

German President Steinmeier delivers war speech to the nation

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28 October 2022

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s “Address to the Nation” on Friday underscored what the Socialist Equality Party has long been warning about: Germany’s ruling class is using Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine to return to an aggressive great power policy after its heinous crimes in the 20th century and implement its war and rearmament plans against popular resistance.

Steinmeier’s remarks, delivered to an audience of invited soldiers, journalists, think tank representatives and leading politicians, can only be described as a “war speech to the nation.” The focus was a de facto declaration of war on Russia and the Russian population. “Our countries are against each other today,” Steinmeier explained. Moscow is “evil,” whereas “good will” is not enough.

Steinmeier explicitly rejected negotiations that did not seal Russia’s complete defeat in Ukraine. “A supposed peace that rewards such action, a peace that seals Putin’s land grab, is not peace,” he asserted. Such a “false peace” would not only “be a reign of terror for many people in Ukraine,” but would also “only increase Putin’s hunger.”

Steinmeier knows that the slogan of a total victory over Russia could lead to disaster. “An expansion of the war, even a nuclear escalation, must be prevented,” he asserted at one point. But the policies pursued by Berlin and the other leading NATO powers produce just such an escalation. The Kremlin has repeatedly threatened to defend Russian territory—including Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine that Moscow considers its own—with “all weapons systems at our disposal.”

Nevertheless, Steinmeier promised the new Ukrainian ambassador to Berlin, Oleksiy Makeyev, to support the right-wing, pro-Western regime in Kiev until victory over Russia. “We support them militarily—your president [Volodymyr Zelensky] has just told me how life-saving the German air defence systems are. We support them financially and politically,” assured Steinmeier. Sanctions, “the termination of contacts” and arms deliveries were necessary “instruments of conflict.”

This rhetoric of war against Russia makes clear the

traditions Germany’s ruling class is reconnecting with. Steinmeier’s phrases about “freedom” and “democracy” cannot conceal the fact that behind the offensive against Russia lie similar imperialist interests as those that fuelled the Nazis’ war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. At one point, Steinmeier described Germany as “a country so small on a world scale and practically without its own resources and mineral resources.”

In fact, Berlin is driven not only by the hunger for Russia’s vast resources, but also by the desire for retribution for its past military defeats—and not only in relation to Russia. As in the First and Second World Wars, the predatory ambitions of German imperialism extend far beyond Ukraine and Russia and are essentially also a declaration of war against its European and US allies.

In his speech, Steinmeier left no doubt about the German claim to leadership, including in military affairs. Germany needs “first of all a strong and well-equipped Bundeswehr (German army),” he said. “We are the strong country in the middle of Europe. We have a duty to do our part to defend the Alliance—much more so today than during the period when others, especially the US, held a protective hand over us.” Germany took on “its responsibility, in NATO, in Europe,” the President continued.

Berlin’s new goal, like its old one, is to organize Europe under German leadership in order to become a world power. Germany was “one of the greats in Europe. We expect leadership, leadership in the interests of Europe,” said Steinmeier. “The applause of the audience is not decisive. Strengthening Europe is crucial.”

Germany had to “get used” to the fact that “a country like ours comes under criticism.” Steinmeier’s role model in this respect is the United States. “Let’s look at the USA, they have a lot of practice at this. They’re a global leader. They are criticized for what they do and for what they do not do. You cannot point to others or call on higher instances. They need to know what they’re doing and why.”

Steinmeier chose not to go into more detail—for good reason. Otherwise, his propaganda about the “Russian

aggressor” who “destroyed the European security order” with the attack on Ukraine would have collapsed like a house of cards. In reality, it is the United States and its allies that have been waging war almost uninterrupted for 30 years, destroying entire countries—not only Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, but also parts of Europe.

German imperialism has played a central role in this from the outset. At the beginning of the 1990s, Berlin’s recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia initially led to a murderous civil war in the former Yugoslavia. In 1999, the NATO bombing of Serbia followed, which aimed, among other things, at the forcible secession of Kosovo. The NATO offensive against Russia and increasingly also China—Steinmeier attacked China’s “economic and political claim to power” in his speech—is the continuation of this war policy.

With the policy of war, the language of militarism also returns. “We must become conflict-capable, both internally and externally,” Steinmeier demanded. One needs “the will to assert oneself,” a “spirit of resistance” and the “strength of resistance.” All this is aimed at preparing the population for a new era of war. “The world is on the way to a phase of confrontation,” and “harder years, harsh years are coming. The peace dividend has run out. For Germany, an era of headwinds is beginning,” he said.

Steinmeier was very aware that this war propaganda will meet with enormous resistance among the population. After the horrors of two world wars and the Holocaust, the rejection of militarism among workers is deeply rooted. Again and again, Steinmeier was forced to admit that the economic sanctions against Russia and the delivery of arms to Ukraine are met with hostility in the population.

The Federal President appealed against this opposition for the unity of the nation. His call for the cohesion of “rich and poor” is a bad joke in view of the unprecedented social inequality. While the rich have received billions in gifts from the state in recent years, and the workers are confronted with inflation and mass layoffs, any resistance to this is to be suppressed in the name of “cohesion.”

This is what Steinmeier means when he speaks of the fact that Germany must not only rearm, but also become “conflict-capable internally.” Specifically, he proposed a “period of compulsory social service.” In this, as Steinmeier stated in an earlier interview, young people must perform either military service or forced labour in the social services in order to reduce the disaster in this sector caused by cuts and miserable working conditions, and at the same time destroy further regular jobs.

According to Steinmeier, there must be no resistance to this agenda of war and social devastation. Citizens would have to endure uncertainty and criticise some political

decisions at most, but under no circumstances would they be allowed to lead a “general attack on our political system,” Steinmeier said.

This attack on democratic rights received just as much support among the representatives of the existing political system as Steinmeier’s warmongering and great power fantasies. Without exception, they supported the speech with standing ovations. These included representatives of the military, such as the deputy general inspector of the Bundeswehr, Markus Laubenthal, influential journalists and representatives of the parties, including opposition Christian Democrat (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz, Free Democratic Party leader Christian Dürr and Thuringia’s Minister President Bodo Ramelow (Left Party).

Following the speech, Merz said that it had given “clear guidance.” “It was a catalogue of political tasks,” he continued. Now it is important to put this into practice, said the CDU leader.

Ramelow also backed the Federal President’s speech and, in particular, the statement that one cannot fight evil with good will. “I am amazed at the many Russian flags being raised in Thuringia by people who say they want to stand up for peace, ignoring the fact that the aggression and war of aggression were initiated by Mr. Putin,” said Ramelow.

This phalanx of all parties for militarism and social attacks underlines that a nuclear world war can indeed only be prevented in a “general attack on the political system.” The Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting for an international movement of the working class, the vast majority of the population, against war and its root cause, capitalism. We call on all readers to join this necessary struggle for a socialist future.



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