

Fascist Propaganda on the Front Page of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

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Global Research, June 06, 2014

[World Socialist Web Site](#) 4 June 2024

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

"If one tells a big lie, and repeats it often enough, then people will believe it in the end." This principle of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, today serves many in the German media as a guideline for writing columns opposing the widespread resistance to a revival of German militarism.

Since Berlin and Washington helped a right-wing regime come to power in Ukraine, and thereby provoked a dangerous conflict with Russia, leading German media outlets have not shrunk from any lie in order to justify this policy. They play down the significance of the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector, depict the resistance in eastern Ukraine as a Russian conspiracy, and denounce their critics for daring to "understand Putin."

But that is not enough. In order to undermine the opposition to the "end of military reticence" announced by the German government, they are even prepared to deny the historical crimes of German imperialism.

On Monday, the front page of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) carried a comment piece uniting both positions, headlined "One-sided friendship." It combined hateful attacks on Putin and Russia with a presentation of the Second World War which one usually reads only in Nazi publications.

FAZ editor Frank Pergande complains about the "understanding shown for Putin's policies, especially in eastern Germany," and ridicules the "apparent friendship with the 'big brother' in the GDR [former East Germany]." He praises Chancellor Merkel, who "already at a time when she wasn't even a politician" (i.e. in the GDR), knew "what was to be thought of Russia."

Indeed, according to Pergande, the relationship with the Soviet Union was also marked by fear in the GDR. "Those who had experienced the end of the war," he writes, "had to keep silent about their vile experiences: murder and suicides, expulsion, rape, camps, reparations. On the way to Berlin, the onslaught of the Red Army destroyed towns like Frankfurt (Oder), Prenzlau or Demmin, to the extent that the wounds ache to this day."

Pergande says nothing about the previous war of extermination by the Nazis, which claimed over 25 million victims in the Soviet Union alone, including more than 3 million prisoners of war. Reading his text, he would have you believe that in 1944, the Red Army attacked a peaceful, unarmed Germany.

He also makes no mention of Hitler dispatching the elderly and minors to the front, and

ordering his soldiers to resist to the last man. In the Battle of Berlin alone, which eventually sealed Hitler's fate, some 80,000 Red Army soldiers died and 275,000 were wounded.

In Pergande's reading, Hitler's defeat was not liberation but rather a "bad experience." He thereby suggests that things would have been better had the Nazis remained in power. That borders on fascist propaganda.

The fact that the *FAZ*, which has a daily circulation of 320,000 and is one of Germany's leading newspapers, can publish such a hack piece without causing a word of protest, says much about the political climate in Germany. An article which just a few years ago would have only been printed in Nazi rags such as the *National Newspaper* or *Young Freedom*, is now the political consensus within the ruling elite.

Pergande himself lacks any qualifications to write on historical topics on the front page of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Born in East Germany in 1958, he studied journalism in Leipzig. Since 1998, he has reported for *FAZ* about local events in the three northern Bundesländer (federal states). His literary output includes several travel guides and some crime novels set in Mecklenburg Pomerania.

His comment piece is pure propaganda. Like much other commentaries appearing in the newspapers and other media, it is aimed at reshaping public opinion, which is obstinately opposed to the official propaganda about Ukraine.

The column's downplaying of the crimes of Nazism has been systematically prepared over a long period. In 1986, when the historian Ernst Nolte ventured into public with his thesis that National Socialism (Nazism) had been an understandable reaction to Bolshevism, he met with fierce opposition.

Now, Jörg Baberowski, professor of European History at Berlin's Humboldt University, can announce in *Spiegel* that "Nolte was right, historically," and Nolte himself claims that the Poles shared responsibility for the Second World War, without any opposition from official circles. In Ukraine, the foundations associated with all the main German parties, from the Greens to the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, are working with political forces that glorify war criminals and Nazi collaborators like Stepan Bandera.

Behind this turn to the right is the dead end of German capitalism. Six years after the outbreak of the deepest financial crisis since the 1930s, the European Union is threatening to break apart, and competition for markets and raw materials, upon which the German economy depends, is fiercer than ever.

This is the source of the determination of the German ruling elite to abandon the military restraint it was forced to observe following the crimes of the Second World War and pursue its imperialist interests violently once again.

The fact that journalists, academics and party functionaries have now switched over to this course does not mean that it is supported by the broad mass of the population. On the contrary, it meets with broad mistrust and resistance. This is the reason for the wave of propaganda and lies; it is an attempt to intimidate and suppress this opposition.

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