How German militarism is exploiting the Ukraine war

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine has unleashed horror and fear of a third world war in broad sections of the German population. Those in ruling circles are reacting completely differently: behind their loud moral indignation and denunciation of President Putin lies a barely suppressed euphoria.

At last—so the tenor of countless politicians' speeches and media commentaries goes—at last, we are allowed to rearm and wage war again. For 75 years we had to moderate our language, apologise for the crimes of the Nazis, and back down to pacifist public opinion. That is now over!

The special session of the Bundestag (federal parliament) on Sunday morning summed up this sentiment. Deputies from all factions cheered Chancellor Olaf Scholz as he announced the biggest rearmament programme since Hitler and promised arms deliveries to Ukraine, effectively making Germany a party to the war. Scholz spoke of a "historical turning point," and the media eagerly seized on the term.

"The German government's decision to supply weapons to Ukraine is historic. Just like the promises about equipping the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces]. And both are right," wrote Nico Fried in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "To regard the lessons of history as the defining maxim would have rendered the German government politically incapable. It has now freed itself from this situation."

Jasper von Altenbockum, writing in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), mocked the "West German tradition of letting others pay for security, underneath whose umbrella it was easy to moralise." Now, post-1945 German idealism was proving to be "a historical error, a deception, the moral and material failure of a generation" that was looking for a vocabulary "to find its way out of the provincialism of its peace illusions and back into the centre of world affairs."

FAZ co-editor Berthold Kohler, one of the worst warmongers in the German media, even explicitly thanked Putin—confirming the WSWS assessment that Ukraine has served as bait for NATO to lure Russia into a war.

"If it didn't sound cynical, one would almost have to be grateful to the Russian president for bringing German foreign and security policy out of its cloud cuckoo land and down to earth," Kohler commented in the FAZ on 27 February. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) was now "vacating old positions so quickly that even Moscow is probably having trouble following." The SPD's opposition to the two percent of GDP target on military spending, the continuation of nuclear sharing, the procurement of armed drones all this was now "water under the bridge."

Kohler himself is not satisfied and calls for the nuclear bomb: "Putin's crusade against the West, however, is also forcing Germany to deal with a question that it, again with reference to its own past, considered answered for all time: the nuclear one," he writes in another *FAZ* commentary.

The experience with Donald Trump had shown Europeans "that there is no eternal guarantee for America's nuclear umbrella." France's deterrent arsenal was too weak. If the Europeans did not want to bow to Russian pressure, "then Europe must become a nuclear power worthy of the name. Without Germany's participation, this will not be possible."

Similar comments can be found in almost all newspapers, not to mention the numerous talk shows on public television. Only opponents of Russia have their say here; rules about balanced coverage have fallen victim to the "historical turning point."

Sunday's Bundestag session was characterised by a mood of euphoric war frenzy. The deputies rose again and again to a standing ovation. The SPD, Green and Liberal Democrat (FDP) coalition and the opposition Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) outdid each other with militaristic slogans and assured each other of their mutual support. The Left Party and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) also joined in the war chorus.

One after another, Left Party deputies confessed they had criminally underestimated Putin. The party's most prominent representative, Gregor Gysi, had already declared on the ZDF morning show that everything he had said that was critical of the West and NATO had become "garbage, because now Putin has decided to wage a criminal war of aggression that violates international law."

Gysi did not explain why Putin's attack on Ukraine retrospectively justifies the bombing of Belgrade, the destruction of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and numerous other war crimes committed by NATO and its members.

Finally, the central message of the debate was summed up by AfD deputy Rüdiger Lucassen. "The brutal politics of power is back and is sweeping dispositional ethics out of German politics," declared the former professional Bundeswehr officer. Germany had no alternative, he said. The federal government must "turn the wheel in the direction of power politics," which meant also "having military capabilities."

Not satisfied with the massive spending on rearmament, Lucassen called for a complementary ideological offensive. The federal government, he said, was "responsible for raising awareness of a new resoluteness among our people." Compulsory military service must be reactivated, he said. "Resoluteness is the price of our freedom."

Efforts to hark back to the great power politics and militarism of past times are almost as old as the Federal Republic itself. It was not the SPD that stood in the way, as Kohler suggests in the FAZ, but the

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resistance of broad sections of the population who, after two devastating wars and the bestial crimes of Hitler's Wehrmacht (Armed Forces) in the Second World War, were determined not to allow another war. The SPD, on the other hand, has supported every expansion of militarism and provided numerous defence ministers.

As early as the first half of the 1950s, there were mass protests against the establishment of the Bundeswehr, which continued in the 1960s in the movement against nuclear weapons. In the early 1980s, hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the stationing of Pershing medium-range nuclear missiles in Germany. In 2003, over half a million demonstrators took to the streets in Berlin against the war in Iraq.

Nevertheless, the efforts to revive German militarism did not abate. The ruling class saw German reunification in 1990 as an opportunity to restore its supremacy in Europe. "As a nation of 80 million people, as the economically strongest country in the centre of Europe, we bear a special responsibility," declared the then Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel (FDP) in 1993. "We are predestined, because of our central position, our size and our traditional relations with Central and Eastern Europe, to derive the main benefit from the return of these states to Europe."

Since then, the European Union and NATO have moved further and further east, a development from which Germany has benefited most, both economically and geopolitically. In 1999, against considerable opposition from within their own ranks, the SPD and the Greens organised the first international war deployment of the Bundeswehr, which cemented the division of Yugoslavia into seven impotent poorhouses dependent on the great powers.

In 2014, the grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD intensified its efforts to help Germany—in the words of the then Federal President Joachim Gauck—"play a more active role in the world" and pursue a great power policy. It supported the coup in Ukraine, which brought an anti-Russian regime to power with the help of fascist militias and laid the groundwork for today's war.

Since then, Germany's defence budget has increased dramatically, from €32.4 billion in 2014 to €46.9 billion in 2021, and now it is set to triple in one fell swoop.

The claim that the Ukraine war is about defending freedom and democracy against an authoritarian dictator, repeated incessantly by the Greens in particular, collapses like a house of cards on closer examination.

Putin's actions are undoubtedly reactionary. He represents the interests of the Russian oligarchs who have become rich by looting the Soviet Union's social property. His nationalism, which goes back to the traditions of Stalin and the Great Russian chauvinism of the Tsarist empire, cannot reverse the disastrous consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union thirty years ago. It divides the working class and drives it into the arms of nationalist demagogues.

But the Ukrainian regime is no better, it does not even meet the minimum requirements of a democracy. Its armed forces are riddled with fascist militias like the Azov Battalion, which according to a report in *Time* magazine, have trained 17,000 foreign fighters from 50 countries in the last six years.

The German government knows this. As recently as 9 February this year, the pro-government Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) published a report, "Ukraine under President Zelensky," which provided a devastating verdict on the Ukrainian regime supported by Germany with large sums of money.

"In addition to the constitutional institutions, there are powerful actors in the country who are not subject to democratic accountability," it says. These include oligarchs as well as regionally anchored political-economic networks and circles of people within the judiciary. "Due to its politicised judiciary and the great influence of powerful informal actors in the political system," Ukraine could not be considered a "liberal democracy." And since "Ukraine is dependent on the Western community of states, both in terms of security policy and economy," the latter had also "become another important actor in the country."

In a nutshell: Ukraine is a state dominated by corrupt cronies and a venal judiciary, controlled and manipulated by Western powers.

In addition, NATO is not a peace alliance of democratic states, but a war alliance of imperialist powers, which with $1.1 trillion in 2020, accounted for more than half of the world's military expenditure and has waged numerous illegal wars in the past thirty years.

As far as the German bourgeoisie is concerned, Ukraine is only a means to an end for them. The hunger of German big business for sales markets and raw materials and the growing social conflicts at home are driving it back onto the path it had already taken in two world wars—expansion towards the East.

Whereas in the last decades it had pursued its goals by peaceful means under the motto "change through trade," it is now again resorting to military force. This is the "historical turning point" that the Bundestag and media are celebrating so enthusiastically. Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which Germany and NATO deliberately provoked, comes at the right time for them.

The consequences of this policy are catastrophic. Not only do they conjure up the danger of a military confrontation with the nuclear power Russia, which would lay waste to Europe; in the long run, France, Britain, and the USA will also not accept that Germany, which they defeated in two world wars, should once again become the dominant great power in the heart of Europe. No matter how often NATO and the European Union invoke their unity and togetherness, their aggressive policies already contain the seeds of future conflicts.

The only way out of this impasse is an international offensive of the working class, uniting Ukrainian, Russian, European, American and all other workers, linking the struggle against war with the struggle against its causes, capitalism and the outdated nation-state system.

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