Zelensky's wartime visit to Berlin and Germany's new "Drive to the East"

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On Sunday morning, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was received with military honors in front of the Chancellery in Berlin as part of his European trip. The setting, with several dozen uniformed and armed soldiers, was militaristic. After a conversation and a press conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the two heads of government flew together under the highest security precautions to Aachen, where Zelensky received the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen.

Zelensky's visit to Berlin marks a new stage in the intervention of German imperialism in the war in Ukraine. De facto, Germany is again at war with Russia, following a dark tradition. Already in the 20th century, German imperialism tried twice to subdue Russia militarily, committing horrific crimes. Now the ruling class is trying a third time. As in the two previous wars, Ukraine is a central battlefield. And again, German imperialism relies on right-wing Ukrainian nationalists.

The official phrases about defending "freedom" and "democracy" are nothing but propaganda. Everyone who is not completely naive historically knows that it is about the old questions again. The renewed "drive" of German imperialism "to the East" (*Drang nach Osten*) and a third "grab for world power" (*Griff nach der Weltmacht*). Nobody should have any illusions. German tanks will be followed by German soldiers in the end, and they will not stop at the Russian border.

The mobilization of the German military machine is already the most comprehensive since the end of the Second World War. On Saturday, the day before Zelensky's arrival, the German government announced a massive increase in its military aid for the Ukrainian army. "Germany is preparing its biggest military support package yet for Ukraine," the Foreign Office wrote on Twitter.

"It includes artillery, air defense, armored combat vehicles & military engineering capabilities worth over 2.7 billion Euros." Specifically, it includes 30 Leopard 1 A5 battle tanks, 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles, 18 howitzers, 100 armored combat vehicles, 4 IRIS-T SLM air defence systems, and 12 IRIS-T SLS launchers plus the associated missiles and artillery ammunition.

In addition, the German defence industry is planning the construction of tanks and other weapons systems directly in Ukraine. "The contracts are signed," said Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger. Rheinmetall has established a joint venture for the repair and construction of tanks with the Ukrainian state-owned company Ukroboronprom. The cooperation on tanks is "only the first step on the way to comprehensive cooperation," writes the *Handelsblatt* newspaper. In the coming days, "the contracts for two more joint ventures will be signed—for the areas of ammunition and air defence."

At the joint press conference with Zelensky, Scholz called for a military alliance with Kiev. "The close relationship will shape the relationship between our two countries for decades to come," he said. "In the face of horror, of injustice crying out to the heavens, we are moving even closer together. We support Ukraine not only in humanitarian terms, but also politically, financially and, of course, with weapons."

Scholz boasted about the extent of military aid so far and made it clear that all of this is only the beginning. "Since the beginning of the war, our bilateral support to Ukraine alone has amounted to €17 billion, and we have set the course for ensuring that this assistance will continue in the coming years. … Germany is now the second largest supporter of Ukraine after the United States, and we will continue to do so." This makes "the size of the package… clear." He added, "We will continue to support Ukraine for as long as necessary."

Berlin's declared goal is the complete defeat of the Russian military in Ukraine. Kiev "rightly demands, and with our full support, that [peace] cannot mean simply freezing the war or that a dictated peace be formulated by the Russian side," Scholz said.

For their part, in order to achieve a "victory peace," the imperialist powers are increasingly waging a direct war against the nuclear-armed power of Russia. It is "completely normal" in such a military dispute "that the attacker also proceeds into opposing territory--for example, to block supply routes," German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said recently. This is a blank check for Ukrainian attacks on Russia and comes close to a direct declaration of war.

Germany's war offensive, which increasingly raises the danger of a nuclear world war, is publicly justified with claims about the defense of Ukraine against Russia's "aggressive war." This, too, is nothing but propaganda. It is not Moscow that is the main aggressor in Ukraine, but the imperialist powers. With its longstanding military encirclement of Russia, NATO has deliberately provoked the reactionary intervention of the Putin regime. Now it is escalating the conflict in order to subjugate resource-rich Russia and also to cement its control over Ukraine.

In this way, German imperialism, in particular, is continuing its historical plans for great power status. Already in the First World

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War, control of raw material-rich and geostrategically central Ukraine—in addition to the establishment of German hegemony over "Central Europe" (*Mitteleuropa*)—was one of the declared war aims of the German Empire. Historian Oleh S. Fedyshyn writes about this in his book *Germany's Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution 1917-1918*:

> At first, the Germans did not intend to go beyond Kiev. Then they decided to move as far eastward as Kharkov. Soon afterward, the knowledge that the coal of the Donets basin was absolutely necessary for the operation of Ukrainian industry and transportation convinced the Germans that they had to move into this area, too, to make the coal region safe from the Bolsheviks. Finally, the Germans extended their domination still farther eastward by occupying roughly one third of the Don region, and eventually they established themselves in Georgia. ... While political and legal arrangements in the Ukraine remained unclear, one thing was beyond dispute: Germany was deeply committed to intensify its exploitation of the Ukrainian economy. This was bound to deepen the Reich's political involvement not only in the Ukraine but in the east as a whole.

During the Second World War, Hitler continued to pursue this policy. In particular, the German historian Fritz Fischer pointed out that a direct line from the German occupation of Ukraine in the First World War led to the Nazis. One of the co-founders of the Nazi party newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, whose political ideas were incorporated into Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, was the former German-appointed head of government in Kiev, Hetman Skoropadsky. In the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which led to the Holocaust and cost the lives of at least 27 million Soviet citizens, the conquest of Ukraine played a central role. "The geo-political, strategic and economic goals ('We want to ride to Ostland!') are in continuity with Wilhelmian all-Germany expansionism," Fischer explained in his book *Hitler war kein Betriebsunfall* ("Hitler was not an accident").

Now German imperialism is once again pursuing the goal of removing Ukraine and other countries that once belonged to the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire from Moscow's sphere of influence and bringing them under the control of the German-dominated European Union. "The awarding of the Charlemagne Prize to Zelensky marks a new beginning—the beginning of our further convergence in Europe, together with Ukraine, with the states of the Western Balkans, with Moldova and, in the future, also with Georgia," Scholz said.

In other words, behind the German war offensive are, at its core, the same imperialist appetites as before. Since German reunification, the ruling class has been systematically working to organise Europe under German leadership to pursue its global geostrategic and economic interests—increasingly by military means. German imperialism already played a central role in the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia and the NATO bombardment of Serbia. This was followed by war missions of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa. With regard to Russia, Berlin is not only driven by hunger for the country's vast resources, but also by the desire for retribution for past defeats in war.

While all parliamentary parties, especially the nominally left parties, are pushing the course of war and rearmament, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party of Germany—SGP) has fought against the return of German militarism from the very beginning. We warned in a resolution as early as 2014—shortly after the anti-Russian coup in Ukraine:

> History is returning with a vengeance. Almost 70 years after the crimes of the Nazis and its defeat in World War II, the German ruling class is once again adopting the imperialist great power politics of the Kaiser's Empire and Hitler. The speed of the escalation of the war propaganda against Russia recalls the eve of World War I and World War II. In Ukraine, the German government is cooperating with the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector, which stand in the tradition of Nazi collaborators in the Second World War. It is using the country that was occupied by Germany in both world wars as a staging ground against Russia.

This process is well advanced. Germany and the other imperialist powers are vying to arm the Ukrainian army and the fascist forces operating within it in order to wage war against Russia. In this process, it is clear that the return of Germany as an aggressive military power will also increase tensions between the European powers and, above all, between Germany and the United States. From the point of view of the German bourgeoisie, the struggle for supremacy in Europe and over Ukraine and Russia is ultimately the preparation for a renewed confrontation with the USA.

The only way to avert the catastrophe of a destructive third world war is to build a socialist movement of the international working class, including the Ukrainian and Russian working classes, against war and its cause: capitalism. We urge our readers to join the SGP and its international sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International today and take part in this struggle.

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