Oppose the State Department's slanders against Roger Waters!

David Walsh
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The slanders against Roger Waters are pouring down like Niagara. The musician-activist has come under attack because of his opposition to the US-led war in Ukraine, his criticism of the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians and his staunchly anti-establishment political views as a whole. The ruling elites through their corrupt media outlets are attempting to destroy Waters and intimidate other artists, performers and intellectuals from speaking out. This is a desperate and systematic attack on freedom of speech and artistic expression.

The Biden administration weighed in on Tuesday. The US State Department asserted in an unsigned email that Waters had "a long track record of using antisemitic tropes" and that a recent concert in Germany "contained imagery that is deeply offensive to Jewish people and minimized the Holocaust."

The email was a written follow-up to pointed questions posed Monday at a State Department briefing. A journalist asked a befuddled and unprepared State Department spokesman whether the Biden administration concurred with the "incredible distortion" involved in comments made about Waters by Deborah Lipstadt, the US special envoy to combat antisemitism.

Lipstadt, for her part, had expressed agreement with the remark of the European Commission's Katharina von Schnurbein, who claimed there was nothing "more antisemitic than using Anne Frank as a prop on a German stage while prancing around in a Nazi uniform attacking Jews." Lipstadt ignorantly condemned Waters "and his despicable Holocaust distortion."

Of course, as any honest person—or anyone who cares to find out—knows, Waters has been performing a version of his anti-authoritarian *The Wall* for 40 years, including a portion where he impersonates a fascistic type who attacks "queers" and "reds" and "Jews" and threatens to kill them all. The theatrical work is a ferocious, satirical attack on bigotry, racism, antisemitism and anticommunism.

In the effort to destroy Waters, however, no distortion or lie is too base or absurd.

The mud-slinging performs an important political function and needs to be examined and countered.

The US State Department, with all its vast resources and deadly power, has now given its official seal of approval to the claims of antisemitism against Waters. This a most serious warning. The example of Julian Assange should not be lost on anyone.

The hypocrisy stinks to high heaven. It is impossible here to go through the history of this executive agency and its friendly relations with military dictatorships, fascist and semi-fascist regimes, many of them officially associated with antisemitism or racism, including that of Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, apartheid South Africa, "white terror" governments in Taiwan and South Korea, innumerable homicidal regimes in South and Central America—the list is too extensive.

Simply focusing on the present, the Biden administration is financing and directing a war against Russia in alliance with the fascist-infested Ukrainian state and military. It is not even entirely appropriate to speak of "neo-Nazis"—in many cases, these are people who see an *unbroken* line of continuity between themselves and the Nazi accomplices of Stepan Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its ilk.

Lipstadt earned respect and fame by opposing Holocaust deniers such as David Irving, defeating his libel suit in an English court in 2000. Moreover, Lipstadt condemned German historian and Hitler apologist Ernst Nolte, who first attempted to rehabilitate Nazism during the 1980s, claiming that its historic crimes were an understandable response to the barbarism of Bolshevism in the USSR.

But today Lipstadt is a wholehearted supporter of the US-NATO war against Russia.

Her evolution exemplifies the foul betrayal by an entire social layer of their previous scholarship and principles. They are all engaged in the trivialization and legitimization of the fascists who perpetrated the Holocaust.

Lipstadt finds herself in alliance with figures defending the Ukraine war, which Waters opposes, who use Nolte's

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arguments, couched a little more carefully. For example, Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, who, as the WSWS put it yesterday, now argues that "anything that the OUN did in World War II was the entirely understandable response of Ukrainian freedom fighters to Soviet oppression." Krugman "resurrects the historical falsifications of the right-wing apologists of German Nazism."

Logic flies out the window, because as Leon Trotsky argued, "when people seek long, especially if they are armed with power, they find something in the end. … When it comes to a threat against their material interests, the educated classes set in motion all the prejudices and confusion which humanity is dragging in its wagon-train behind it."

Roger Waters has become the victim of a media lynching because his hostility to the powers that be resonates with millions of people, especially young people. He is one of the few of his generation who has not betrayed, in the words of American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon, "the artist's sacred duty to hold the mirror up to life and reflect it truly."

Waters refers in a recent video statement to the "scum" who are trying to get his upcoming concerts in Britain banned. "It's insane," Waters explains. "If we shout the lie loud enough, 'Roger Waters is an antisemite,' we'll be all right. We'll get people to believe it.' Vilify him destroy him. … Repeat your lie, it remains a vicious lie." The musician acknowledges, however, that "I'm really upset … beyond all measure" by the smears, which are "deeply, deeply insulting."

He notes that the attacks, "not just from a personal perspective," are "an outrage." It denies everything that British society claims to be about, democracy, "fair play." He bristles, as well he should, at "the idea that I should not be allowed to speak."

The famed musician describes how he refers in all his concerts to victims of oppression in the given locality. Thus, in America, he pointed to victims of police murder like George Floyd. In Germany, he paid tribute to Anne Frank, young victim of the Nazis, along with Sophie and Hans Scholl, guillotined in 1943 by the Hitler regime for their anti-fascist activity.

As we noted in July 2022, during the North American leg of Waters' current tour, the vast majority of the performers of his age "lost their anger decades ago. They made their social and artistic peace with society. They have to continue performing their original material because they have nothing new and important to say. Worst of all, they may even have a Kennedy Center Honor, that 'wide rainbow-colored ribbon' of shame, hung around their necks by US presidents whose hands are drenched with blood."

Waters "remains a living, working, thinking artist. He is still engaged, still pressing forward. His work is a response of a serious artist to the conditions of his time."

The slander campaign against a single musician reflects the intense nervousness of the US government and its allies. The ruling class is terrified that anti-war views may catch on, become contagious. Waters' concert tour has been attended by hundreds of thousands of people and his condemnations of the present system and its crimes received with standing ovations, including in Germany where the authorities unsuccessfully sought to shut down his concerts.

Waters has millions of followers. What if other artists and intellectuals follow suit? The establishment feels the ground crumbling beneath its feet. Of course, it lashes out, tries to trample whatever is progressive in society in blood and filth.

The official narrative is already being questioned and opposed by masses of working people all over the world. Support for the war is concentrated in a small upper-middle class social layer, whose rabid hatred of Russia is historically rooted in Cold War anti-communism. Despite the restoration of capitalism, Russia will not be forgiven for its historical association with the October Revolution, Bolshevism and socialism.

Political slander of this sort ultimately undermines and undoes the slanderer. It is a double-edged sword. Workers and young people will begin to ask themselves: What does it mean that the claims about Waters come from the same sources that are most hostile and hateful to us? Governments that preside over poverty and social inequality, that allow a pandemic to kill millions, that pursue endless wars, that threaten to destroy every democratic right. A media that denounces workers as lazy, the youth as irresponsible, strikers as dangerous to the economy, the poor as responsible for their own misery.

Waters is a courageous, principled opponent of imperialist war and oppression. It is the job of the working class, and only the working class can do this, to adopt him as its ally and defend him.

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