

German talk show utilises atrocity propaganda to justify expansion of the Ukraine war

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A policy of aggressive war and rearmament, such as that being pursued by the German government, is always accompanied by deafening propaganda. But with the growth of popular opposition to NATO's intensification of the Ukraine war, this propaganda is assuming hysterical and grotesque forms.

An example of this was provided by Louis Klamroth's recent talk show *Hart aber Fair* (Hard but Fair) on broadcaster ARD. Atrocity propaganda of the worst kind, open lies and a script orchestrated in detail were employed to intimidate anyone who harboured doubts about the constant escalation of the war by NATO and rejected the horrendous level of rearmament.

This was the reason for inviting Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht, who had published a "Manifesto for Peace" on February 10, opposing the "escalation of arms deliveries" and promoting "peace negotiations." As the WWSWS has pointed out, Wagenknecht does not take an anti-militarist stand, but advocates a different orientation for German militarism. Her differences with the German government are purely tactical.

Wagenknecht was the punching bag that all the guests and the moderator pounded on for 70 minutes. But she was not the real target. The broadcast was directed against the overwhelming opposition that is growing despite the media drumbeat for war. According to a Yougov poll from early February, 40 percent oppose the arms deliveries so far as being too extensive. As many as 44 percent oppose the delivery of battle tanks.

This deep-rooted rejection of again waging war against Russia was to be suppressed by all means in the broadcast. To this end, any attempt to try to understand the geostrategic and historical roots of the war and any criticism of NATO's escalation were muzzled using the most contemptible means.

At the very beginning, the floor was given to right-wing Humboldt Professor Emeritus Herfried Münkler, who has long promoted drone assassinations and the restriction of

democracy, and who claims Germany did not pursue imperialist interests in World War I. The professor explained that there could be no peace negotiations at present because Russia was fighting a war of attrition and did not want negotiations. Land gains for Russia should not be accepted by the NATO powers, he said, because otherwise other countries would also wage wars of aggression.

One wonders on what planet the professor has spent the last 30 years. During this time, the US and its allies have waged incessant wars of aggression in violation of international law, in Iraq alone costing a million lives and destroying an entire society.

But Münkler was immediately seconded by Liberal Democrat (FDP) politician Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who declared that Putin only understands the language of strength and that negotiations with him are not possible. "We are not dealing with someone who has mastered cultivated togetherness, human togetherness. Putin does not want that," she asserted.

This demonization of Putin, which Green Party politician Katrin Göring-Eckardt then immediately echoed, is a transparent attempt to justify the escalation of the war and conceal its real causes. Germany and the other NATO powers are not waging this war for peace and freedom—and certainly not for the Ukrainian people, who are suffering the most—but for their own geostrategic interests. They want to weaken and subjugate Russia to be able to hijack its raw materials and prepare for a war against China.

That is why the word geostrategy was not even allowed to be mentioned! When Wagenknecht made the sober statement that for Russia, the focus was not so much on gaining land but on security guarantees, the assembled propagandists immediately objected. Strack-Zimmermann accused Wagenknecht, and with her the demonstrators at last Saturday's rally, of "justifying why Ukraine was attacked." As if an analysis of the causes could be equated with justification.

Then, at halftime, more firepower was brought in to justify the escalation of the war and to shut down any discussion. Sergiy Osachuk, a sergeant major in the Ukrainian army, spoke by video, declaring that Putin wanted to eliminate not only Ukraine but everything “that had been achieved after the French Revolution in the 18th century, what we had achieved from the lessons of World War I and World War II.” No arms deliveries from NATO meant “even more thousands of torture chambers,” the military man said. The Ukrainian army was ready to fight Russia for 20 years until the last Russian soldier was pushed out of Ukraine, he declared.

This was the starting signal for a nasty bout of atrocity propaganda in which panelists and moderators passed the ball to one another. Atrocity propaganda is a well-known tool to justify the escalation of wars and to exclude any negotiations. Atrocities committed by the opposing side are systematically exaggerated or even invented, while the crimes of one’s own side are downplayed and denied.

Osachuk’s “thousands of torture chambers” is one such immoderate exaggeration. The Putin regime’s reactionary war is undoubtedly leading to foul crimes, but these are systematically magnified in order to continue and escalate the war. “Thousands of women are being raped, their hands are broken so that they can’t fight back,” Strack-Zimmermann, for example, declared, going far beyond the United Nations’ estimates of rape in Ukraine.

Heribert Prantl, a long-time department head at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and former liberal, immediately seized on this to justify the escalation of the war: “I am in favour of arms deliveries because the Ukrainian army must be put in a position to withstand the attacks and, with Western help, to push back the Russians and put an end to such atrocities,” he stated, adding, “Massive counterattacks must be made here.”

When Wagenknecht objected that “war crimes are being committed by both sides,” Klamroth interrupted her rudely and declared, “I can’t let that stand here. Let me show you what the UN says.” He then played a clip saying, “The United Nations has been collecting information on rape since the beginning of the war ... Evidence of rape by Ukrainian soldiers is not available to the UN, according to this. When it comes to the issue of rape, without exception, it always concerns Russian soldiers.”

When Wagenknecht then tried to correct this account, Klamroth left the podium, walked up to her, and barked, “Now we have a problem, because it is my responsibility as the presenter of this program not to let any false report stand here. I showed them that. That’s right.” Wagenknecht objected again but was cut off by Klamroth and the other panelists.

In fact, it was very clearly a misrepresentation on the part

of the moderator. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported rapes committed by Ukraine’s fascist Azov battalion in the Donbass even before the war. After the war began, the office issued regular reports on war crimes, including reports of rape by Ukrainian soldiers in July and September 2022.

With deliberate lies and their aggressive defence in the “discussion,” the program makers wanted to refute the plausible argument that rapes, just like other war crimes, can only be ended if the war is ended. Instead, they cultivated the image of brutal Russians going into the field against enlightened and humane Ukrainian soldiers. In this way, they seek to further impose their own war aims on the backs of the Ukrainian population.

“How can you, as a woman, say that this doesn’t concern you?” asked Strack-Zimmermann provocatively. When Wagenknecht refused to accept this baseless and stupid insinuation and took a clear stand against rape in war, Münkler, Strack-Zimmermann and Göring-Eckard barked at her in chorus for refusing to name the perpetrators.

This way of using sexual crimes in war to mobilize emotions for the expansion of war is all too familiar. The Nazis took it to extremes with atrocity propaganda against the Red Army. “Bolshevism is slavery, rape, mass murder, extermination,” read a well-known poster depicting a skeleton with a red star, with the words below: “Never Surrender!”

In the former West Germany, too, the exaggeration of actual and alleged assaults by Red Army soldiers served to fuel the Cold War while relativizing Germany’s own crimes. The warmongers are now picking up where they left off. This has nothing to do with a necessary condemnation of Russian war crimes but is intended to mobilize sentiments for their campaign against Russia, which itself is causing millions of people to suffer. This found a particularly hysterical expression on *Hart aber Fair*.



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