

Right-wing gutter journalism: Der Spiegel rails against Russia

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Following the crash of flight MH17 over Ukraine, the tirades against Russia in the German press have reached a new peak of intensity. Every evening, Thomas Roth and his colleagues on *Tagesthemen*, the main nightly news program on German television, turn the broadcast into an anti-Russian propaganda barrage. Next morning, the editorials in the print media provide a second helping.

The aim of this media propaganda is as transparent as it is criminal. Demagogues like Stefan Cornelius, Stefan Ulrich, Hubert Wezel (all from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*); Klaus Dieter Frankenburger, Reinhard Veser (both from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*); and Dominic Johnson (*taz*) are using the air disaster to promote militarism and prepare the population for a war against Russia.

They endlessly repeat the same allegations. Without presenting any proof, they claim that the plane was shot down by “pro-Russian separatists” and demand harsh retaliatory measures against Russia. To this end, they are prepared to employ the sort of racist stereotypes that are usually associated with fascist propaganda.

A particularly vile example is the recent column by Jan Fleischhauer in *Spiegel Online*. Under the headline “Russia's Loss of Reality,” Fleischhauer declares the entire Russian population to be mentally ill and a suitable case for “clinical psychology,” because they are not willing to accept Western propaganda.

In the manner of a gutter journalist who could have found a place in Goebbels's propaganda ministry, he writes: “One knows from psychopathology the consequences distorting reality has for the individual. The conventional system of explanation is replaced by an alternative model of interpretation whose inner logic cannot be shaken by counter arguments. What passes for reality appears as a refined illusion that counts as true only because influential powers prevent people from seeing reality. Now we must recognise that delusions can seize not only a person, but an entire society.”

The “delusional loss of reality” of Putin and the “Russian people” is so great that “no sanctions [can] help” to reverse

it. In the end, one knows “from the textbook of psychiatry” that “it is hopeless for outsiders to try and persuade the affected person to give up his delusional convictions using logical arguments.”

Fleischhauer's conclusion? “If we are unlucky, we must seek help from clinical psychology instead of diplomacy. The doctor prescribes medicine in order to help the person entangled in delusions back to reality. But how do you free a state of its intrusive thoughts?”

Fleischhauer provides no answer to his question. He should explain what he means by this and what he is proposing concretely to “free [Russia] from its intrusive thoughts?”

Precisely as a German journalist, he must be conscious of the political tradition in which his rhetoric stands, and the terrible crimes his abstruse arguments recall. It was the Nazis who stigmatised entire peoples. One of their “non-diplomatic solutions” was to send dissenters and the mentally ill to concentration camps.

That Fleischhauer directs his hatred against Russia, of all places, has a particularly ominous historical connotation. Hitler's war of extermination in the East cost the lives of 27 million citizens of the Soviet Union. In the Second World War, the Nazis pursued the declared aim of “liberating” Europe from the “pathological madness” (Goebbels) of Bolshevism.

Fleischhauer is an anti-communist, whose hatred of Russia is closely linked to his hatred of Marxism. On his blog *Among the Left*, he depicts communism as an atrocious crime. He writes things like, “Class delusions end, taken to their logical conclusion, not much better than race delusions. It is no accident that wherever revolutionaries tried to make the Marxist idea a reality, the first thing to open up was the re-education camp.”

Fleischhauer's absurd equating of Marxism and Nazism does not prevent him from indulging in racist incitement himself. In January 2012, he advocated the use of the term “national character,” and used the disparaging term “the Italian race” in the context of the Costa Concordia maritime

disaster. Fleischhauer's comment was so scandalous that the Italian ambassador sent a letter of complaint to *Spiegel* and demanded that it "refrain from generalisations on the basis of race."

Fleischhauer's repulsive weekly column for *Spiegel Online*, called "The Black Channel," exudes stupidity. But it would be a mistake to dismiss it as a harmless aberration. The gutter journalism in a supposedly "serious" publication, and its echoes of the propaganda of the Nazis, has political and historical roots. It is directly connected to the return of Germany to an aggressive foreign policy, announced at the start of the year at the Munich Security Conference by President Gauck, Defense Minister von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Before German imperialism launched its military campaign against Russia in 1941, it first had to smash the workers movement, abolish democracy and poison public opinion. This was Hitler's objective. So too today, the advance of German imperialism to the East is inextricably linked to fascist propaganda and war.

Fleischhauer wants to speak about "reality?" Let us examine briefly the reality he wants to conceal with his babble about psychological delusions.

In the Ukraine conflict, it is not Putin who is the aggressor, it is the Western powers. Berlin and Washington worked closely with fascist forces such as Svoboda and the Right Sector to organize a coup against the elected president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, after he refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union.

Now they support the regime of the oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who is conducting a brutal war against the population of eastern Ukraine, which has close linguistic and cultural links with Russia, and which, by a large majority, rejects the pro-Western puppet government in Kiev. The Western powers are pursuing the aim of absorbing Ukraine into their sphere of influence and subjugating Russia.

So far, there is no evidence showing who shot down flight MH17. If one poses the question, whose interests were served by the downing, the suspicion falls first on the regime in Kiev and its imperialist allies. The Malaysian passenger plane had hardly hit the ground when Ukrainian government officials, Western politicians and the Western media began to exploit the disaster for their own purposes, and to intensify the conflict with Russia.

In a propaganda article shortly after the crash, *Spiegel Online* claimed that the first clues pointed to the separatists and accused Russia of spreading "conspiracy theories." The current edition of *Spiegel* bears the title "Stop Putin Now." It demands an "end to the cowardice" and calls for "Putin to be brought to justice for the shooting down of flight MH17."

The return of German militarism is being accompanied by

an ideological offensive that is aimed at making fascism acceptable. As the largest circulation news weekly and the German language news web site with the greatest reach, *Der Spiegel* and *Spiegel Online* play a central role.

Just a few days after representatives of the German government announced the end of the country's military abstention at the Munich Security Conference, and shortly before the putsch in Ukraine, *Der Spiegel* published an article entitled "World War I Guilt: Culpability Question Divides Historians Today," by Dirk Kurbjuweit. Its objective was to revise the assessment of "German guilt" in the First and Second World wars and play down of the crimes of the Nazis.

Kurbjuweit quoted Ernst Nolte extensively, who, since the Historikerstreit (historians' debate) of the 1980s, has propagated the view that Nazism was a justified response to Bolshevism.

In conversation with Kurbjuweit, Nolte declared: "I am more and more convinced that we should attach more weight to the role played by the Poles and the British than is usually the case" in assessing war guilt. In the same breath, he insinuated that the Jews had their "own share" of responsibility for the "gulag" because some Bolsheviks were Jews. Kurbjuweit commented that this had "long been an argument of anti-Semites," but declared, nevertheless, "but not everything this man [Nolte] says is wrong."

Kurbjuweit quoted the Berlin historian Jörg Baberowski, a declared supporter of Nolte, saying: "Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table."

These statements are not only repulsive; the political conclusions arising from them have consequences. The last attempt by the German ruling class to aggressively realise its great power interests ended in a catastrophe. Those responsible included not only Hitler and his confidantes, but also the war-mongers in the media and the war ideologues in the universities. No one should have any illusions that it will be different this time if the working class does not intervene on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist programme.



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