

German media campaigns for economic sanctions against Russia

Johannes Stern
20 March 2014

Following the Crimean referendum, leading German media outlets have intensified their warmongering while calling for tough sanctions against Russia.

A string of editorials have been driven by two main objectives. First, they are directed at undermining popular anti-war sentiment. An overwhelming majority oppose economic sanctions, while an even greater percentage are opposed to war against Russia. Second, They are aimed at bolstering the government, which is aggressively changing foreign policy and reviving German militarism.

Under the headline, “Germany’s weapons in the Crimean crisis”, Henrik Müller, writing in *Spiegel Online*, calls Russia a “test case”. He writes, “The government and the president have announced a more decisive foreign policy. Now it stands to be seen: Is Berlin really willing to impose costly trade sanctions?” The “actions against Russia” will have a “signal effect. They show the Kremlin and the rest of the world how serious Berlin is about its new foreign policy.”

The message of the editorial is clear: In pursuing more aggressive foreign policy objectives, neither the opinion of the people nor the economic consequences should be taken into consideration. The government must impose sanctions “against the resistance of German business leaders too”, says Müller. With breathtaking cynicism, he declares that even German citizens must “be willing to take very concrete economic risks for higher values such as freedom, peace and human rights”.

On Tuesday, *Spiegel Online* raised the ante by calling for “the gas tap from Russia to be turned off”. “Germany wants to take on more responsibility in foreign policy; in the Crimean crisis it has the opportunity to do so”, writes David Bocking. He demands, “The government should impose tough

sanctions against Russia—even if it harms the domestic economy.” In the final analysis, he says, you don’t get “freedom for nothing”. It “always has a price”.

For these bourgeois scribblers, no lie and contortion are too brazen to promote anti-Russian sentiment and intimidate anyone who opposes the war propaganda. Sanctions against Russia have nothing to do with a fight for “freedom, peace and human rights,” but are part of an aggressive policy of the Western powers in Ukraine, increasing the risk of a war in Europe.

Despite the provocative measures already taken, the two largest-circulation German daily newspapers, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), called for tougher action against Russia in their lead articles on Monday.

In the FAZ, Reinhard Vesper demanded that “the cost” for Putin “be driven up as far as it will go”. He claims, “After Moscow has already created a fait accompli in Crimea, the indications are multiplying that it soon plans to open another front in eastern Ukraine.” The Kremlin was “not satisfied with Crimea” and threatened “a military invasion”. That is why it is “important the EU react quickly to Russian aggression with drastic sanctions, even if they cannot immediately stop Putin”.

For the SZ, Daniel Brössler writes under the headline, “Diplomatic quarantine instead of G-8-routine”. He states that there would “not be a solution through purely diplomatic channels”. Therefore, “sanctions, even heavy ones”, are “inevitable.” This is the case “not because these would immediately compel Putin to back down, but because Putin would understand their absence as an invitation to keep going.”

The claim that Russia is the aggressor in the Ukraine crisis, which has been repeated like a mantra in the German media for weeks, stands reality on its head. In

truth, it is the Western governments that are systematically driving forward their imperialist offensive against Russia. Firstly, they organised a putsch in Ukraine in collaboration with fascist groups, and installed a pro-Western government. Now, Washington and Berlin are preparing a trade war against Russia in order to force a regime change in Moscow, too. They calculate that a mixture of military threats and harsh economic sanctions will weaken the Putin regime in the medium term.

In advancing this campaign, the German media have taken on the role of the cheerleader. Brössler declares: “However, in this situation sanctions are not a panacea, and certainly not a fast-acting one. Freezing bank accounts and travel bans will make Putin unpopular with Moscow’s power and money elite, but will probably even initially increase his prestige among the people. Only economic sanctions, that is, the next escalation stage threatened by the EU, are a threat to Putin. They will be expensive for many in the EU, but even more so for Putin.”

What angers the bourgeois media most is that their aggressive war propaganda finds no support in the population. Brössler complains, “A surprising number of people have adopted Putin’s interpretation, according to which the West...has done everything, or most things wrong, and has confronted the Ukrainians with a fateful choice.... Many in Germany can now also be heard saying that Ukraine, or parts of it, lie in the Russian zone of influence. Twenty-five years after the fall of the [Berlin] wall, this willingness to assign a different zone of influence is not only amazing, but shabby.”

Who here is reclaiming zones of influence for itself and is following in which traditions? It is German imperialism, which has aggressively pushed into the East ever since reunification, and, after Ukraine, now dreams once again of subordinating Russia.

When Brössler describes those who oppose his war propaganda as “shabby”, he speaks for the filthy rich and criminal upper class that dominates politics and the media. One hundred years after the outbreak of the First World War and 75 years after the start of the Second World War and the crimes of the Nazis, they are seeking to abandon the military restraint of the post-war period by every means. In this, their efforts are diametrically opposed to the views of the vast majority

of the population.

The commentators in the bourgeois editorial offices should write more carefully. If the standards of the constitution, or even the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, were applied to their editorials, then some of them would have to stand trial. Article 26 of the German Constitution declares that “Acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be made a criminal offense.” In the Nuremberg war crimes trials, one of the main charges was of committing “crimes against peace”.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact