The relativisation of fascism in Germany and the recall of Ukrainian ambassador Andrij Melnyk

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The reactions to the removal of the Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin, Andrij Melnyk, show how far the rehabilitation of the Nazis in Germany has progressed 77 years after the end of the Third Reich.

Although Melnyk is an avowed partisan of the Ukrainian fascist, anti-Semite and Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and publicly honours and defends his murderous legacy, numerous leading politicians and media outlets in Germany have paid tribute to him and rushed to issue statements of praise and thanks.

Katrin Göring-Eckardt, vice-president of the federal parliament (Bundestag) and long-standing leader of the Green Party parliamentary group, wrote on Twitter: "@MelnykAndrij has fought hard for his country. As far as Bandera is concerned, I was and still am not in agreement with him. Regardless of this, I wish him all the best for what is to come and, above all, for his country! And say: Thank you."

The chairman of the Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee, Michael Roth (Social Democrats, SPD), tweeted similarly. Melnyk's statements had "polarised" and "defending Bandera" was "bad," but these are "dramatic times for Ukraine and Europe." The ambassador "fought with all his might for the survival of his country and his people and for us not to look away." He wished him "and his family a peaceful future in a free, democratic Ukraine. Goodbye."

The foreign policy spokesman of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group, Roderich Kiesewetter, openly defended Melnyk's statements. "The fact that he did not always strike the diplomatic tone here is more than understandable in view of the incomprehensible war crimes and the suffering of the Ukrainian people," he told the *Augsburger Allgemeine*. The ambassador had "rendered important services to his country" and had "always been a perceptible voice... campaigning for support for his country."

Similar statements can be found in the major media outlets. "In spite of everything, a loss," writes *Die Zeit*, while *Die Welt* wrote, "Thank you, Andrij Melnyk!" Melnyk's removal was also mourned in a commentary by public broadcaster ARD's capital city studio headlined, "The man who made us look in the mirror will be missed." His attempt to "cleanse" Bandera was a "grave mistake." But who could "want to blame the diplomat for trying to save his country here by all means—verbally?"

The author of the article, Kai Küstner, does not explain why he believes that the defence of a fascist and mass murderer contributes to the salvation of a country. He himself admits that Bandera "not only collaborated with the Nazis," but that his partisans were also "co-responsible for the mass murder of Poles and Jews in World War II."

But it is clear what Küstner is talking about. He writes: "It was Andrij Melnyk who warned the Grand Coalition led by Angela Merkel against the Baltic Sea pipeline Nord Stream 2 as consistently as it was in vain. It was Andrij Melnyk who reminded the Social Democrats of the historical errors of their pro-Russian policy. It was Andrij Melnyk who, after the start of Putin's war of aggression, vehemently criticised the traffic light coalition and also the chancellor for his reluctance to provide his attacked country with heavy weapons."

In other words, Melnyk has played a central role in directing German foreign policy towards an aggressive, anti-Russian war course in recent years and months.

After some initial reluctance, Germany is now at the forefront of military support for Ukraine. Berlin supplies heavy weaponry and is heavily involved in the NATO war offensive in Eastern Europe. In addition, the ruling class sees war as an opportunity to put its long-developed militarisation and great power plans into practice, and, after two lost world wars, re-emerge as the leading military power in Europe.

For this reason, Melnyk was invited onto numerous talk shows in order to present his insistent demands for more German weapons and to denounce anyone who even put the words "negotiation" or "diplomacy" in his mouth with regard to Russia. When Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) announced the €100 billion special fund for the German army in the Bundestag on February 27, Melnyk, together with former federal President Joachim Gauck, stood in the official gallery and received standing ovations.

Politicians and the media always knew exactly in whose ideological legacy Melnyk was working. Shortly after taking up his post as Ukrainian ambassador to Germany in 2015, he visited the grave of his idol Bandera in Munich, laid flowers there and called him a "hero" on Twitter. Since then, Melnyk has expressed his admiration and reverence for the Ukrainian "Providnik" (leader) in numerous interviews.

He recently went one step further in an interview with the online

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broadcast Jung & Naiv. Not only did he celebrate Bandera as a "freedom fighter" and "Robin Hood" of Ukraine, but he also denied the mass murder carried out by his OUN units in the Holocaust and massacres of Russians, Poles and Hungarians. "There is no evidence that Bandera troops murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews," he claimed.

In reality, it is a historical fact that Bandera and his supporters in the radical anti-Semitic wing of the OUN helped to prepare the Nazi war of annihilation, and after the invasion of Ukraine by the Wehrmacht organised pogroms against the Jewish population and murdered Russian prisoners of war. When the journalist Tilo Jung confronted Melnyk with the crimes of the Banderites, the Ukrainian ambassador defended them with the words: "I will not tell you today that I am distancing myself from them. And that's it!"

The interview sparked a public outcry and sharp international reactions. "The statements of the Ukrainian ambassador are a distortion of the historical facts, a trivialisation of the Holocaust and an insult to those murdered by Bandera and his people," the Israeli embassy in Berlin said on Twitter.

The Polish Foreign Ministry described Melnyk's remarks as "absolutely unacceptable."

In order not to jeopardise the Western war alliance against Russia, Kiev was ultimately forced to withdraw Melnyk as part of a diplomatic rotation. This does not change the close cooperation with him and the pro-fascist Bandera course of the Ukrainian government. On the contrary, according to media reports, Melnyk may even be promoted to deputy foreign minister of Ukraine.

The WSWS already noted in an earlier article that Melnyk's statements not only expose the Ukrainian government, which reveres Bandera and the OUN despite their terrible genocidal crimes, and erects statues, prints stamps and renames streets and squares in his honour. They "also shed light on the essentially fascist character of the ruling class in Germany, which, 81 years after the invasion of the Soviet Union, is rearming massively and playing a leading part in the NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia."

The Melnyk case is a warning, but it also has a positive side. Support for Ukraine in the war has nothing whatsoever to do with defending "values" or "democracy." It is a deliberately planned imperialist proxy war. With the decades-long military encirclement of Russia, NATO provoked Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine and is now escalating the conflict. The most important allies in Ukraine refer to the same fascist forces with which Hitler-Germany made pacts during the invasion of the Soviet Union.

The war aims are also similar to those of that earlier period. The imperialist powers are intent on militarily subjugating and splitting up the resource-rich and geostrategically important country so that it can be exploited and controlled. Ideologically, the renewed war against Russia requires the rehabilitation of the Nazis and ultimately of Hitler himself. This is at the core of Melnyk's defence. If the Ukrainian fascist leader Bandera was not a criminal, but a hero, why should the same not apply to the German Nazi leader?

The ruling class that brought Hitler to power to unleash World War II is not far from openly pronouncing such a claim. As early as 2014, right-wing extremist Humboldt University professor Jörg Baberowski described Hitler in *Der Spiegel* as "not vicious" and claimed: "He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table." In the same interview, he expressed his solidarity with the now deceased Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, who already claimed during the historians' dispute in the 1980s that the Holocaust was a justified reaction to the Soviet Union.

At that time, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) were the only ones who opposed this gross falsification of history and trivialisation of the Nazis. They warned that the relativisation of the historical crimes of German imperialism serves the preparation of new wars and new crimes.

This has been powerfully confirmed. The same parties and media that defended Baberowski and denounced the SGP/IYSSE over the last eight years are now celebrating Melnyk.

Baberowski's positions now form the core of German government policy. On June 22, Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) took advantage of the 81st anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union to announce a massive expansion of the proxy war against Russia in a government declaration. He failed to utter a single word about Germany's crimes, including the murder of at least 27 million Soviet citizens and the Holocaust.

Resistance to this development is growing among the population. According to a Civey poll, 69 percent of Germans welcomed Melnyk's dismissal. Only about one in 10 expressed regret about it. Fascism and war are hated among workers and young people precisely because of Germany's historic crimes. It is now more important than ever to organise this mass opposition and arm it with a clear perspective. The urgent task in Germany and internationally is to build a powerful socialist movement of the working class against capitalism.

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