

“Day of German Unity”: Germany’s leading conservative paper attacks Lenin

Peter Schwarz
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The front page of the online edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on October 3, the 35th anniversary of German unification, carried a frontal attack on Lenin. Under the headline “One must counter the myth that everything started out well,” the mouthpiece of the Frankfurt stock exchange complained: “Lenin still will not disappear even 35 years after reunification.”

What followed was a long screed of almost 3,000 words in which the leader of the Russian October Revolution was denounced as a “criminal” whose name, it was claimed, “leads to a trail of violence, blood and terror,” who stood for “dictatorship, violence and murder” and who “belongs in hell.” The piece asserted that Lenin had established a “system of terrorist surveillance and repression” whose tradition the SED (Socialist Unity Party) regime in the GDR (German Democratic Republic, East Germany) had continued. This was presented as “the true face of communism.”

The article relied on contemporary witnesses who had come into conflict with the Stalinist regime of the GDR and had been persecuted for distributing anti-SED leaflets or trying to flee to the West.

Finally, the federal commissioner for the victims of the SED dictatorship, Evelyn Zupke, was quoted complaining that isolated Lenin statues still stood in some German towns. She said this sent the wrong signal and could even foster positive impressions. One must “counter the myth that everything actually began well,” Zupke demanded. “Many people still cling to the delusion that these were basically good ideas.” Too rarely, she said, was addressed “what trail of violence this ideology has left in human history, the millions of dead since 1917.”

At first glance, more than a hundred years after Lenin’s death, it may seem surprising that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* would feel compelled to verbally beat the great revolutionary to death once more. Since the dissolution of the GDR and the Soviet Union 35 years ago it has repeatedly proclaimed that socialism had failed and no longer matters. Yet it is obvious that the paper’s editors

themselves do not really believe this tale.

They have dug deep into the moth-eaten anti-communist propaganda of the Cold War because they fear that the revolutionary, Marxist perspective embodied by Lenin and his comrades—above all Leon Trotsky—could regain mass support. Their hatred of Lenin is an expression of their fear of socialist revolution.

Lenin’s political genius lay in grasping that the outbreak of the First World War—the greatest catastrophe in history to that point—represented the collapse of international capitalism, just as Marx had predicted.

The imperialist war was not simply an arbitrary policy that could be replaced by a different, more peaceful one. It followed inevitably from the laws of capitalism—the replacement of free competition by monopolies, the dominance of finance capital over industrial capital, and the complete partitioning of the world among the imperialist powers, which required a violent redivision. “This war will soon, if there is not a series of successful revolutions, be followed by other wars,” Lenin warned at the beginning of the First World War.

While the leaders of Germany’s SPD and other social-democratic parties betrayed their pledges against war, called for the defence of the fatherland and postponed socialism to some indefinite future, Lenin called for struggle against the warmongers at home and for the international unity of the working class. In October 1917 the Russian working class, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, seized power and on the same day ended the war.

The October Revolution was an act of liberation of unprecedented international significance. Millions of workers around the world joined the Communist parties; liberation movements against barbaric colonial oppression gained immense momentum; in Russia culture flourished despite material shortages, widespread illiteracy was overcome within a few years, and after initial years of wartime deprivation the economy experienced substantial growth despite international isolation.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*’s attempt to present

the October Revolution as the origin of “dictatorship, violence and murder” rests on hackneyed lies that have been refuted time and again. “Dictatorship, violence and murder” came from the imperialist powers, which imposed a civil war on the young workers’ state and relied on notorious butchers—such as the tsarist generals Kornilov, Denikin, Wrangel and Kolchak—who were infamous for conducting antisemitic pogroms.

The Bolsheviks also resorted to repressive measures, which, under civil-war conditions, were unavoidable. But equating coercive measures taken in a civil war with the later Stalinist terror is a gross historical falsification.

Stalin’s terror did not target the enemies of the revolution, but its leaders. The Great Terror of the late 1930s claimed several hundred thousand devoted revolutionaries, including almost the entire Lenin-era leadership of the Bolshevik Party and much of the command of the Red Army. Its climax came in August 1940 with the assassination of Leon Trotsky, who had built the Left Opposition internationally and in 1938 founded the Fourth International to defend Lenin’s legacy against Stalin.

Equating Leninism with Stalinism is the great historical lie of the 20th century; the more historical research refutes it, the more stubbornly it is repeated. It places the leaders of the revolution on a par with its gravediggers, equating victims with their murderers.

Stalin represented a privileged bureaucracy that developed within the state and party apparatus under conditions of economic hardship and international isolation, whose interests increasingly clashed with those of the working class. Fixated on securing its own incomes, the bureaucracy grew more hostile to the prospect of an international socialist revolution on which the October Revolution had been based. Internationally, it pursued an increasingly counter-revolutionary policy that led to numerous defeats of the working class.

For a long time, the bureaucracy did not dare to touch the socialised property relations created by the October Revolution. With the onset of the Cold War, it extended them to the so-called buffer states of Eastern Europe, whose control Stalin agreed with the US and Britain toward the end of the war. But unlike in the Soviet Union, there was no proletarian revolution in Eastern Europe. The nationalizations, which constituted social progress, were accompanied by repressive measures against the working class.

Eventually it was the Stalinist bureaucracy itself—as Trotsky had warned—that took the initiative toward capitalist restoration. What Hitler’s tanks had not accomplished, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and their successors completed. They dissolved the Soviet Union and plundered the socialised

property. In the East, the SED, which renamed itself the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), played an active role in introducing capitalism and in the integration of the GDR with West Germany.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its German section, then called the League of Socialist Workers, were alone in warning of the consequences of this development. They opposed the illusion that German reunification would bring prosperity and democracy; and called for the overthrow of the SED regime while preserving the socialised property.

The bankruptcy of the Stalinist regimes and their policy of national socialism was a result of the contradiction between the global character of the world economy and the nation-state system, which undermined all national-reformist programs—including those of social democracy and the unions. The same contradiction between world economy and the nation state heralded—the ICFI warned at the time—a new era of imperialist wars and fierce class struggles.

On the 35th anniversary of German reunification there can be no doubt that this warning was correct. Germany and the other NATO states are escalating the war against Russia, supporting the genocide in Gaza and spending trillions on war and rearmament, which they plan to recoup through massive attacks on the working class. The gap between rich and poor has taken on historically unprecedented proportions. Fascist tendencies are raising their heads everywhere, especially in the US, where Trump is building an authoritarian dictatorship. Against this, resistance is growing.

This is why the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published an attack on Lenin on its front page on the “Day of German Unity,” as it is called. Workers and young people should draw their own conclusions from this and study the history and perspective of the revolutionary socialist movement embodied today by the ICFI.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, published daily by the ICFI for 27 years, contains a vast wealth of lectures, background articles and analyses dealing with current and historical aspects of the Marxist movement and politics. They form the basis for arming the working class for the inevitable class battles ahead.



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