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Der Spiegel Apologizes, Retracts Story about Walden Bello Inciting to Riot in Rostock

Wednesday 6 June 2007, by [SUKUMARAN Anoop](#) (Date first published: 6 June 2007).

Irresponsible journalism is alive and well in Germany.

During the rally of over 50,000 people against the G 8 in Rostock, the country's premier weekly, *Der Spiegel*, reported on its online edition that Focus on the Global South Executive Director Walden Bello was inciting participants to riot. The publication quoted Bello as saying "We have to bring war to this demonstration."

Bello said no such thing in his wildly applauded speech. Representatives of ATTAC, one of the lead organizers of the demonstration, and many others immediately protested. When *Der Spiegel's* editorial board were presented with a video of Bello speaking, they admitted their error but shifted the blame to DPA, the German Press Agency, which, they said, filed the story from which they took the wrong quote. According to the *Spiegel* apology carried online on June 4, "the correspondent from *Der Spiegel* in Rostock was in another site of the demonstration at the time Walden Bello was giving his speech and could not personally listen to his words."

The same line from DPA was reproduced in hundreds of newspapers throughout Germany and Europe and contributed to the perception that violence had been deliberately fanned by organizers of the largely peaceful but spirited rally. It was only three days after the event that the main culprit, DPA, retracted the story and apologized to Bello and the organizers. In an item that went out on the wires on June 5, the agency said:

"A call to war by one of the speakers at the demonstration in Rostock last Saturday did not take place. An investigation of the text of the speech showed that the intervention of Walden Bello had been wrongly translated and reported by the DPA. DPA regrets the flawed reporting and has apologized to the organizers.

"In its correspondent's report about the violence during the demonstration on June 2, DPA had quoted Bello wrongly as calling for 'bringing war to the demonstration because with peaceful means we will achieve nothing.' Bello actually said in English: 'We must bring the war into the discussion because without peace there can be no justice.' His demand was in connection with the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The German translation was 'We need to bring the war into the discussion because without peace there can be no fight against poverty.'

Although DPA apologized, the damage already had been done. Organizers of the

G8 Alternative Summit have been very frustrated with the German press' focus on the images of disturbances at the margins of Saturday's largely peaceful rally and its lack of coverage of the issues relating to global justice that are being discussed in the week-long affair that is timed with the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm. There is, indeed, a lively debate on whether the wide transmission of the mistranslation of Bello's message was deliberate on the part of largely conservative German press eager to discredit the alternative summit.