was left with nothing but slavery at best. The weak, in particular, saw colonial rule as progress, according to Gilley, who offered stability and security with the establishment of state structures.

Therefore, the withdrawal of the colonial powers after 1945 was "tragic" for Africa. Because the proto-nationalists sensed the weakness of the European states marked by the Second World War and seized power. Wars and the establishment of corrupt, violent regimes were the result.



In order to help the states of the Dark Continent, which are still suffering from these conditions, Gilley, who received his doctorate from the elite Princeton University, wished for a new edition of colonialism. He emphasized that it was not about the re-colonization of entire states, but about externally controlled support for sectors, which should be spatially limited to individual bases. He cited Hong Kong as an example. A lot of positive feedback from African countries showed that his theses found open ears in the former colonies.

Criticism of German scientists

Since in Germany no discussion of colonial history is possible without reference to the suppression of the Nama and Herero uprisings in German Southwest Africa, Gilley also commented on this. However, that was just one episode in decades of successful German colonialism. The German governor at the time, Lothar von Trotha, was solely responsible for this. Gilley rejected the term "genocide" in this context. The mass killing of the tribesmen by the German troops was a war crime that went back to orders from Trothas. When scientists nevertheless speak of a genocide, they are relativizing crimes that deserve this term.

In his lecture, Gilley was harsh on his colleagues at the universities. They clung to very Marxist, anti-colonial ideas that had already emerged after the First World War and had been established in universities since the 1960s at the latest. The American could not resist a dig at the German historian Jürgen Zimmerer from the University of Hamburg, who had previously denied his seriousness in an interview with *Die Welt* .

Gilley stresses the importance of free speech

In general, according to Gilley, it can be observed that in Germany colonialism is being reinterpreted as a crime against humanity, which he firmly rejects. Germany should rid itself of its guilt complex. In this context, he also criticized the renaming of streets that are reminiscent of actors in German colonial history.

In the subsequent discussion, the US professor explained why he accepted the AfD's invitation. He stands for freedom of research, speech and opinion and speaks to everyone, he explained. That's why he gladly accepted the invitation, he said.

It would be desirable if this attitude were to prevail again at German universities. In any case, Gilley's theses offer historians and political scientists the opportunity, if not to reassess Germany's colonial past, at least to discuss it openly. Unfortunately, it is doubtful whether this will happen.