

Uli Rippert: The struggle against militarism and war

By Uli Rippert
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We are publishing here the text of the speech given by Uli Rippert, national secretary of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit in Germany (PSG), to the International Online May Day Rally hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the World Socialist Web Site on Sunday, May 4.

Dear comrades and friends,

I am very pleased to take part in this truly international May Day rally, which signifies a new stage in the global struggle against war and militarism.

Previous speakers have already referred to the recent events in Ukraine. The attack on the trade union headquarters in Odessa took place on May 2, the anniversary of the raid carried out by Nazi thugs in 1933 against the trade unions in Germany. The attack is an indictment of the governments in Berlin and Washington and the EU institutions in Brussels.

It refutes all their lies about democracy and freedom and makes clear to everybody that these governments, which emphasize their democratic character at every opportunity, are quite prepared to collaborate with fascists.

The dramatic war development in Ukraine is directly related to the revival of German militarism. It is being used to press ahead with a systematic buildup of the state in Germany.

Earlier this year, the German government announced that its previous policy of “military restraint” is over. In future, Germany will “intervene more decisively and more substantially” in international crisis regions.

Workers around the world should take note. The return of German militarism is a fundamental change and opens up a new stage of aggressive imperialist confrontation.

The end of German military restraint is linked to a barrage of deafening war-mongering in the media. One has the impression that Hitler’s propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels has risen from the dead and taken over the leadership of the press office in Berlin.

The big media corporations and their lackeys agitate against so-called “Russia appeasers” and demand more

tanks and more soldiers to combat Russian expansion. They play down the cooperation with fascists in Kiev and demand that Germany carry “a stun gun in the pocket” and build up its military if it “wants to be heard across the globe.”

The battle cry in the media is so loud and aggressive because the rejection of fascism, militarism and war runs so deep in the population. The newspapers and broadcasters are receiving sackloads of protest letters from angry readers.

Millions of people are stunned and shocked. Who would have thought that all this—militarism, fascism and war—is coming back?

The monstrous crimes of the Nazis and the German army left a deep imprint on public consciousness. The demands “No more war! No more Fascism!” have influenced generations.

Not only Germany, but also the imperialist governments in England, the US, France and other countries committed war crimes. But what took place here in Germany was of a different order, much worse and more brutal.

Hitler’s Wehrmacht and the SS death squads organized a war of extermination and systematic genocide in the East. Six million Jews, hundreds of thousands of Roma, Sinti, prisoners of war and many others were systematically murdered in the Nazi death camps.

At a trade union school in the 1960s I saw the documentary *Ordinary Fascism*. It showed footage of the liberation of the concentration camps. Mountains of corpses were simply bulldozed into mass graves—emaciated and starving people resembling skeletons.

The destruction was organized on an industrial scale. There were huge piles of women’s hair, piles of children’s shoes. Lampshades were made from the skin of the corpses—all of this was documented in the film.

In order to understand this monstrous relapse into barbarism, the writings of Trotsky are of great importance. Trotsky showed that Hitler could come to power because the Stalinist policy of “social fascism” had divided the working class. Under Stalin’s influence, the German Communist Party called the Social Democrats “social fascists” and

refused to undertake any joint action against the Nazis.

Trotsky fought tirelessly to overcome the division of the labour movement and to mobilize the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme.

When we founded the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter—the League of Socialist Workers—in the autumn of 1971, we based ourselves on these political lessons. We were determined to avoid a repeat of war and fascism at all costs. Today, these questions are once again of vital significance.

German imperialism is once again showing how it really developed historically. Even the very areas which Germany now seeks to dominate are the same as in the past. Again, it is the expansion to the East. Again, it is Ukraine.

German governments have tried on two occasions in the last century to bring Ukraine under German military control, committing terrible crimes against the civilian population in the process.

The return of German imperialism and militarism takes the form of a real conspiracy against the people. The SPD (Social Democratic Party) has taken on the role of rabble-rouser. It is celebrating the 100th anniversary of its support for the First World War with evil warmongering against Russia.

The warmongering of the SPD is surpassed only by the Greens. The Greens, former pacifists, fully support the interests of German imperialism and bang the drums for German army missions and wars in the name of “human rights” and “humanity.”

We used to have heated arguments with the pacifists. They completely rejected the working class and a socialist perspective. In the meantime, the protesting sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie have returned home to their families and won influential posts in business and politics. The former pacifists have become the most ardent patriots and supporters of war.

The Left Party was pacifist only as long as German imperialism behaved in a pacifist manner. At the very moment German militarism is preparing to return to the world stage, the Left Party has cast off its pacifist garb and lined up behind the so-called “humanitarian” war propaganda of the Greens.

In early April, parliamentary deputies of the Left Party voted for the first time for a foreign intervention by the German army, signalling to the ruling class that they now supported the new war policy.

The PSG is literally the only party in Germany that opposes the return of German militarism and the war preparations. Together with the SEP in the UK, we have placed opposition to militarism and war at the heart of our European election campaign.

We combine the struggle against war with the struggle

against its cause, capitalism. There is only one social force that can stop the development of war: the international working class in the struggle for a socialist programme. This is the great lesson of the past class struggles.

It is an historical fact: the First World War was ended not least by the conquest of power by the Bolsheviks, that is, by the Russian Revolution. When the extension of this revolution throughout Europe and the world was suppressed, fascist terror and the Second World War became inevitable.

Just like a hundred years ago, the acute danger of war places the struggle for revolution on the agenda.

If the ruling elite believes they can impose a return to militarism and war with a few decisions in the Chancellery, some speeches by the president, and numerous war-mongering articles in the media, they are very wrong.

There is a party that is not intimidated, a party that has learned the lessons of history and prepared the working class for the next great class struggles. That is the big difference. One hundred years ago, the SPD and the Second International collapsed after assuming an opportunistic direction years earlier.

Today, our party is winning influence—a party that fought for decades under difficult conditions, but never gave up the struggle for an international socialist program and assembled a powerful international cadre in the process.

This international May Day rally shows the strength and political authority of our movement. We therefore look forward to the future with great optimism.

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