

Germany's president and chancellor beat the drum for Ukraine war and invoke national unity

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The continuation of the Ukraine war and the invocation of the unity of the nation were the focus of the traditional Christmas and New Year speeches of the German president and chancellor.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, both Social Democrats, advocated continuing the Ukraine war until Russia's complete defeat, even if this entailed enormous social and economic costs and the risk of nuclear war. Both invoked the "cohesion" and "togetherness" of society in seeking to pass on the disastrous consequences of the war to the mass of the population.

Steinmeier, who delivered the Christmas address, sanctimoniously declared, "This year, our most ardent wish is probably that peace will reign again." Only to immediately add, "But this peace is not yet tangible." It had to be "a just peace" that did not reward land grabbing, he said. Until then, "it is an imperative of humanity that we ... stand by those who are attacked," he said.

In plain language, this means that Germany and NATO will continue to escalate the war with billions in arms deliveries and military support until Russia capitulates. According to experts, this could take two to three years and claim hundreds of thousands more victims. The risk of the war spreading to the whole of Europe and involving the use of nuclear weapons is being deliberately accepted.

Scholz was even more explicit in his New Year's address. Several times, he repeated the phrase "the turn of the times," which he had employed in the spring to justify increasing the arms budget by €100 billion and vowed, "We will continue to support Ukraine." He claimed that thanks to the "cohesion and strength" of

our "dear fellow citizens," Germany "has not bowed to Russia," and praised the unity of the European Union and NATO.

Steinmeier also praised his "dear compatriots," going on to say, "You are feeling the consequences of this war, especially the economic consequences. But you bear the burdens because you are not indifferent to the fate of Ukrainians; because you care about their struggle for freedom; because you express solidarity and compassion."

Ukraine was "standing its ground with great courage. Europe is standing together. And our country is once again rising above itself in the challenge," Steinmeier continued. This year, he said, had shown that "together we can get through this period." His Christmas wish was "that we strengthen everything that unites us." These are outright lies.

Firstly, NATO is no more concerned with freedom and democracy in Ukraine than it was in its previous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, where it devastated entire countries, killing millions and driving countless more to flee. NATO deliberately provoked the Ukraine war by systematically advancing eastward, supporting the 2014 coup in Kiev, and arming the Ukrainian military since then, and is now using this to bring Russia to its knees.

Ukraine itself is also a valuable prey. Not only is it rich in coal and gas reserves, but it has critical raw materials—lithium, cobalt, titanium, beryllium and rare earths—worth an estimated €6.7 trillion, according to the Brussels-based Carnegie Endowment think tank.

This does not at all justify the Putin regime's military attack. It is playing into NATO's hands and strengthening the most reactionary forces—in both

Ukraine and Russia. But the main initiative for the war came from NATO, which does not want it to end until it achieves its goal.

The aggression with which the ruling class is proceeding, echoing Hitler's plans for conquest, is shown in an interview with Stefan Meister, the Russia expert at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), published by newsweekly *Der Spiegel* in its latest issue.

Meister accuses previous German governments of having adopted the "convenient but false interpretation of history" that "there could be change through rapprochement, in the style of Willy Brandt." At least 80 percent of the German elites had "collectively lied to themselves" and expanded their dependency on Russia.

What was needed, he said, was "a genuine long-term Russia policy" that was "ultimately about regime change in Moscow." This required leadership, Meister said, rather than a "system of systematic irresponsibility" in which political elites were afraid of "electoral risks," i.e., facing the will of the voters.

Secondly, the German population is not, as Steinmeier and Scholz claim, united behind the war. Large sections of it are sceptical or opposed to it. Conversely, the war and the incessant war propaganda in the media serve to intimidate and suppress the growing opposition to war and social inequality.

For decades, a tiny minority has shamelessly enriched itself at the expense of the majority. According to the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), the richest 10 percent in Germany own more than two-thirds of all wealth, while the entire poorer half owns only 1.3 percent. The real incomes of the poorest 10 percent have risen by only 5 percent since 1995, while those of the richest 10 percent have increased by 40 percent.

The Ukraine war is accelerating this divergence of income and wealth. The trade unions, which support the government's war policy, have signed collective bargaining agreements cementing wage "increases" far below the rate of inflation, which was 10 percent in 2022 and will average 7.2 percent in 2023, according to Bundesbank estimates. Added to this are skyrocketing energy costs and unaffordable rents. For the younger generation, in particular, the future looks bleak, even if they have studied for years.

Steinmeier and Scholz invoke the "cohesion" of society primarily because they fear open class struggles. Scholz spent much of his New Year's speech enumerating the support programs the government has put together to dampen the rise in prices somewhat. But they are nothing more than a drop in the ocean and, in any case, largely benefit the wealthy and the corporations, which are making record profits despite the pandemic and the war.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also fears a rebellion against war and social inequality. "There is still a majority in this country for financial support for Ukraine, for sanctions against Russia, for arms deliveries," comments its former editor-in-chief Kurt Kister. "But if acclimatisation, loss of trust and personal disadvantages grow in the second year of the war, things may look different in December 2023."

In the existing political system, this growing opposition to social inequality and war finds no expression. All parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament), from the Left Party to the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens to the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), support the war course.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is placing the fight against the hated war policy and social devastation at the centre of its campaign for the Berlin state elections on February 12. Together with its sister parties in the Fourth International, it is building a socialist party of the international working class that combines opposition to war and social inequality with the struggle against their cause, capitalism.



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