

Reactions in Germany to the webinar: “Fight Covid! Save Lives! Stop the Drive to World War III!”

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Below are further comments from participants in the February 26 webinar, “Fight Covid and Save Lives! Stop the Drive to World War 3!” In the course of the online meeting, leading members of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) explained the geopolitical, historical and social background to the war in Ukraine and explained how it was linked to the coronavirus pandemic.

Dajana comes from Slovakia. She listened to the webinar in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. She said: “Many things were explained clearly during the webinar. I strongly agree with the positions put forward. The situation will certainly not improve if the US and Europe take action against Russia using weapons and soldiers!”

“Of course I am against war and reject the military attack on Ukraine. But I am from a Slavic country and can understand what Putin meant in his speech. The Warsaw Pact broke up, and since then NATO has moved continually eastward. Does that testify to a policy aimed at peace? NATO has moved ever closer to Russia and encircled it militarily. Even Germany’s first chancellor Bismarck pointed out the role of Ukraine: In order to destroy and capture Russia, you first have to capture Ukraine.

“As I said, I am absolutely against the war and think it’s terrible, but who is paying attention to all the terrible events in past years? The brutality of the fascists in Odessa, or in the Donbas and Luhan? Nobody cared about the terrible events there, but they have made Russia feel more and more threatened.

“What happened in Serbia? Today there are pro-Russian demonstrations in Belgrade, because of what Belgrade experienced at the hands of NATO in 1999, i.e., weeks of bombing during the Balkan War. Yugoslavia was also a sovereign state, but the US and Germany made sure it was destroyed and fragmented into numerous small states—Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, Serbia and Slovenia—each of which is not viable on its own.

“To what extent can one trust newspapers today? They present Ukraine as democratic, but in all these states, and also in Bulgaria and Slovenia, monuments to the soldiers who fought against the fascists in the Second World War have been toppled and Nazis and right-wing extremists are glorified in their place.

“What we need are not weapons and weapons of war that cost billions and destroy everything. This money could be much better used to eradicate poverty because there is enormous poverty in these East European countries. My mother in Slovakia, for example, has to live on a pension of 350 euros and her rent costs 150 euros. What does that leave her to live on? Her life is getting worse and worse, and the anti-Russian agitation is not making it better. In Slovakia, food that has ‘Russian’ in its name is now being renamed: It can no longer be called ‘Russian eggs’ or ‘Russian ice cream.’

“All this is absurd, stupid and reactionary. Our family was always on good terms with my friend’s Russian family, and today it’s like they don’t know each other anymore. This whole development worries me a great deal, where is it heading? People don’t know history anymore. We have to open their eyes and make them aware of history in order to reverse this development!”

Kevin from Bavaria works in the IT sector and has had some exposure to the Green Party. He became acquainted with the WSWS during the coronavirus pandemic and listened to the webinar on February 26 several times.

“I registered for the webinar beforehand, and found it very enlightening, especially Nick Beams’ contribution on the fantastic national debt of the US. It is an unimaginable \$30 trillion, exceeding US annual GDP by \$7 trillion. Corporate debt has also risen gigantically.

“As Beams explained, this development dates back to the end of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, which in turn led to globalisation, the ‘financialization’ of the stock exchanges and the growth of speculation. Beams quoted Karl Marx saying that ‘the driving force of capitalism [is] not production. It is rather the conversion of money into still more money.’ This trend has become very prevalent since the 1980s.

“In his contribution, Beams described a whole series of stock market crises and burst speculative bubbles, right up to the sub-prime housing crisis of 2008, which led to the central bank having to constantly bail out companies and banks with billions and billions. while buying up junk loans. The pandemic greatly exacerbated all of this. Government securities fell precipitously and the Federal Reserve had to buy up every kind of debt: Loan debt, municipal debt, student debt, etc. At times, it was spending up to a million dollars a second! At the same time, during the pandemic, there was no money for masks, for effective measures or for workers who suffered lost wages.

“Then inflation set in, which we are increasingly experiencing today. As Beams demonstrated, the oligarchs know that inflation increases the probability of class struggle, but they cannot raise interest rates to curb inflation because otherwise their system would collapse like a house of cards. This leaves them with no other way out to solve their crisis apart from imperialist, predatory war. I found Beams’ conclusion very powerful when he said: ‘Imperialism seeks to save the capitalist order through war. The working class seeks to overcome the global crisis through social revolution.’

“Initially I turned to the Greens because I believed they stood for peace and the environment. But the more I got to know them, the more clearly I understood that this was not what they were about. Anyone who knows the Greens in Germany knows that their focus is on their careers and image—it’s repulsive. In the coronavirus pandemic they did nothing to

protect the population, and now they are proving to be a party of war led by Foreign Minister [and Green Party leader] Annalena Baerbock.

“What the WWS is doing is hugely important because they are the only ones to provide a platform for the resistance by the working class and the strikes that are taking place, and also the role played by the unions: Their selling-out and how, for example, they pit Ford auto workers in Saarlouis against Ford workers in Valencia, Spain. The webinar as a whole was excellently organised. There were videos and graphic representations that underlined what was said and showed in all their brutality anti-refuge manoeuvres like ‘Sea Breeze 21.’

“Johannes Stern’s contribution proved to be prophetic: on February 26, in his contribution on German militarism, he warned that the EU, and Germany in particular, would now massively rearm—and just one day later, on 27 February 27, SPD [Social Democratic Party] Chancellor Scholz announced that the Bundeswehr would be rearmed with the help of an additional 100 billion euros. This really shows the strength of the analysis based on historical materialism.

“Evan Blake’s contribution showing Our World in Data in time-lapse on the spread of COVID-19 was also frightening, especially regarding the rise of the Omicron wave. The figures he gave on Long-COVID: i.e., 10 to 30 percent of all coronavirus patients develop Long-COVID, means that hundreds of millions of people will suffer long-term lung, heart, immune system or brain damage.

“I found particularly important David North’s call for us to take up the fight on the basis of developing class consciousness. This war is so reactionary precisely because it divides the Russian and Ukrainian workers. Yet they have the same history and speak the same language to some extent. He said, ‘Any policy that undermines class consciousness is reactionary.’ Our opposition to Putin is not based on a moral rejection of war, but genuine socialists and revolutionaries must first and foremost lead the struggle for revolutionary class consciousness.”

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Frank is a nurse from North Rhine-Westphalia and was born and raised in former East Germany. He explained:

“The webinar provided a good summary of basic developments and background. It was clear to see that economic interests are opposed to measures to combat the pandemic and are the real driving force in the Ukraine war.

“Hardly anything is being done against the pandemic. There is too little testing, too few air filters, and generally insufficient safety precautions in schools. There is also no interest in releasing vaccine patents. The pandemic cannot be fought nationally, only internationally—otherwise, new mutations will always emerge. This increases manufacturers’ profits when they produce new vaccines. For the world population it is a catastrophe. The attitude towards children is also disastrous. Just letting the virus rip through schools is irresponsible.

“Health care is the victim of this policy. We can’t say we’re shutting down operations, that’s not possible when caring for the elderly, in hospitals and mobile care for the aged. We are confronted everywhere with the consequences of the prevailing mass infection policy. Nursing staff are absent because they themselves fall ill or are in quarantine and staffing levels had already been deteriorating. Salaries are simply too low, and in this profession, alongside the physical strain comes extreme psychological strain. In hospitals you see a lot of suffering.

“Many hospitals would like to do more for their patients, but this is not being paid for. The state does not provide any funds and private clinics are also supposed to make a profit. Health and patient care should be organised and financed by the state—without the pressure to make profits! Why does the health system have to prove its profitability? This has an impact not only on the staff, but also on the material used. Only the cheapest material is used with no attention paid to quality. Who knows how many people die because of shortages in hospitals.

“The dilemma becomes even clearer in the question of war. Economic and geopolitical interests are behind the war. The West has bought up Ukraine and is now supplying the country with weapons. I think it’s fair to say that Germany is already waging war against Russia, through arms deliveries and through sanctions. The Ukrainian and Russian populations suffer, as do the workers in all of the warring countries, because they will at least be asked to foot the bill even if they are not sent to war.

“Now 100 billion euros have been announced for the German armed forces, but there is supposedly no money for fighting the pandemic. It is clear: economic interests come before the interests of the population. All the lamenting about the country’s ailing Bundeswehr is also clearly aimed at promoting rearmament. The Bundeswehr has been active in Afghanistan and in Mali; its equipment cannot be that dilapidated.

“Since the outbreak of the war, there has been no more talk about the coronavirus. It kills more people every day than war. In the US alone, 2,000 or more die every day.

“The media claim this is ‘the first war in Europe’ since the Second World War, but the Bundeswehr was already involved in the war in Yugoslavia. Whenever militarism is to be promoted and armament or war participation is on the agenda, the Social Democratic Party and the Greens are in government. They call themselves peace parties, but the opposite is the case.

“The other day, a general said in a TV roundtable talk: ‘We have to strengthen the eastern flank.’ Older viewers in particular must have cringed. That was already the motto in the Second World War... and words are followed by actions.

“Workers must not be blinded by the imperialists and capitalists. They must look to their own interests. In a worldwide democratic society, where economic interests are no longer the yardstick for everything, there would be no more wars. That is why workers must unite. The call ‘Proletarians of all countries unite’ is not new—but is so topical! Had we acted on it earlier, we would all have been spared much suffering.”

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Other letters and comments testify to the growing importance of the daily statements and background articles published by the WWS on the Ukraine conflict. Shortly after the webinar, we received a letter from Milena, a teacher from the Palatinate, who reacted spontaneously to an article about the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr.

“I have read the article ‘How German militarism is exploiting the Ukraine war’ by Peter Schwarz and agree completely. While everyone around me is of the opinion that Germany should neither rearm nor support Ukraine with weapons, I see a completely different point of view being taken in public discourse.

“It leaves me speechless when people demonstrate against the war in Ukraine and at the same time support the supply of weapons. Already people are being denounced due to their links with Russia, and even supermarkets are going along and supporting sanctions. This is all reminiscent of the debate about vaccination, which seems to belong to the past—although I see a much bigger threat here.

“I am not prepared to take to the streets to glorify war, but I want to raise my voice against war, against weapons and against the military. Where is the peace movement, I ask myself? Where are the people who once took to the streets against nuclear weapons and for disarmament? Is it naïve and unworldly to wish for a world in which there is no war? I live in the Palatinate, between Büschel and Ramstein [US airbase]. I am afraid for myself, for my family, for the Palatinate Forest, for humanity, for nature. I would like to help. What can I do?”





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