

German foreign minister Steinmeier and the Civitella massacre

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On Sunday June 29, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier took part in commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the massacre perpetrated by the Nazi army at Civitella, Italy.

On June 29, 1944, a public holiday, a unit of the tank-paratrooper division “Hermann Goering” stormed the Tuscan village and committed one of the worst ever war crimes in Italy. The German soldiers drove residents to the central church square and shot all 244 male residents with a bullet to the head, in front of the women and children. The killing lasted for hours. The soldiers subsequently dragged the bodies back to the houses to set them alight.

The horrific crime had been prepared by the Wehrmacht for some time. It aimed to break resistance to the Nazi occupation among the population. Similar massacres were perpetrated in towns including Sant’ Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto.

Steinmeier visited the site of the crime with his Italian counterpart, Federica Mogherini. In his speech, he declared he was deeply shaken and felt shame for the events, which he could not comprehend. It was important “that we don’t suppress and forget, but engage with history and draw the correct lessons from it.” One hundred years after the assassination in Sarajevo and 75 years after the beginning of World War II, he stressed, “Where war leads: to excesses of violence.”

There is hardly anything more repulsive than representatives of the German ruling class recalling their past crimes and speaking of lessons from history when they are actively preparing the next catastrophe.

Steinmeier has played a key role in Germany’s return to aggressive great power politics. At the beginning of the year, he declared along with German President Joachim Gauck and defence minister Ursula Von der

Leyen at the Munich Security Conference that Germany must “be ready to intervene earlier, more decisively and substantially in foreign and security policy.” He criticised the “culture of restraint” and said, “Germany is too big just to comment on global politics from the sidelines.”

The horrific crimes of the Nazi regime, for which Steinmeier asked for forgiveness in Italy, were the direct consequence of the attempts by the German bourgeoisie to organise Europe and the world under its leadership. Under Steinmeier, the call for German “leadership” is once again being raised. An official foreign ministry web site even strenuously promotes this, displaying a strategy paper entitled “Germany’s destiny: to lead Europe in order to lead the world.”

Steinmeier is not a Nazi. But he is cynically using the past crimes to cover up current war policy, which has already produced atrocities like that in Civitella. In his speech, he said: “In the European Union, we are today united in friendship. No economic crisis can be allowed to break this solidarity. And no political crisis can be allowed to lead us to consider war once again a solution. We owe that to the dead of June 29, 1944. The forces of the underworld will never again get the upper hand—neither in Civitella, nor anywhere else in Europe.”

It would be hard to outdo such hypocrisy. It is well known that Berlin organised a coup in Ukraine against President Viktor Yanukovych, in which fascists played a leading role. Now they support the regime of the oligarch Petro Poroshenko, which is leading a brutal war against the people of East Ukraine that threatens to provoke a war with a nuclear power, Russia. The fascist forces the Ukrainian regime relies upon are responsible for such crimes as the May 2 massacre in Odessa where 40 people were brutally killed.

Steinmeier personally collaborates with the “forces of the underworld” he condemns. Only a day before the coup in Kiev, he welcomed the leader of the fascist Svoboda Party, Oleg Tyahnybok, in the German embassy in Kiev.

Tyahnybok is a notorious anti-Semite, who claimed in the past that Ukraine was governed by a “Jewish-Russian mafia.” Svoboda maintains close ties to the neo-fascist German National Democratic Party (NPD) and honours Ukrainian anti-Semites like Stepan Bandera and Roman Shuchevytsch, who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Both were implicated in massacres in which thousands of Jews and Poles were killed.

As in the 1930s, German great power politics today is inseparable from fascism and war. Significantly, before traveling to Italy, Steinmeier attended a summer conference of NATO defence ministers in Brussels, where preparations for war with Russia were discussed. The ministers endorsed the Poroshenko regime and adopted measures to strengthen the defence capabilities of the Ukrainian military. NATO General Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen threatened that there would be no “business as usual” with Moscow “until Russia sticks to its international obligations.”

In reality, it is the NATO powers who are in breach of their assurances. They are using the crisis they provoked in Ukraine to further encircle Russia militarily—a campaign in which Germany plays a central role.

In April, during the massive NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe, Berlin ordered a warship to the Baltic Sea. Starting in September, six of its Eurofighter jets will strengthen the Baltic states’ air defences. During a visit to Berlin, Rasmussen explicitly thanked Germany for its military support and its leading role in the Ukraine crisis.

Steinmeier’s visit to Civitella cannot deflect from the fact that the German ruling class, as in the last century, is pursuing its imperialist goals by aggressive and criminal means.

It speaks volumes that 70 years after the massacre in Civitella, Germany has not brought a single perpetrator to trial, nor compensated any of the victims’ families. When the Italian supreme court sentenced former German junior officer Max Josef M to lifelong imprisonment and called upon Germany to pay

compensation to the victims, Berlin refused to accept the judgement. At the time, as now, the foreign minister was Frank-Walter Steinmeier.



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