Politicians and media demand delivery of German battle tanks to Kiev for war against Russia

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Germany's ruling class is reacting to the Russian army's debacle in Kharkiv with an intensification of its war offensive. Leading government and opposition politicians and media outlets are seeking to outdo each other with demands to supply German tanks and other heavy weaponry to Kiev in order to defeat Russia in Ukraine.

"Germany must immediately play its part in Ukraine's successes and provide armoured vehicles, the Marder artillery tank and the Leopard 2 battle tank," Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (Free Democrats-FDP), the chairwoman of the parliamentary Defence Committee, told the dpa news agency.

Now is not "the time to wait and see," she added. "The current military advance of the Ukrainian army and the first recaptured territories in the east of the country speak for the fighting power of Ukraine and its unconditional will to reconquer its invaded country—in connection with the delivery of heavy weaponry and military equipment from its allies."

The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Bundestag (parliament), Michael Roth (Social Democrats-SPD), also demanded a massive increase in arms deliveries to Ukraine. "In this new phase of the war, Ukraine needs weapons that will enable it to liberate territories occupied by Russia and keep them under permanent control," Roth told the Funke Mediengruppe's newspapers. It is now time to "take advantage of the momentum for Ukraine."

The SPD Co-Chairman Lars Klingbeil also joined the demand for further arms deliveries. "The Ukrainians are enjoying huge successes right now," he enthused in the summer interview with public broadcaster ARD. This has "also to do with the fact that the West, that Germany, that we have supplied an incredible amount of weapons in recent weeks and months. And that has to go on. This will continue."

Klingbeil left no doubt that Germany is already flooding Ukraine with weapons, and NATO is playing a central role in the warfare. "We have rocket launchers," he said. "We have the Cheetah tanks—so much that is now arriving in the second tranche in Ukraine, which helps. But, of course, we in the Western Alliance must also assess whether there should be further arms deliveries now. And that has to happen quickly."

The Greens are particularly aggressive in their demands for additional weaponry. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was in Kiev at the time of the Ukrainian offensive and pledged her support to the Ukrainian army on the ground.

"We will sooner or later have to supply Ukraine with modern, Western battle tanks," warned the Green defense politician Anton Hofreiter. Germany should "deliver Leopard battle tanks as soon as possible to prevent Ukrainian soldiers from dying unnecessarily."

This argument is as cynical as it is dangerous. In reality, the supply of battle tanks and other weapons does not save human lives but rather escalates the war, with all the destructive consequences that brings. On Monday, the Russian Ambassador to Berlin Sergei Netchaev warned in an interview with the Russian daily *Izvestia* that Germany had crossed a "red line" with the "delivery of lethal weapons to the Ukrainian regime."

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was from the outset a reactionary and desperate response by the Putin regime to the escalating imperialist war policy of the US and NATO over last three decades. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the NATO powers have systematically encircled Russia with the aim of subjugating the geostrategically crucial and resource-rich country. The recent offensive has created the threat of a nuclear conflagration.

"It is not ruled out that the Kremlin will conclude from this military catastrophe that it is necessary to wage a massive military escalation, which would itself only lead to an escalation by NATO," the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in a recent perspective. "Paradoxically, the desperate efforts by the Kremlin to reach an accommodation with imperialism do not preclude a series of actions that could trigger a thermonuclear war."

Nevertheless, German imperialism, which already tried twice in the 20th century to subjugate Russia militarily, is driving the war offensive forward. To the extent that there is criticism of the federal government's course, it comes from the right.

For example, Christian Democrat (CDU) foreign policy expert Roderich Kiesewetter called on the government to

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immediately deliver battle tanks to Kiev. “For the counter-offensive to be successful in the long term ... it now needs all the military support that is possible,” he told the Funke Mediengruppe. Germany could “immediately supply Marder and Leopard, Fox and Dingo (tanks) and quickly instruct the industry to produce more.”

The media are in a veritable war fever after the Ukrainian advances. “With Western, including German, arms deliveries, Ukraine has reached this point. Only with significantly more supplies will it be able to continue its offensive,” the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* said. Thus, “the chancellor, the federal government and the traffic light coalition are also at a new turning point. They must decide on the delivery of Leopard 2 type battle tanks.”

“Now is the hour for tanks” is the title of a *Die Welt* commentary by retired Brigadier General Klaus Wittmann. The German government should “finally see itself prompted to think much more systematically about what the repeatedly asserted support for Ukraine actually requires: faster decisions, faster deliveries of more weapon systems and—finally and primarily—tanks, artillery tanks and transport tanks.

“It is not worthy of Germany to constantly refer to others who do not deliver this or that,” says the general, who, with his anti-Russian enthusiasm for war, would have found his place in Hitler’s Wehrmacht. Of course, “coordination with allies is necessary, but the constant appeal to it” seems “like hiding behind others.” Real “leadership” consists in the declaration that Germany is ready “to deliver the battle and artillery tanks offered by industry.”

The statements of leading government politicians show that Germany is preparing exactly that. The war aims of the ruling class extend far beyond Ukraine and Russia. It sees war as an opportunity to revive its ambitions as a military superpower after its terrible crimes in two world wars and to play a central role in the redivision of the world in the 21st century.

In a keynote speech on Germany’s National Security Strategy on Monday, Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht (SPD) declared that Germany must play a leading role in military matters: “Germany’s size, its geographical location, its economic strength, in short, its weight make us a leader, whether we like it or not. Even in the military.”

According to the plans of the ruling class, the German armed forces (Bundeswehr) is to be enabled to act as a leading military force in the European Union and NATO. “We ourselves need strong, combat-ready forces so that we can defend ourselves and our alliance when needed,” said Lambrecht. Germany is ready to “relieve America in Europe,” as the US “has now necessarily turned its attention to security in the Pacific.”

The cost of the return of German militarism to the world stage is to be borne by the working class. Lambrecht praised the €100 billion Bundeswehr special fund that Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) announced to the applause of all parties in parliament shortly after the Russian invasion. Then she made it clear that this gigantic sum is only the beginning.

In the long term, Germany will have to provide enough money to meet the NATO target of spending 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defence, she said. Even if the details of the capabilities of the Bundeswehr were still being worked out, “this should not distract from the fact that this sum is ultimately necessary.” We shouldn’t kid ourselves, she continued. “Those who have to do more themselves, but have fewer resources, will have to restructure internally.”

What this means in practice is shown by the current draft budget of the ruling “traffic light coalition” for 2023. While inflation and exploding energy prices plunge millions into poverty, the government plans massive cuts in almost all social sectors. The health budget alone is to be reduced from €64 billion to €22 billion in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, which has already killed almost 150,000 people in Germany alone.

As in the past, the policy of war and austerity requires the militarization of society internally. The Bundeswehr will “play a more important role in our political thinking and action in the future,” said Lambrecht. The time when “our armed forces were perceived exclusively as actors in crisis operations abroad or providing assistance to state institutions is over,” she said, adding, “The Bundeswehr must again be regarded as the key institution for securing our general interests. And that means every day.”

Like the keynote foreign policy speeches by Scholz, Klingbeil and Baerbock in recent weeks, Lambrecht’s remarks are a warning. The German bourgeoisie will once again shy away from nothing in order to pursue its capitalist and imperialist interests. It can only be stopped by the independent intervention of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International fight for.

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