

What is behind the warmongering of the German media?

Peter Schwarz
12 March 2014

Rarely before has the German media been brought so much into line. Two weeks after Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was chased out of office by armed gangs of fascists, the television hosts and newspapers are virtually unanimous in support of the confrontational course adopted by Berlin and Washington towards Russia.

Hardly any critical voices can be heard. On the contrary, the newspapers seek to outdo each other in fomenting the conflict and demanding that the government take a tougher stance against Russian President Vladimir Putin. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* demands “threats and punishments” instead of “talks,” while the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* calls on the “free world” to deploy the “means of deterrence.”

The media is availing itself of distortions and lies that are reminiscent of Goebbels’ propaganda techniques.

It downplays or conceals the role of militant fascists in the putsch in Kiev, as well as the presence of three fascist ministers in the new government supported by the European Union. The three are members of Svoboda, which has close ties to Germany’s far-right National Democratic Party (NPD), Hungary’s Jobbik, the French National Front and other neo-fascist parties in Europe.

As recently as December 2012, the European Parliament adopted a resolution describing Svoboda as “racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic,” and appealed to the “pro-democratic parties in the Verkhovna Rada [Ukrainian parliament]” not to “associate with, endorse or form coalitions with this party.” Fifteen months later, the Svoboda leaders and ministers are regular visitors in European government offices and are celebrated as democratic freedom fighters.

Above all, the media is suppressing the historical background to the actions taken by the German government in Ukraine. The country has been twice occupied by German troops, in both the First and Second World Wars. It was the scene of unspeakable crimes. The

parallels between past and present are striking.

On August 11, 1914, only a few days after the outbreak of the First World War, in a decree to the German ambassador in Vienna, German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg wrote that the “bringing about of an insurgency in Ukraine”—i.e., the triggering of an uprising with the aim of bringing to power a pro-German government—was an important war aim and a “weapon against Russia.”

Historian Fritz Fischer, in his book *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, the classic work on the subject, writes, “So the German Reich leadership did not first come upon the idea of creating an independent Ukrainian state in early 1918 at Brest-Litovsk, but already in the second week of the war declared the separation of Ukraine from Russia to be the goal of official German policy, to be preserved as a long-term goal in the event of a dictated peace.”

After the German Reich had forced the young Soviet government to give up its claims to Ukraine in March 1918, in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, it went to work in a determined fashion. After letting the powerless Ukrainian Rada call upon it to “help,” Germany occupied Ukraine, established a pseudo-democratic government dependent on Berlin, and began single-mindedly to organise agriculture, iron ore and coal mines, railways and banks in the interests of the German economy.

When differences with the Rada emerged, the German Army organized a coup and summarily installed the former Tsarist Guards officer and landowner Pavlo Skoropadski as the “hetman” of Ukraine. Only with the defeat on the Western Front and the November Revolution in Germany did this nightmare come to an end.

The Nazis’ policy of conquest in the Second World War merged seamlessly with the German war aims in the First World War. Once again, Ukraine, now part of the

Soviet Union, served as a staging area against the Russian heartland. Once again, Germany sought to bring the vast acreage of farmland and rich natural resources of Ukraine into the service of its war economy. Once again, it relied upon the support of local collaborators.

A central role was played by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) of Stepan Bandera, who is now revered by Svoboda as a model and hero. Cooperation between Bandera and the Nazis was not only of a tactical nature, but also extended to the Holocaust. For example, on June 30, 1941, before the invasion of the regular German troops, the wing of the OUN led by Bandera carried out a massacre in the city of Lviv in which about 7,000 communists and Jews were killed.

The fact that the German government is collaborating with those who worship such a Nazi collaborator would earlier have raised the alarm for any critical journalist. Today, it is taken for granted, accepted, trivialized and justified. And all in the interest of a policy that is not only destabilising the entire region, but also raises the danger of an international armed conflict and nuclear war.

How can this change be explained?

First, it has been prepared over a long time. Ever since German reunification in 1991, Berlin has extended its political and economic influence systematically to the east. The former Eastern Bloc countries are today almost all members of the EU and NATO. They serve German industry as an extended workbench, with wages that are in some cases lower than in China.

The appetite of German imperialism does not stop at the borders of the former Soviet Union. For a long time—and not without success—Germany tried to pursue its business interests there in collaboration with the Putin regime, which represents the interests of Russian oligarchs. This eventually failed because of the attitude of the United States, which wants to diminish the international weight of Russia for geostrategic reasons—especially after Putin got in the way in Syria and Iran, and granted asylum to the whistle-blower Edward Snowden.

Now German foreign policy is swinging back toward a collision course with Russia, and is reconnecting with its historical traditions.

Second, the aggressive foreign policy is closely related to the intensification of the attacks on the working class in Germany and throughout Europe. Since the financial crisis of 2008, Berlin has dictated austerity measures and labour market policies for the EU, forcing large parts of the population to work harder and harder for diminishing wages. It has set an example in Greece, where the

standard of living of the vast majority of the population has been reduced by 40 percent in a few years. The EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine is tied to massive social cuts and a three-fold increase in gas prices in the country.

At the same time, a small upper layer has acquired fabulous wealth, dominates the political parties and the media, and ever more openly employs dictatorial methods to defend its rule. It is now exhibiting the same ruthlessness in its foreign policy. Class war at home and war abroad are inseparably connected.

Third, the rightward shift in foreign policy has been ideologically prepared. The historian Ernst Nolte, who in 1986 initiated the so-called *historikerstreit* (*historians' dispute*) with his trivialization of Nazism, has been systematically rehabilitated since German reunification. In 2000, he was awarded the Konrad Adenauer Prize of the Deutschland Stiftung (Germany Foundation), which was previously given to Helmut Kohl and Wolfgang Schäuble.

In February this year, *Der Spiegel* published a long article rehabilitating Nolte. Jörg Baberowski, professor of east European history at Humboldt University, is quoted as saying: "Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right." In the same article, Baberowski's colleague Herfried Münkler describes the research of Fritz Fischer on German war aims as "outrageous, in principle."

Apart from the *World Socialist Web Site*, no one has condemned these revolting statements. They have been accepted without comment—at least in the academic world and the media. The path to collaboration with fascist tendencies and support for an aggressive, militarist foreign policy has been systematically prepared.

It is high time to oppose this reactionary offensive, which threatens today's younger generation with disasters similar to those their grandfathers and great-grandfathers experienced between 1914 and 1945. This requires a political perspective that focuses on the struggle for social equality, the international unity of the working class and the abolition of the capitalist system, which has nothing to offer humanity except war and social counterrevolution.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact