

The SPD and Greens seek to gag rock musician Roger Waters and silence criticism of NATO's war in Ukraine

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Members of the Munich city council, a coalition of the SPD and the Green Party, are seeking to prevent Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters from performing his *This Is Not a Drill* show at the city-owned Olympiahalle on May 21, 2023. Advance sales for the concert have already begun.

Munich Mayor Dieter Reiter (SPD) declared he was very irritated to learn that the city-owned Olympia Park company had awarded its rooms to Waters, and that he had had no knowledge of the move. Reiter called on the company to review and reverse its decision. The city's deputy mayors, Verena Dietl (SPD) and Katrin Habenschaden (Greens), expressed similar views.

Cancelling the hall, which has over 15,000 seats, would be tantamount to banning Waters from performing in Munich, under conditions where no comparable facility is available. This blatant attempt at censorship is justified solely on the grounds of Waters' political stance, which runs counter to the interests of the ruling elite in Germany.

As the WSWs wrote about Waters' concert tour, which began in the US in July, almost every one of his songs "deals with the pressing issues of our time: imperialist war, fascism, the poison of nationalism, the plight of refugees, the victims of state oppression, global poverty, social inequality, the assault on democratic rights and the threat of nuclear annihilation."

The SPD and the Greens—as well as governing in the city of Munich, both parties are also partners in the federal government—are absolutely determined to prevent any discussion of these issues and will stop at nothing to discredit Waters. They are denouncing him as an anti-Semite and Putin supporter, although such accusations are demonstrably false. The conservative Christian Social Union (CSU), which governs the state in Bavaria, and the corporate media also support the campaign against Waters.

In 2018, the city of Munich had already tried to prevent a concert by Waters in the Olympiahalle, but lost its case in court. It had relied on a city council resolution from the previous year, according to which the city denied access to its facilities to organisations and individuals who—like Waters—support the BDS movement, which campaigns for the

rights of Palestinians. At that time, Mayor Reiter had already declared that no more concerts by Waters would be allowed in the Olympiahalle in future.

In January 2022, however, the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig ruled in another case that the BDS resolution passed by the Munich city council in 2017 was unconstitutional and violated the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Access to public spaces could be restricted for certain purposes, but not on the basis of unpopular opinions.

After this ruling, the Olympiahalle company awarded the hall to Waters, having previously delayed any decision. The company had to accept because "legally there was no longer any reason not to offer the date," explained managing director Nils Hoch. The fact that the Munich city council is now nevertheless trying to prevent the concert demonstrates the ruthlessness with which it tramples on the right to freedom of expression.

When the SPD and the Greens try to muzzle Roger Waters, one can imagine how they respond to less influential artists and political activists. Internationally renowned, Waters is one of the most successful musicians of the past 50 years.

He is respected not only for his musical creativity but also for his political activism. In the course of his career and, particularly during the past two decades, he has combined both elements to emerge as one of the world's most popular and influential musicians. Waters' *This Is Not A Drill* Tour is expected to attract an audience in North America alone of 1 million.

He is one of the few artists to have repeatedly denounced the oppression of the Palestinian population by the Israeli government and uncompromisingly defend WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, against the cabal of US-led imperialist powers seeking to silence and destroy him.

In 2018 the SPD-Green campaign to gag Waters was centered on his opposition to the reactionary policies of the Israeli government. This time round the musician's outspoken opposition to the war in Ukraine has increasingly been singled out for attack. In addition to accusations of "anti-Semitism," Waters is now being falsely charged with being "pro-Putin"

and propagating “conspiracy myths” (Miriam Heigl, head of the Office for Democracy of the City of Munich) about NATO’s responsibility for the war in Ukraine.

As previously reported on the WSWS, Waters has sharply condemned the role of the US and NATO countries in fomenting the war in Ukraine, while, at the same time, making clear he holds no brief for the Russian president.

The fevered efforts of the SPD and Greens in Munich to quash opposition to the war in Ukraine is not limited to the rock musician, Waters. In March this year the city council sacked the chief conductor of the city’s Munich Philharmonic orchestra, Valery Gergiev, for not explicitly condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin. More recently, the city council dismissed the same orchestra’s first violinist, Lorenz Nasturica-Herschcowici, after a member of the Munich Green Party, Florian Roth, claimed Nasturica-Herschcowici was “part of Putin’s propaganda machinery.”

The political offensive to silence Roger Waters also has the backing of the country’s leading media. The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, published in Munich, has run numerous articles repeating the slanders of Mayor Reiter, echoing the claim that Waters “backs Putin.” In a comment on October 12, *Süddeutsche* journalist Moritz Baumstieger slandered Waters by fabricating an association between the latter with reactionary figures such as US singer and Trump supporter Kanye West and the German singer and right-wing supporter of conspiracy theories, Xavier Naidoo.

In 2018, the *Süddeutsche* magazine published a multi-page interview with Waters in which he justified his rejection of the Israeli government’s policy. “BDS does not deny Israel its right to exist,” he said. He added that the movement pursues three goals: “the end of military rule over Palestinians in the occupied territories, which began in 1967,” “full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel” and “enforcement of the internationally recognised right of return for Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their homes at the creation of Israel and thereafter.” Today, amidst the growing war hysteria against Russia, the publication of this interview would be unthinkable.

Germany’s leading radio news station, Deutschlandfunk, also joined the fray. In its regular “Corso” programme Deutschlandfunk reporter Susanne Luerweg repeated the claims that Waters was anti-Semitic and pro Russian, disgracefully going on to describe Waters as a “frustrated old white man.”

The hysterical reaction of the German media to an artist who had consistently and bravely warned of the danger of the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine mutating into a Third World War fully confirms Waters’ own judgement, following the recent cancellation of two concerts due to be held in Poland. Waters wrote: “The mainstream media in the West seems intent on encouraging public support for escalation of the proxy war between the USA and the Russian Federation that is raging in the Ukraine, even to the point of contemplating playing nuclear

chicken.”

Significantly, the Deutschlandfunk report also linked its smears against Waters to the recent campaign to shut down the world famous Documenta art exhibition based on claims that a handful of works on display were anti-Semitic.

The attacks on art, culture and dissenting views in Germany are taking forms unseen in the country’s post-World War II history. A brief look at German history confirms that censorship of the opposition was always integral to prepare for new wars. In Munich, at the instigation of the National Socialists, book burnings of progressive and anti-war authors took place in May 1933 in the city’s central Königsplatz. Four years later, Munich was the first port of call for the Nazis’ exhibition of so-called “Degenerate Art,” which denigrated all those German artists who opposed war.

In his interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2018, Waters himself drew the same comparison: “Wanting to silence me, as the mayor would have done if he could have, is the same as burning a book. Books are burned to condemn authors to silence and destroy ideas.”

The decisions made by the SPD and Greens in Munich to censor all opposition to the war in Ukraine have undoubtedly been coordinated with their party colleagues in the country’s capital. In Berlin, the federal coalition led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck (Greens) and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) are recklessly driving forward with Germany’s intervention in the Ukraine war.

On October 12 the coalition announced it would send anti-aircraft defence equipment to Ukraine as part of its rapid transition into a direct party of the war. On the same day the German press reported that the Court of Arbitration in Berlin had ruled that the ruins of Russian tanks destroyed by Ukrainian troops could be placed provocatively in front of the Russian Embassy in Berlin.

The campaign against Waters also exposes the mendacious claim that support for the Ukraine war is based on defending the rule of law and democracy. While President Putin is continually accused of suppressing dissent, the fact is that the very same forms of suppression are taking place here.

Against a background of growing social crisis, soaring inflation and growing opposition to war the SPD and Greens are determined to silence all criticism of their policies. This is behind the frenzied attempts to silence Roger Waters. The struggle against the censorship of art and culture by the SPD and Greens must be a central component of a new anti-war movement of the working class and youth.



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