

German right-wing press calls for demolition of Soviet memorial

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On Monday, the right-wing Springer newspapers *Bild* and *Berliner Zeitung* (BZ) handed in a petition to the German parliament calling for the demolition of the memorial to the Soviet Union in Berlin's Tiergarten. "At a time when Russian tanks are threatening free, democratic Europe, we don't want any Russian tanks at the Brandenburg Gate!" the petition states. Two original T-34 tanks form part of the memorial.

Peter Huth, the chief editor of BZ and deputy head of *Bild*, stated that due to the events in Ukraine, "the fear of Russian tanks, which overthrew Hitler and a few years later moved against German demonstrators," had returned. "Russian military units have marched to the borders of Ukraine and are threatening the freedom of a sovereign state," he wrote. "The last Russian tanks in Berlin must leave!"

The memorial was established in Berlin Tiergarten in 1945 in honour of the fallen Red Army soldiers in World War II. It marked in particular the 80,000 soldiers who perished in the liberation of Berlin, some of whom are buried on the site.

Huth's outrageous argumentation goes beyond the media campaign to date, which has supported the fascist-led coup in Ukraine and NATO's troop build-up in eastern Europe, while portraying Russia as the aggressor. It is an attempt to rehabilitate German fascism.

With the taking of Berlin on May 2, 1945, the Red Army dealt a death blow to the Nazi dictatorship, which had terrorised the German working class, murdered 6 million Jews, and drowned Europe in blood. It ended a war that had been launched from the outset with the aim of physically liquidating a large section of the Soviet population and all of Europe's Jews.

It is an incontrovertible historical fact that in the struggle against German imperialism, the Soviet Union bore by far the greatest burden among the allies. The Nazi regime was ultimately defeated by the Red Army and the workers and farmers of the Soviet Union. In heroic struggles, 14 million soldiers lost their lives. At least as many Soviet civilians were victims of the Nazis.

The T-34 tank Huth would like to remove from the memorial played a central role in the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany. In spite of the Stalinist degeneration of the young workers state, the Soviet Union was able to undertake an historically unprecedented programme of industrialisation thanks to the planned economy. From 1942, the T-34 was built by the thousands and surpassed the German tanks of the day by far.

The defamation of the Soviet T-34 tank as a "Russian tank" is a brazen historical lie. The Putin regime in no way represents the former workers state, and the Soviet Union was not limited to the Russia of today. In the battle for Berlin, not only Russians, but also Ukrainians, Belarusians and many other nationalities lost their lives.

Behind the demand for the demolition of an anti-fascist monument is the attempt to rewrite history and rehabilitate National Socialism. Previously, only fascist groups and right-wing radicals defiled Soviet memorials and called for their destruction. Now, the campaign is being led by one of the most powerful media companies in Germany.

In this, Springer Publishers is in good company. In February of this year, *Der Spiegel* published a lengthy article in which right-wing historians spoke in favour of a fundamental revision of German history. Without comment, Ernst Nolte was allowed to speak out in

favour of placing the blame for World War II on Poland and Britain. Historian Jörg Baberowski from Humboldt University in Berlin was cited as saying, “Hitler was not evil.”

Baberowski has been working systematically in recent years to portray the Soviet Union as the real aggressor in the World War II. In his book, *Scorched Earth*, published in 2012, he claims that Stalin wanted to wage war on Germany. “Stalin enjoyed the war of destruction,” wrote Baberowski, concluding, “Hitler was poorly prepared to lead a war against a regime for which violence was second nature and whose soldiers were fully prepared to use it.”

The revision of history and the downplaying of National Socialism, which has found its sharpest expression to date in the call for the demolition of the Soviet memorial, is directly connected to the revival of German militarism.

To wage war again, the German ruling elite needs to trivialise its crimes in World War II. Since President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister Von der Leyen announced the end of “the politics of military restraint” at the beginning of the year, a systematic assault on the anti-fascist and anti-militarist convictions deeply rooted in broad layers of the population has been under way.

To encircle and destabilise Russia, the German government collaborated with Svoboda, the heirs of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, in the coup in Ukraine. Springer Publishers, once one of the strongest advocates of the Cold War, supported this alliance and gave opposition politician Vitaly Klitschko, who is backed by the conservative Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a regular column in the *Bild* newspaper. *BZ*, *Bild* and *Die Welt* seek to outdo each other in their war propaganda against Russia.

But the war propaganda has had little impact thus far. An overwhelming majority of the German population are opposed to the actions of the German government in Ukraine as well as to foreign interventions by the army.

At the beginning of the month, the deputy editor of *Die Welt*’s political section, Klaus Christian Malzahn, complained in *Welt am Sonntag* that NATO was becoming increasingly unpopular. “A majority of 53 percent spoke out against NATO monitoring and

securing the airspace of eastern European partners to guard against potential Russian attacks,” Malzahn reported, before launching an attack on this majority. “Obviously, many ordinary Germans believe,” wrote Malzahn, that the federal republic can survive permanently “without out-of-area military interventions and burdensome NATO operations.”

The Springer campaign against the Soviet memorial takes place in this context. The German government’s collaboration with fascist forces in Ukraine, who move from city to city destroying Lenin monuments and terrorising workers, has broken the dam. With the call to demolish the Soviet memorial, the *Bild* newspaper is attempting to mobilise the most backward elements against the anti-war sentiments of the majority of the population.



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