

The Frankfurt Book Fair—in the service of the war against Russia

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The Frankfurt Book Fair, held October 15–19, was dominated by Germany’s war policy against Russia. As a team from the *World Socialist Web Site* observed, this provoked considerable disapproval among visitors.

As in previous years since 2022, Russian publishers were excluded from the fair. Ukraine, by contrast, was given extensive space. Financially supported by the German federal government and the City of Frankfurt, the Ukrainian exhibition even had its own stage. There, both Wolfram Weimar (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), minister of state for culture in the Federal Chancellery, Bundestag (parliament) President Julia Klöckner (CDU) and former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made appearances. According to reports from one visitor, Ukrainian soldiers even appeared on stage in full uniform.

Weimar’s predecessor, Claudia Roth (Greens), announced funding of €900,000 for a German-Ukrainian book project. What such funding promotes could be seen clearly at the Ukrainian stands, which featured right-wing war propaganda and literature glorifying Stepan Bandera, the central figure of Ukrainian fascism.

Peace Prize for Karl Schlögel in the Paulskirche

This year’s Peace Prize of the German Book Trade was awarded to Eastern European historian and right-wing propagandist Karl Schlögel, a vocal advocate of rearmament and of achieving a military victory over Russia. Throughout the week, Schlögel dominated the media and numerous events with his mantra that Ukrainian soldiers were “heroes” who were “teaching Europeans what lies ahead of them.”

The WSWs team had previously drawn attention to the case of the imprisoned Ukrainian socialist and anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotiuk with posters outside the book fair and distributed an article criticising the awarding of the “Peace Prize” to the warmonger Schlögel.

In his acceptance speech for the €25,000 award, Schlögel lived up to these expectations, delivering a warmongering speech that portrayed the military defeat of Russia as Europe’s “destiny.” Like many former Maoists who made careers in Germany—he was a leading member of the Maoist Communist Party of Germany (KPD) from 1972 to 1980, which glorified Stalin and branded the “social-imperialist” Soviet Union as the “main enemy”—Schlögel has become a fervent supporter of the rebirth of German imperialism.

He was not content with declaring Russian President Putin to be a “figure of evil.” He also denounced anyone who sought to discern a

“deeper meaning” in Putin’s policy—such as fears of encirclement or security concerns. Schlögel, on the other hand, exalted Ukraine and its soldiers as pure figures of light. “No one,” he declared, “is more interested in peace than they are.” The front was being defended by “an army of volunteers”—an obvious lie given the brutal forced conscription that is taking place.

They teach us that national defence has nothing to do with militarism... [They] teach us that what is happening should not be called the “Ukraine conflict,” but war. They help us understand who we are dealing with: a regime that wants to annihilate Ukraine as an independent state and that hates Europe. They show us that making concessions to the aggressor only whets his appetite for more, and that appeasement does not lead to peace but paves the way to war.

Comparisons between today’s German war offensive and that of the Nazis, or references to neo-Nazis in the Ukrainian leadership, Schlögel dismissed as Russian enemy propaganda: “Compared to this, the propaganda of Soviet times seems outdated and almost harmless.”

The much-travelled historian, who places great value in his books on personal observation, seems not to have noticed the gigantic monuments to Stepan Bandera and other Nazi collaborators now glorified throughout Ukraine—or, more likely, he agrees with this glorification. After all, 10 years ago he vehemently defended his fellow historian Jörg Baberowski, who had claimed that Hitler “was not cruel.”

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Schlögel had already spoken in favour of deploying Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) troops in Ukraine—even against the will of the German population. Asked by the reporter whether “the deployment of German soldiers in Ukraine would be legitimate to secure peace,” Schlögel replied, “Yes. But it will trigger a fierce controversy in Germany.”

The solemn presentation of the Peace Prize, which brought together all the political and cultural notables of Frankfurt and Hesse, was broadcast live by ZDF television. At the end, ZDF reporter Daniel Cohn-Bendit—the former student leader in France, later co-founder of the Greens and now a European politician—was asked his opinion of Karl Schlögel. Cohn-Bendit endorsed Schlögel’s call for military readiness with the words: “There are many who want peace, but few who are willing to fight for it.”

Since Russia’s invasion, said Cohn-Bendit, “it has been clear that Europe must become a power; Europe must be capable of defending

itself. It is not a soft power—we can buy nothing with that. ... If we want to defend democracy, we must be capable of defending ourselves.” That readiness, he claimed, could be felt “today in the Paulskirche.” (The church is famous as the meeting place of the Frankfurt National Assembly, the first freely elected parliament of Germany, which convened there from 1848 to 1849.)

Book Fair visitors speak out against war

The WSWS team had a very different experience outside the fair. Several visitors who initially hurried past turned back to take leaflets once they realised that they were about the struggle against war and militarist propaganda.

Many expressed their concern about the danger of a new large-scale war and spoke out against the reintroduction of conscription currently under discussion in Berlin. “They even want to use a lottery system to force young people into the army. I find that so appalling,” said one visitor. On the same day, the office of the German Peace Society–United War Resisters (DFG-VK) reported that its counselling services were being “positively flooded”: visits to its homepage had risen from 24,000 in May to 125,000 in September.

There were also—mostly affluent—visitors who indicated support for rearmament. A man who identified himself as a proud nationalist said: “Schlögel—he’s our man for Ukraine!” A woman declared: “I was a pacifist all my life, but now I think it’s necessary to arm and fight against the Russian threat.” When asked what she planned to do when “the first atomic bomb is in the air,” she had no answer.

Yet many, especially younger visitors, reacted to Schlögel’s motto “Si vis pacem, para bellum” (“If you want peace, prepare for war”) with criticism and denunciation. Schlögel had repeated this phrase in the Paulskirche itself.

Hans, a WSWS reader who helped distribute the flyers, said, “That phrase has never been true in the 20th century—and today, with nuclear weapons, I can’t even find words for it. We all know from history that it has never worked; on the contrary.”

Regina from Heidelberg added, “There’s that saying, ‘The rich bring the weapons, and the poor bring the corpses.’ That’s exactly it. It’s pure profit-making. We all have grandparents or uncles who died or came back crippled from war. The trauma still runs through families—there were two world wars.”

A young woman named Jana, who works professionally with the deaf and hearing-impaired, said, “I’m in my early thirties, and I’m deeply worried about the future. I always hoped that Germany, of all countries, had learned something from history, but apparently that’s not the case.” Her parents had always opposed war on principle. “They were also against this terrible rearmament—because history shows that wars always claim innocent victims.”

Jana bought the book *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*. She stressed that the current Gaza war showed the utter senselessness of such violence. “They’re saying there’s a bit of a pause now—after two years of bloodshed! But what about all the people who were killed? What about them? Does none of that matter anymore?”

Jana said she believed “war only ever leads to more hatred and extremism.” She recalled a statement by US President Biden about the Ukraine war: “Biden once said, ‘In Ukraine, we will fight to the last

Ukrainian soldier.’ And I thought to myself—it’s not his children or his compatriots who are the cannon fodder. What right do they have to make such decisions? It’s always about economic interests. It’s terrible. They talk about human rights, but under capitalism they make money from war and weapons—at whose expense?”

Hans, who engaged in animated discussions with young people while distributing leaflets, explained that one thing he had learned from the WSWS was the importance of understanding the historical background. “I think the problem,” he said, “is that people engage far too little with the complex geopolitical dynamics behind wars like the one in Ukraine. To equate Russia’s invasion simply with Hitler’s war of annihilation, as the media does today, is scientifically false. It’s historically absurd.”

He said he had come because “the public needs to know what kinds of people the major media now celebrate, and what kind of war propaganda goes with it. When we talk about people like Karl Schlögel—he’s a right-wing warmonger. And we should know that he has openly associated with people like Jörg Baberowski who downplays the Holocaust. All the alarm bells should be ringing.”

“Some things need to be said clearly,” Hans continued. “Schlögel is calling for an escalation of war. If it were up to him, we’d already be marching on Russia. History shows, however, that it was the West that provoked all this with its NATO encirclement of Russia. Russia, with its resources, is a highly coveted target. That’s nothing new for the German bourgeoisie. But now, in a new capitalist crisis, it’s all coming to the surface again.”

Hans also spoke of his own recent experience as a temporary worker, noting, “The current drive to war goes hand in hand with enormous social polarisation—the widening gap between rich and poor.” It was important to reject the propaganda that “foreigners or refugees are to blame for everything.” “The so-called middle class is collapsing because it’s being crushed by big capital, and the politicians point the finger at foreigners. But that’s the classic fascist method.”

On temporary work, Hans said, “It’s spreading everywhere. It’s a hybrid between market economy and organised crime. Mafia structures are taking hold.” He added that reading the WSWS, which he had followed for years, had helped him understand these developments more deeply: “I can recommend it to anyone who wants to understand what’s really going on. It’s vital not to stay on the surface, but to study history—especially the history of the Trotskyist movement.”



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