

German Economy Minister Habeck in Kiev: German big business makes grab for Ukraine

Johannes Stern
6 April 2023

The war in Ukraine is not about defending “democracy” and “freedom,” as official propaganda claims. As in any war, the imperialist powers are pursuing geostrategic goals and tangible economic interests. This was underlined by the trip of the German Economy Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) to Ukraine earlier this week.

It was Habeck's first trip to Kiev since the war began. He said he wanted to come only if he could bring something with him: “An economic delegation that gives Ukraine the hope that there will be a reconstruction after the war.” This involves massive profits for the German economy and the division of the spoils of war.

The war propagandists in the media openly say this. “With armaments, with maintenance and reconstruction, money can be made. No wonder the Europeans are also showing their ugly side here,” commented Stefan Kornelius, a leading political commentator at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, on Habeck's trip and the increasing competition between the imperialist powers.

The G-7 countries are already “openly discussing who would take control of the post-war Ukraine.” He continued: “Whoever pays calls the tune.” The German government therefore has no reason to lament and complain, but should “coolly acknowledge that this war, despite all common political outrage, also promotes the states' self-interest.”

In fact, German imperialism, which attempted to annex Ukraine during the First and Second World Wars, is aggressively pushing ahead. Already last August, the Eastern Committee of the German Economy set up a working group “Recovery Ukraine,” which published the dossier “Rebuild Ukraine” in September. It includes “proposals of the German economy for the reconstruction and modernization of the Ukrainian economy.” In October, the German government held a conference on “Reconstruction of Ukraine” in Berlin.

Now the plans are being put into action on the ground. Habeck's delegation consisted of seven leading representatives of the German economy – including Siegfried Russwurm, President of the Federation of German

Industries (BDI), Martin Wansleben, Managing Director of the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) and a representative of the federal state's bank, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) – and they made no secret of their interests.

Habeck himself sees the Eastern European country as a potentially important energy supplier. Germany and Ukraine have been partners in this area since 2020, he stressed, after visiting a substation of the energy company “Ukrenergo.” The Ukrainians' “strategic plans” are to “make the energy system broader and more decentralized.” In this respect, “two things fit together quite well: the need for security and a sustainable energy system.” Ukraine could become an energy exporter to Europe.

The hunger of German imperialism is not limited to questions of energy. In an interview with ZDF's *Heute Journal*, Habeck announced that the German pharmaceutical and chemical giant Bayer will invest €60 million in Ukraine. In addition, the building materials company Fixit Group will “expand its capacities in building materials production in Ukraine, almost doubling it.” This is also urgently needed for the repair of roads, buildings and bridges.

In order to secure Berlin's control over the reconstruction, Habeck promised the companies a substantial investment guarantee. “Should this factory building be destroyed, for example by missile attacks, the German state guarantees or is liable,” the economy minister promised. For war zones, “we usually don't do that, but in this case we do.”

In order to raise the enormous sums that the reconstruction will cost – estimates range from about €400 billion to over €1 trillion – a “triad” is needed: Ukraine must “create good investment conditions,” there must “be guarantees from the public sector,” and then “private capital must want to go to Ukraine.”

“Good investment conditions” are a euphemism for the brutal exploitation of the working class. Already last summer, the Zelensky regime promised potential donors that it would achieve annual GDP growth of more than 7 percent by 2032. Since then, Kiev has continued to attack the rights

of Ukrainian workers, who were already among the poorest and most exploited in all of Europe before the war.

Moreover, the exploitation of Ukraine is directly linked to the plans for the subjugation and plunder of Russia. In February, the Baltic states and Poland called on other Western governments to use Russia's central bank reserves, about \$300 billion of which are stored abroad, for Ukrainian reconstruction. Habeck did not comment on this proposal – which would be illegal and an act of robbery – but made it clear that the German government is seeking the military defeat of nuclear-armed Russia.

“We believe that Ukraine will be victorious, that it will be rebuilt, that there is an interest of Europe not only to support in need, but that Ukraine will also be a strong economic partner in the future,” Habeck said. There should be “no surrender on Putin's terms,” but the “restoration of an order that implements peace.”

Habeck's argument is cynical and mendacious. The imperialist powers, which have been at war continuously for almost three decades and have bombed entire countries, are not interested in peace, but in the expansion of war. “It would have been right to support Ukraine militarily earlier,” said Habeck, who was one of the few German politicians who called for “defensive weapons” to be delivered to Kiev before the Russian invasion. “The decisive factor is how quickly the promised tanks and the promised ammunition will arrive in Ukraine.”

The widening of the war, which is increasingly directly creating the danger of nuclear escalation – on Tuesday the Kremlin confirmed the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons to Belarus – is accompanied by aggressive propaganda about Russian war crimes. Habeck and Zelensky visited the basement of a school in the village of Jahidne. The Ukrainian president claimed that Russian soldiers crammed 350 residents inside, killing eleven Ukrainians. Another dozen were shot.

These claims cannot be verified. But atrocity propaganda is an important instrument of warfare. The opposing side is accused of horrific crimes that are either fictitious or massively inflated in order to dehumanize the enemy and seek its complete destruction.

“All you can wish for the President of Russia is to spend his remaining days in the basement with a bucket instead of a toilet,” Zelensky said. Habeck explained that he could understand Zelensky.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is reactionary, but the main responsibility for the war lies with the imperialist powers. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union 30 years ago, NATO has been systematically encircling Russia. In early 2014, Washington and Berlin organized a right-wing coup in Ukraine to install an anti-Russian regime in Kiev.

Even then they relied on fascist forces, which now play a central role in the war.

The propaganda about Russian war crimes in Ukraine cannot hide the fact that NATO is arming a government in Kiev that worships Nazi collaborators such as Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych and celebrates members of fascist army units and militias as “heroes of Ukraine.” All this is done with the full support of the Federal Government and, above all, the Greens.

Shortly before Habeck's visit, Green leader Marieluise Beck posted a selfie on Twitter with a certain “Kateryna P.,” praising her as “an adorable, highly creative young woman.” Her husband had fought “with Azov for a life of freedom instead of dull Russian terror. Those who are willing to give their lives for dignity and freedom are often the best. They are fighting for us too.”

Beck's hero is the former commander of the fascist Azov regiment Denys Prokopenko, who played a central role in the Battle of Mariupol. Prokopenko makes no secret of the fact that he sees the war against Russia as part of a far-right historical mission.

His grandfather fought against the Soviet Union in World War II in Finland, and Prokopenko writes: “It feels like I continued the same war, only on another section of the front, a war against the Kremlin's occupation regime. My grandfather had such a terrible hatred of communism, of Bolshevism, of the Sovok.”

During World War II, the Ukrainian nationalists and fascists collaborated with the Nazis and committed horrific crimes. One of the most heinous was the massacre of Babi Yar, which killed more than 33,000 Jewish men, women and children. In total, the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union cost the lives of about 27 million people. The third German attempt to control Ukraine and Russia follows in this dark tradition.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact