

The return of German militarism and the lessons of World War II

Christoph Vandreier
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This is the report delivered by Christoph Vandreier, the National Secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Germany), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30. To see all rally speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

I am very pleased to be able to speak at today's May Day and to extend revolutionary greetings from the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party) in Germany.

This May Day holds significant political importance. While NATO further escalates its proxy war against Russia, the United States and its allies are preparing a war against China. While the imperialist powers are sharpening their knives against each other, we are embodying the perspective of unity of the international working class against this madness: The perspective of international socialism.

This is especially significant here in Germany. In this country, the most heinous crimes in the history of mankind were committed. Now, tanks are once again rolling from here towards Russia. In March, the government decided, behind the backs of the population, to quintuple German military aid to Ukraine. Previously, it had already promised the delivery of more than 100 main battle tanks.

These weapons will further increase the suffering of the people in Ukraine and plunge the country deeper into an inferno. All talk of peace and freedom being defended in Ukraine is sheer hypocrisy. As in the brutal wars against Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine is about geopolitical and imperialist interests. Once again Germany wants to annex Russian and Ukrainian mineral resources and subjugate both countries.

The ruling class is prepared to once again reduce the continent to rubble and ash. They do not even shy away

from nuclear annihilation. With the tripling of the defense budget and the stated goal of building the most powerful army on the continent, it hearkens back to Hitler's megalomania.

The costs are to be borne by the working class. The government has already implemented a two-thirds slashing of health care spending and other massive budget cuts. Now, Finance Minister Christian Lindner demands further cuts of €20 billion in the social budget. The horrendous price increases for energy and food are also decimating workers' incomes. Hundreds of thousands are being thrown onto the streets.

This policy is supported by all parties in the German Bundestag.

The SPD has become the leading party of German militarism and advances rearmament with technocratic cold-bloodedness.

The Greens, who started out as pacifists, have turned into the worst warmongers. Foreign Minister Baerbock openly declared that Germany is at war with Russia and is now promoting war against China.

The Left Party is also part of this war conspiracy. Their leading candidate at the Berlin election, Klaus Lederer, explicitly supports the delivery of weapons to Ukraine. He accuses opponents of "open complicity with Putin."

This is the old charge by militarists against antiwar protesters. Even Karl Liebknecht was accused during World War I of collaborating with the Russian tsar, who had to be fought in the name of "European progress."

Just as Liebknecht did then, we counter today: "The main enemy is at home!" German imperialism, the German war parties, German secret diplomacy. The war can only be stopped when workers around the world fight together against the warmongers in their

own country.

Such an international movement is developing quite objectively. That is shown very impressively by this May Day rally. Anger is also growing in Germany. In the public sector, at the railroads and at the post offices, millions of workers want to strike against wage cuts. A movement is growing in the European and international working class, that, just as in France, is in conflict with the government, the state and the entire capitalist system.

Capitalism offers workers nothing but war, disease and impoverishment. That is why the ruling classes everywhere react with extreme aggression to any sign of resistance. No one should underestimate just what they are capable of, especially here in Germany!

Ninety years ago, the ruling class brought Hitler to power to smash the workers' organizations and thereby prepare for a new world war. The war of extermination and the Holocaust were not simply the result of Hitler's personal megalomania. Hitler embodied the German elites' quest for world power.

The Nazis received only 33 percent of the vote in the last free election. But influential circles in the army, among German capitalists and the media made Hitler Chancellor of the Reich. Eight weeks later, all bourgeois parties voted for the Enabling Act and provided Hitler with dictatorial powers.

The working class, on the other hand, rejected the Nazis almost unanimously. Even when the reign of terror had already begun to unfold and the first concentration camps were established, the Nazis obtained only 12 percent in the works council elections in April 1933, prompting them to cancel the elections.

But the workers were prevented by their own leaders from taking up the fight against Hitler. The Stalinized KPD refused the united front against the fascists and stunned the workers with the passive slogan: "After Hitler, us."

Even after Hitler came to power, the SPD called on its members to remain "on the ground of legality." The Social Democratic Federation of Trade Unions assured Hitler that they would integrate into the Nazi state. The unions were "in the course of their history for natural reasons more and more fused with the state itself," according to a March 1933 statement by the General Confederation of German Trade Unions.

On May 1, 1933, exactly 90 years ago, the union

leaders called on the workers to march together with the Nazis under the swastika flag. The following day the union halls were occupied and their leaders locked up in concentration camps. Social Democracy and the trade unions sought to close ranks with the bourgeois state to the point of complete self-sacrifice.

Only the Trotskyist movement fought for the perspective of the united front of the working class, which would have made it possible to stop the Nazis and prevent the catastrophe of World War II and the Holocaust.

Now the same questions are coming to a head again under changed conditions. Today, the SPD is a purely bourgeois party, which is at the forefront of implementing policies of war and austerity. The trade unions are also no longer workers' organizations, but police forces to prevent strikes, more comparable to the Nazis' German Labor Front.

The bourgeoisie does not have a mass fascist movement today, but it displays the same ruthlessness as in the 1930s.

The central task remains the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. This perspective is embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Workers must break out of the straitjacket of unions and unite worldwide in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Workers must resist the madness of war and capitalism through the unity of the international working class and build the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.



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