

# Conductor Valery Gergiev sacked from Munich Philharmonic Orchestra

## The ideological mobilisation for war against Russia

**Ulrich Rippert**  
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The brutal sacking of world-renowned conductor Valery Gergiev by the Munich Philharmonic on March 1 is the high point of an unprecedented smear campaign against all things Russian.

Governments, media, universities, cultural and sports officials are demanding that Russian artists, scientists and athletes publicly oppose their own government or be summarily dismissed. Others are losing their jobs or being excluded from events simply because of their passports. Russian films and books are being censored, Russian shops are smeared with graffiti and Russian goods boycotted. Supermarket chains in Germany like Rewe, Edeka and Aldi are taking Russian products off their shelves.

Not since the Nazis' book burning and their anti-Semitic smear campaign "Don't buy from Jews!" has anything like this been seen in Germany. It does not bother those responsible that by dictating opinion they are introducing the very methods they accuse Russian president Vladimir Putin of using.

Only hours after Russian troops crossed the border into Ukraine, the Social Democratic Party mayor of Munich, Dieter Reiter, issued an ultimatum to Gergiev, the chief conductor of the city's Philharmonic Orchestra: either he clearly distance himself from Putin or he would be fired.

When Gergiev did not respond to this ultimatum, all contracts with him were terminated with immediate effect. Previously, La Scala in Milan, the Vienna Philharmonic and the Lucerne Festival declared their collaboration with the Russian conductor to be finished and New York's Carnegie Hall cancelled a concert with Gergiev and the Vienna Philharmonic.

A campaign against star soprano Anna Netrebko then

followed. Her condemnation of the Russian invasion as a "senseless war of aggression" was not enough for the management of the Bavarian State Opera. They terminated all contracts with Netrebko and cancelled her engagement on the grounds that the singer's dissociation from the Russian war of aggression was insufficient.

Then things went from bad to worse.

- The European Film Academy joined the Ukrainian Film Academy's call for a boycott and declared that Russian films would be "excluded from this year's European Film Awards." The Ukrainian Film Academy had justified its call for a boycott among on the grounds that Russian films spread "propaganda messages" and strengthened "the loyalty of Russian culture, the culture of the aggressor." It also demanded that no more films be distributed that feature "actors and public figures" who supported the war against Ukraine.

- The Cannes Film Festival said Russian delegations and people close to the Russian government would not be welcome at the next festival.

- On Wednesday, *Börsenblatt*, the book industry's trade magazine, reported that the major Ukrainian book centres—the Ukrainian Book Institute, the Lviv International BookForum, PEN Ukraine and the Book Arsenal in Kiev—were calling for a worldwide boycott of all Russian books and publishers. The *Börsenblatt* supported the call.

- The Frankfurt Book Fair joined the initiative to boycott Russian publishers at international book fairs. When a storm of indignation arose against this, the Fair management was forced to announce that individual stands of Russian publishers would be allowed at the upcoming Book Fair. But there would be no joint

Russian stand and the necessary cooperation with Russian state institutions.

- Anti-Russian sentiments are also being whipped up in the academic world. “All activities with Russia—including institutional and strategic links with Russian institutions—will be suspended until further notice,” the presidium of the Technical University of Berlin announced on Sunday after a special meeting. “New projects will not start.”

- The Free University Berlin suspended all relations with academic institutions in Russia for the time being. The strategic partnership with the University of St. Petersburg has been suspended. This also applies to the Russian university’s office on the Dahlem campus, which was opened virtually in December. The liaison office of the Free University in Moscow is being closed.

Many people are reacting to these developments with shock and horror. On social media, comments accumulate such as: “Are you insane? We’ve been through all this before,” or “How horrible! Is history repeating itself now?” Many remember that the greatest crime in human history began with Jews being discriminated against and persecuted simply because of their origin and faith.

When a restaurateur in southern Germany announced on his Facebook page that in future he would refuse entry to his restaurant to people with Russian passports, he unleashed a media storm and protests on his doorstep. Despite a quick apology, he lost most of his regular customers.

Yesterday, after sustained protests, the management of the Frankfurt Book Fair reaffirmed its decision to exclude the official Russian stand from the Book Fair. They justified this by saying that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was an “unparalleled event in recent European history” and that the exclusion of the Russian stand served to support the liberal Russian public.

This rationale is false and mendacious. The claim that the exclusion of the Russian stand is in defence of freedom of expression in Russia is simply absurd. The opposite is the case. Just like the dismissal of Gergiev and Netrebko, the boycott of Russian literature serves to undermine freedom of expression and introduce collective punishment.

When the German military supported the bombing of the Serbian capital Belgrade in its first international

war mission in 1999, cultural officials did not call for a boycott. Instead, they unleashed a campaign against Peter Handke, one of the few German-language writers who dared to protest publicly against this barbaric act.

In 2012, the 84-year-old Nobel laureate Günter Grass also became the target of a furious smear campaign when he criticised Israeli bombing terror against Palestinians in Gaza in a poem.

When the US and its NATO allies invaded Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and fuelled the civil war in Syria—wars that claimed over a million victims and drove millions more to flee—the Frankfurt Book Fair did not exclude the Americans or the British, nor did it demand political confessions from artists.

Nor is the current war in Ukraine—as reactionary and deplorable as Russia’s actions are—by any means all down to Putin. Through their numerous wars, the military encirclement of Russia and the support of the right-wing coup in Kiev eight years ago, the US and NATO have systematically provoked it. Now they are flooding the country with weapons and turning it into an El Dorado for international mercenaries and fascist militias to make the war as bloody as possible.

The US, Germany and NATO are pursuing the goal of installing a regime in Moscow that will also serve their interests, eliminate Russia as a strategic rival and gain unrestricted access to its vast natural resources. The German government is using the war in Ukraine as a welcome opportunity to shake off all the restrictions of the past and to emerge as the strongest military power in Europe.

When Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered his war speech in parliament last Sunday, announcing the biggest rearmament programme in Germany since Hitler and inaugurating direct arms deliveries to Ukraine, there was euphoria among the assembled deputies. There was no end to the standing ovations. Anyone who opposes this is to be intimidated. The agitation against the Russians serves the ideological mobilisation for NATO’s long-prepared war against Russia.



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