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The Brandenburg Gate lit up in the colours of the Ukrainian flag during a solidarity protest in Berlin, Germany. Photograph Source: Leonhard Lenz – [CC1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The tide of public opinion in Germany is as overpowering – and changeable – as elsewhere: “Stop the Russian invasion!” – “Defend Ukraine!” – “Send money” – “More, bigger, further-reaching weapons!”- “Defeat Russia!” Sustaining this tide is an all-encompassing media campaign. No politician is exempt; even President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel are pressured to make excuses for long-past efforts to achieve detente and decrease confrontation with Russia, now denounced as “appeasement”. (Steinmeier has abjectly apologized, Merkel stubbornly refuses to do so.)

And the calls to defend Ukraine are expanding: now we are told to defend our “democratic rules of order” in a new crusade.

Every epoch has had its call to battle the Forces of Evil. Once it was Anarchism, then Bolshevism, Communism. After those menaces were defeated new ones were required; in 2001 it was Terrorism. With that frightening term eroding, it is being replaced by Authoritarianism. The gargoyle staring at us from magazine covers – after Stalin, Mao and Fidel have died and Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Gaddafi been eliminated – is now a scowling Putin. And with him Russia, which must be ostracized, sanctioned, wrecked, starved and, above all, defeated. I have not yet heard any direct use of the word “bombed,” but the weapons are ready, with \$800 billion spent annually in the USA, about thirteen times Russia’s military budget, not counting the others in NATO. In Germany, on top of its already huge military outlay, a special €100 billion fund was added, after receiving the required 2/3 parliamentary majority to overrule constitutional limitations. Its use is restricted to strengthening and modernizing the Bundeswehr, for F-35 planes, capable of dropping atomic bombs on Moscow in record time, for warships capable of landing at any shore, for latest-model, deadliest tanks.

All this is “to achieve security”. German borders are nowhere threatened, but the Ukraine invasion, it’s said, proves Putin’s plans to regain the area of the USSR or the czarist empire. So who knows? And any call to reason, to push for a truce and negotiations instead of demands to defeat and “ruin” Russia, oust Putin and put him on trial, is denounced as appeasement, with allusions to the 1938 Munich Agreement, when Neville Chamberlain and French premier Daladier sold out Czechoslovakia.

I also see parallels, but very different ones. Hitler’s main aim, proclaimed in his Anti-Comintern Pact with Italy and Japan, was to invade and destroy the USSR, seizing the wealth of its giant expanse and moving closer toward hegemony, with Japan, of all Eurasia.

How did “the West” view such plans? In a secret meeting on November 19 1937, Lord Halifax, Britain’s representative, congratulated Hitler “that the Fuehrer had not only achieved great things in Germany, but that by destroying communism in his own country he had blocked its way to Europe and that therefore Germany can rightly be regarded as a bulwark against Bolshevism.”

The West, though not itself fascist, admired Hitler’s hatred of the USSR and hoped he might attack and destroy it, thus eliminating any nasty socialist threat. It demonstrated this by supporting Hitler, Mussolini and Franco in Spain, uttering hardly a whisper of

disapproval of the Nazi takeover of Austria, agreeing to the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia which brought Germany to the Russian border, and rejecting calls by Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov in the League of Nations for “collective security” against German expansion. Litvinov’s hopes for unity against fascism died with the West’s speedy recognition of Franco’s victory on April 1 1939. Within a week Stalin drew the consequential conclusion, ousted Litvinov and set his successor, Molotov, to making a deal with Germany.

As Litvinov commented: British and French leaders “... had done everything they could to goad Hitler’s Germany against the Soviet Union by secret deals and provocative moves ... The Soviet Government, in order to avoid an armed conflict with Germany in unfavorable circumstances and in a setting of complete isolation, was compelled to make the difficult choice and conclude a non-aggression treaty with Germany.”

The two years it gained made the Red Army’s liberation of Berlin possible, but only after the death of over 50 million people, about 27 million of them Soviet citizens. The events following the West’s rejection of Litvinov’s “collective security” were bloody and devastating. So too are the events of 2022. Of course the world is very different and neither NATO, Putin nor Ukraine are Nazi Germany. But has it not been USA policy to push its NATO closer and closer to Russia, building up its neighbors militarily, with annually threatening border maneuvers, organizing provocations like the putsch against an elected Ukrainian president in 2014 for wanting trade with both Russia and the West? Has it not been trying to totally surround Russia, weaken it economically, aiming at a final goal of “regime change” with a pawn like Yeltsin providing full access to a giant region and a ramp for an attack on the last big barrier to world hegemony, China? Doesn’t current US (hence NATO) policy recall eastward pressures of the past – called “cordon sanitaire,” “containment“ or “rollback”?

That ugly agreement of Stalin with Hitler was necessitated by an overwhelmingly existential threat. Did Putin view the present scene similarly? We cannot tell. Of course he saw how Ukraine was being steadily armed with Javelin antitank missiles, modern artillery, drones and howitzers that fire deadly Excalibur shells “with pinpoint accuracy”. He most certainly knew of deadly, joint US-Ukrainian “biological research facilities,” as admitted by Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland (the same official who guided the 2014 putsch in Kyiv). And we needn’t simply guess at what steps Washington would take if China conducted heavily-armed maneuvers in Tijuana or Baja California; we can look up the Bay of Pigs invasion or the attacks against Guatemala, Grenada, Panama,

Dominican Republic, not to mention Korea, Vietnam, Iraq , Libya, Afghanistan, all of them far distant from Washington or New York. Luckily, the toll in lives and damage in Ukraine has not approached that in some of those invasions. Of burning necessity today; those numbers must never be approached!

But even the most valid comparisons with past or present dangers cannot minimize the Putin government's share in the guilt for present horror! Nor can they overcome worries that Putin may indeed be dreaming of Czar Peter, of a Greater Russia, denying Ukrainian rights to independence and sovereignty. Nor do accusations of Nazi rule justify the violation of international law, the wrecking of so many towns, cities and families, despite a very real Bandera cult and the strength of Azov thugs. It is more than likely that a massive attack against the Russian-speaking Donbas republics was planned and Putin moved to prevent it. But was invasion the only method of prevention? I cannot say.

There is much we do not know. But there can be only one answer to current escalation, with growing election-related American belligerency, ever more powerful weaponry which will cost ever more lives, mostly Ukrainian ones – and the constant menace of atomic war. The answer must be to pressure Biden and Johnson, Baerbock and Scholz to support negotiations and peace. Difficult as such a response may be, I think it must top the agenda, worldwide, of every progressive! And it also means welcoming similar conclusions by a very mixed crowd including Erdogan in Turkey, the Pope in Rome, courageous Lutheran leaders in Germany and even that old war hawk Kissinger.

The call for peace is also heard from inside Russia, despite attempts to silence it. I hope it bears fruit – but not for those Russians who yearn for a NATO victory – and one more regime take-over!

In Germany, weak attempts to avoid total confrontation and work for peace were heard from Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a Social Democrat, who dared briefly to look to the future, when a Europe deprived of its Russian component, unalterably aligned against it, should be unthinkable. But timid words in this direction were soon shushed by his coalition partners: the right-wing Free Democrats, ready to spend billions for war and weapons but not tax the billionaires one more euro, and the Greens, once seen as progressive, now nicknamed “Olive-Greens”, with Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock loudest in the ravenous pack, outdoing even European Union Commission boss Ursula von der Layen. Scholz knows that resisting either partner could sink his coalition ship and end his captaincy. Both of them (and his own party) have happily joined in many state-level coalitions with the rightist Christian Democrats and could try it again nationally. His fears

of their desertion could explain his loud support for the €100 billion package for the military. But the trend is strong all over Europe, as seen in the efforts of Sweden and Finland to break long-held traditions and apply to join NATO. The bellicose “Atlanticists” have used the Ukraine war to please the Pentagon and the Raytheons and defeat the pragmatic, business-minded advocates of trade and rapprochement with Russia and China. Olaf Scholz now plans to forget past insults from Kyiv and pay a visit, together with Emmanuel Macron and Italian premier Mario Draghi, all of them somewhat hesitant till now but all fearful of media accusations of being slouchers, the threesome will be listening favorably to Zelenskyy’s insistent demands for heavy weapons. They will undoubtedly be spared embarrassing encounters with the Nazi-like flags, insignia and tattoos of the Azov battalions or visits to giant Bandera statues.

Scholz has already paid a first-time state visit to Vilnius, where he assured the heads of state of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia that Germany was thinking of them and would send more troops to their countries, near Russian St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad. No mention was made of Hitler’s use of this Baltic area when attacking the USSR in 1941 and laying deathly siege to Leningrad for 2½ years, nor the eager participation of Baltic volunteers in SS units fighting for Hitler. During the visit none of the traditional, police-protected marches of SS veterans and supporters were held; their current accent has switched to support of Ukraine.

While the western winds were blowing stronger, partly out of sympathy and solidarity, partly tainted by the smell of nationalism and hatred, where in Germany was DIE LINKE, The Left, a party traditionally standing for peace and opposing the weapons race? Sadly said, it’s better not to ask!

After its disastrous results in the national election last September, where it sank to 4.9%, down from 9.9% in 2017 and only squeezed back into the Bundestag thanks to a rule by which, if three or more delegates were elected directly by their districts, proportional representation (PR) came into force. Just three won, two in Berlin, one in Leipzig, so the party stayed in the Bundestag, but no longer the largest opposition party with 69 seats but as the weakest, down to 39. Drastic changes were more than urgent! But they were not made, and in three state elections the Left again lost catastrophically.

Despite participation in four state coalitions, in Berlin, Bremen, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Thuringia, the party’s further existence was clearly endangered. A heavy blow hit in April, when the more “reformist” co-chair Susanne Hennig-Wellsow resigned, because of her “personal situation” as mother but with a veiled attack on her more militant

co-chair, Janine Wissler, based on a nastily distorted article in the crafty magazine *Der Spiegel*, always an enemy of *Die Linke*, which falsely wrote of Wissler covering up a case of misogyny by her ex-partner. Almost certainly allied with its usual behind-the-scenes snoopers and manipulators, it wrote of *Die Linke*'s mishandling of "sexism."

Because of the co-chair's resignation, the many election defeats, and the charges of sexism flying around (although *Die Linke* has a female majority in its Bundestag delegation and in state legislatures), it was decided to elect an entire new leadership at the party congress in Erfurt on June 24-26. Defying the unjust media attacks, Janis Wissner will run again for the top office. Since she is a left-leaning female West German, a likely co-chair might be a reformist-leaning male East German.

But the party is sharply divided. The "reformers," who based their disastrous campaign last year on hopes of joining a national coalition with the Greens and the Social Democrats, had to bury this dream (for now). Even if feasible, the party would have had to abandon opposition to NATO and the deployment of German troops in foreign wars and occupations, as in Afghanistan and Mali, and its resistance to big armament plans, or sending heavy weapons to Ukraine. The "left wing" of *Die Linke* insists that this would mean giving up its position as a lone party of peace, thus becoming irrelevant: a slightly left-leaning Social Democratic sector of the establishment, forgetting its opposition to the capitalist system and its mighty billionaire potentates!

Such basic questions will likely be at the center of debate in Erfurt at the end of the month – and in the choice of co-chairs and all other positions. Will the party choose sides? Will it find some compromise? Could it split, forming two weak parts, leaving a peace position unstated in the Bundestag and the media? In two weeks we should know.

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