

# The hysterical anti-Russian campaign and the US-NATO drive to war with Russia

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The ideological propaganda campaigns waged to justify the imperialist wars of the past invariably relied on distortions, fabrications, and outright lies. As the writer Stefan Zweig observed in his recollections of the outbreak of the First World War, “All the warring nations were already in a state of over-excitation and the worst rumor was immediately transformed into truth, the most absurd slander believed.”

So it is that during the week since Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, the hysterical anti-Russian campaign spearheaded by the corporate media and sections of the middle class with the aim of legitimizing the US-NATO war drive has assumed horrifying proportions. Singers, artists, conductors, products, and even cats are being excluded or banished solely due to their Russian nationality or origin.

On Tuesday, Munich Mayor Dieter Reiter announced the immediate firing of Russian conductor Valery Gergiev from his position as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic. Reiter, a Social Democrat, issued an ultimatum to Gergiev shortly after Putin’s invasion of Ukraine: either he publicly criticize the Russian government, or he would be fired. After Gergiev failed to respond, Reiter cancelled all contracts with the world-famous conductor with immediate effect.

Star soprano Anna Netrebko suffered a similar fate at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. After a sustained campaign by the *New York Times* over Netrebko’s “Putin ties,” i.e., her Russian nationality, Netrebko withdrew from her upcoming engagements at the Met and Berlin’s Staatsoper. In a statement declaring her opposition to the war, Netrebko said, “It’s not fair to force artists, or any other personality, to express their political opinions in public and denounce their homeland.”

Similarly brutal treatment has been meted out to Russian filmmakers, who have effectively been banned from international film festivals, and athletes, who were prohibited from competing in the Paralympics, football World Cup, and other sports competitions. Retailers in North America and Europe have removed Russian products from their shelves. A university in Italy went so far as to attempt to ban a literature course based on the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, a Russian novelist who died in 1881 after writing such iconic works of world literature as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. The University of Milano Bicocca only relented

after a public outcry.

This chauvinist campaign is being led by a section of the upper middle class infected with war fever. Media outlets, academics, and scientists who ought to know better have lapped up the pro-war propaganda of US imperialism and the NATO powers according to which the world was a peaceful paradise until the evil mastermind Vladimir Putin sent Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022. They have cheered on the sanctions imposed on Russia, which amount to economic warfare and will devastate the population, and applauded the massive military build-up by the NATO powers throughout Eastern Europe.

It seems to have occurred to none of them that there is a principled, left-wing basis upon which to oppose Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine, which he justified by invoking right-wing Russian chauvinism.

This opposition, rooted in the struggle to unify workers in Ukraine, Russia, and internationally in a global anti-war movement, does not require that one adapt to the predatory interests of the imperialist powers or cover up the role of fascism in Ukraine. It does not oblige one to maintain a shameful silence about the fact that among the NATO powers’ allies in their battle for a “democratic and independent Ukraine” are far-right nationalists and fascists whose political forefathers collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

Among these complacent layers of the middle class, no critical examination of these historical and political issues raised by the Ukraine-Russia war is allowed. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted yesterday, “In reporting on the conflict, the distinction between journalism and propaganda has been obliterated. Everything is presented in black and white, and the media gives no space for the brain to work. According to the universal narrative, Russia invaded Ukraine because there is a monster called Putin, just as there were monsters named Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and Slobodan Milosevic.

“Learned academics—even those who have grappled for decades with the complex problem of historical causation—are in a state of intellectual collapse and are content to let CNN, MSNBC and, of course, the *New York Times*, think for them.”

Listening to the lectures from opera company managers,

sports officials, and academics attempting to justify the banishing of everything Russian, one would never know that US imperialism and its NATO allies have been waging uninterrupted war for the past three decades. None of these individuals or institutions asked American musicians or artists to answer for the horrific war crimes of the Clinton, Bush or Obama administrations, including the savage bombardment of Serbia, the invasion of Iraq, black site torture programs, “Terror Tuesday” assassinations, and the massacring of civilians in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere.

No performer who accepted a US government award, performed at the White House, or served as an academic or scientific adviser to the government was threatened with exclusion and the effective end of their professional careers due to American imperialism’s wars of plunder, which conservative estimates suggest led to the deaths of some four million people.

Many of the same individuals engaged in whipping up anti-Russia hysteria have been no less vociferous in their denunciations of bans against Israeli academics to protest the Zionist regime’s brutal oppression of the Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, the impoverished population faces indiscriminate violence from the Israeli military in conditions that aid organizations have likened to an open-air prison. Yet when supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign call for the suspension of ties with Israeli academics and bans on Israeli products, they are routinely vilified as “anti-Semites.” As of 2019, 27 US states had passed laws banning government agencies and employees from doing business with anyone who supported a boycott of Israel.

The pro-war layers of the upper middle class see nothing wrong in these gross double standards, because they long ago made their peace with American and European imperialism. During NATO’s air war against Serbia in 1999, which included the German air force’s first participation in warfare since World War II, there were no shortage of intellectuals and ex-radical politicians ready to justify the slaughtering of Serbian men, women, and children with hypocritical blather about NATO’s warplanes protecting “human rights.”

Explaining the material roots of this phenomenon, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North wrote in 1999:

The social structure and class relations of all the major capitalist countries have been deeply affected by the stock market boom that began in the early 1980s. Perpetually rising share values, especially the explosion in market valuations since 1995, have given a significant section of the middle class—especially among the professional elite—access to a degree of wealth they could not have imagined at the outset of their careers. Those who have actually grown rich comprise a

relatively small percentage of the population. But in numerical terms, the ‘newly rich’ represent a substantial and politically powerful social stratum. [“After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War,” included in *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony, 1990-2016*]

This stratum is now determined to provide the ideological justification for a catastrophic war between the US imperialist-led NATO alliance and Russia—a conflict which would be fought with nuclear weapons. Indeed, the savagery of the anti-Russia campaign they are leading can only be compared to the demonization of enemy nations during a state of war.

Even the right-wing Canadian daily *National Post*, a firm supporter of NATO’s war drive against Russia, wrote somewhat nervously Friday, “It’s all seeming a bit like the opening months of the First World War, when Canada, and the wider British Empire feverishly renamed everything with even a whiff of German association. Berlin, Ont. got renamed to Kitchener. The Alberta communities of Bingen, Carlstadt, and Dusseldorf were all assigned more patriotic names. And the Royal Family even changed their name from the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to the extremely British House of Windsor.”

But while war fever has a firm grip on the privileged layers of the middle class, the present crisis is viewed very differently by the broad mass of the population—the working class. After thirty years of unending war and a steady decline in their living standards, workers have no appetite to be stampeded into a disastrous global conflagration. And after more than two years of a pandemic in which workers have been forced by governments around the world to sacrifice their health and lives for the protection of corporate profits, they treat with skepticism or outright scorn the claims of the political elite and their upper middle-class hangers-on to be fighting for “democracy” and on behalf of the “free world.”

The critical task now is to transform this latent opposition to war among the international working class into a conscious political struggle for socialism.



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