



УДК 327.2

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## **GERMAN IMPERIALISM AND THE THIRD ATTEMPT AT WORLD POWER PART I.**

**Abstract.** *The author shows how German imperialism collaborates and rivals with the other imperialist powers in preparing the war against the PR China and its ally, the Russian Federation.*

*From the history of German imperialism in the last century and the actual development as the strongest power in the European Union the relationship to US-imperialism is analysed and whether Germany is a vassal of the US. Rising after the incorporation of the GDR German imperialism has lost momentum in coming on equal footing with the US especially in the fields of "decarbonisation" and "digitalization". This was enhanced by the enforced decoupling from Russia (Nord Stream!). What is the role of German imperialism in the systematically prepared war against the PR China and its ally the Russian Federation?*

**Keywords:** *imperialism, Germany, European Union, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, vassalage, collaboration, rivalry.*

**Note:** *Acknowledgement to Ernst Herzog and Stefan Mueller for cooperation / Danksagung an Ernst Herzog und Stefan Müller für die Zusammenarbeit.*

A speech in the German Reichstag on 6 December 1897 sheds light on the historical role of German imperialism: "*The times when the Germans left the earth to one of his neighbors, reserved the sea for the other and for themselves the sky, where pure doctrine is enthroned (laughter - bravo!) - those times are over.*" And at the end of this speech we hear: "*In a word: we don't want to put anyone in the shade, but we also demand our place in the sun.*" [9, p. 60] So a certain Bernhard von Bülow was speaking at the time as State Secretary (today we would say "Minister") of the Federal Foreign Office. The debate that day was about the planned massive expansion of the imperial navy. And von Bülow's speech marked a "turning point" towards the undisguised expansionism of the German Reich, the associated military build-up and the intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions in the division of the world.

One connection that is often overlooked today is important: Eduard Bernstein published his articles in the "Neue Zeit" in 1897 and 1899, which were published as a book in 1899 under the title: "Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie" [1]. This became something of a declaration of principles for the developing labor aristocracy, right-wing opportunism and revisionism in the then still revo-



lutionary German labor movement. Bernstein's credo was: *"The final goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything."*

Almost exactly 125 years later, we hear from the German Bundestag: *"February 24, 2022 marks a **turning point** in the history of our continent. ... One thing is clear: we must invest significantly more in the security of our country in order to protect our freedom and our democracy. ... This is a major national effort. ... That's what it's all about, and it's achievable for a country of our size and importance in Europe. ... Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to address all the parliamentary groups in the German Bundestag: Let us secure the special fund in the Basic Law"* [7]. (emphasis added by author)

As far as the Federal Chancellor O. Scholz on February 27, 2022, not of nobility, but a candidate who failed for the office of party leader of the SPD.

Just a small reminder that historical comparisons should always be treated with caution. But studying the past can sharpen our view of the present and help to outline the contours of the future. Especially as the structures of the era in which we live have remained relatively unchanged for around 150 years. These are structures that have been shaped by capitalism in its highest and final stage, by imperialism.

1. Private ownership of the means of production and the development of monopolies; thereby achieving a degree of socialization of production that requires socialism for the further development of society or leads to stagnation and decay, against which crises and wars then only provide temporary "relief".

2. Compulsion to redivide the finite and completely divided earth among monopolies and imperialist superpowers. Given the compulsion to accumulate capital, this leads to ever more expansion, enlargement, growth, and, in the case of uneven development of the monopolies and great imperialist powers, to the pressure to redivide the world, even by force. From an imperialist perspective, the "earth" consists of: Sales markets, sources of raw materials, spheres of investment or influence and territories. And apart from Russia, the imperialist superpowers are still almost the same as Lenin analyzed them in 1916: UK, France, Germany, Japan, USA.

3. The increased exploitation and impoverishment associated with all this is accompanied by oppression. Suppression of class struggles also in form of democratic aspirations, of peace movements, of national liberation movements. This has led to socialist aspirations, especially in less developed and backward countries.

4. Since 1917, resistance to imperialism has led first to the creation of the Soviet Union and then to socialist countries, on which imperialism's particular hatred and will to destroy is concentrated. They have been and continue to be subjected to sanctions, isolation, counter-revolution and war. The struggle of declining imperialism against socialism at times makes the inherently antagonistic contradictions (as proven in two world wars) between the imperialist superpowers recede.

5. The squeezing of monopoly profits enables the corruption of sections of the working class and the formation of a labor aristocracy in the imperialist countries as the



principal “*social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie*”, as Lenin points out. They form the reformist wing of the workers' movement and can act counter-revolutionary, war-mongering and pave the way for fascism. However, parts of this upper stratum of workers can also be won over as allies in the struggle against fascism and war.

Of course, such relatively constant structural elements should not tempt us to believe in the constant return of the eternal same or to engage in such questions: Are we today in a situation like 1897 or 1914 or 1935? In our opinion, this is pointless and can even hinder a concrete analysis of the actual situation.

One example will illustrate this. It is interesting how von Bülow describes the relationship with China in the quoted speech: “... *we are filled with benevolent and friendly intentions towards China, (laughter on the left); we do not want to offend or provoke China. Despite the severe hardship we have suffered (- two missionaries were killed by angry mobs), the occupation of Kiaochow Bay has been carried out in a gentle manner. We wish for the continuation of the friendship that has long linked Germany with China and which has never been tarnished. But the prerequisite for the continuation of this friendship is mutual respect for each other's rights*” [9, p. 60].

Much is reminiscent of the subliminal aggression in today's tirades about China as a partner, competitor and systemic rival. Or as Ms Baerbock put it in the Bundestag on 23.9.2023: “*That is why we emphasize in this China strategy: we want to cooperate wherever possible, but on the basis of common and fair rules.*” The language may be similar. But what is the declining imperial China of the late 19th century compared to the emerging socialist People's Republic of China in the 21st century?

### **Initial situation of German imperialism and the way forward**

Let us note the initial situation of German imperialism in the last third of the 19th century: Germany had come too late and too short in the division of the world, especially in the colonies and thus in the sources of raw materials and spheres of influence, but had clearly overtaken its major imperialist competitors in Europe, England and France, economically. So was it not “fair” for Germany to demand “equality” in other areas too, including a “place in the sun”?

In this sense, the major forces of German finance capital were heading towards the First World War. Deutsche Bank, Siemens, Krupp, BASF, to name just a few of the companies from back then that are still important today.

Let's hear a fitting summary of the way forward:

“*After the First World War, it was also thought that Germany was finally out of action ... just as some ... now think that Japan and Germany have been put out of action for good. At that time it was also said and loudly proclaimed in the press that the United States of America had put Europe on a fixed ration, that Germany could no longer get back on its feet, that from now on there could be no more wars between capitalist countries. But Germany rose again and, barely 15 to 20 years after its defeat, was once more a great power; it had shaken off its yoke and embarked on an independent path of devel-*



*opment. It is characteristic that it was none other than England and the United States of America who helped Germany to rebuild itself economically and to raise its war economy potential. Of course, the United States and Britain helped Germany to rebuild itself economically because they intended to send the rebuilt Germany against the Soviet Union, to position it against the country of socialism. But Germany directed its forces primarily against the Anglo-French-American bloc.*

*And when Hitler's Germany declared war on the Soviet Union, the Anglo-French-American bloc not only did not join Hitler's Germany, but on the contrary was forced to enter into a coalition with the USSR against Hitler's Germany.*

*As a result, the struggle of capitalist countries for markets and the desire to drown their competitors proved to be practically stronger than the antagonisms between the capitalist and socialist camps.*

*The question is, what guarantee is there that Germany and Japan will not come up again, that they will not try to shake off the American yoke and start an independent life? I don't think there are any such guarantees" [8]. This clear-sighted analysis and prognosis was made by Stalin in 1951(!).*

The predicted resurgence of German monopoly capital gathered in Western Germany (1949 Federal Republic of Germany – FRG) has come to pass. As a bulwark against the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the socialist camp, the FRG was protected by US imperialism, gradually conquering economic supremacy in Western Europe in collaboration and rivalry with France, infiltrating the socialist states with the "new Ostpolitik". Finally, to foment counter-revolution in Poland and the GDR. With the annexation/incorporation of the GDR in 1989/90, thus liquidating the post-war order of Yalta and Potsdam, started again the territorial redivision of the world. The next step was the destruction of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and their division into bite-sized pieces for German imperialism. And then the high point so far: the 9th of May 2010, when supposedly Greece, but in reality French finance capital was saved from bankruptcy by Schäuble/Merkel. Exactly 65 years to the day after Germany's defeat in the Second World War, this documented who will claim political leadership in EU-Europe in the future.

Since then, however, German imperialism has lost speed, while US monopoly capital has in part overcome the shock of the great crisis of 2008. In the fields in which German monopoly capital needs to catch up in order to "catch up" with US imperialism, US corporations have strengthened and in some cases pulled ahead; particularly in **digitalization**, which is also crucial for military armaments and for controlling communication channels as well as for directing the flows of goods, money and capital. [5] With regard to the second factor for gaining greater autonomy, decarbonization, which should enable German imperialism to become less dependent on the Anglo-American dominated oil cartel, it is not yet clear where the journey in the energy sector as a whole is heading.



### The positioning of German imperialism

Let us now turn to the domestic and foreign policy constellation in which this resurgence has taken place. We were able to clearly identify two factions in German monopoly capital, the all-German-European faction and the American-transatlantic faction, which had already begun to emerge before the First World War and gained firmer contours in connection with the stabilization of the mark and the Dawes Plan in 1923/24. Both monopoly factions are united by the overall interest of German imperialism, and that is the preservation and strengthening of its rule. After all, this power is intended to secure access to sales markets, sources of raw materials, etc., the security of "supply chains" and the associated maximum profit. We have described this as the **third attempt at world power**. What distinguishes the factions are the ways to achieve this and the tactics used. Among other things, this involves the question of when and for how long one must subordinate oneself to the strongest imperialist power, today US imperialism, when and how one can break cover and with whom one can ally oneself.

Kurt Gossweiler, the most reliable historian of the development of German imperialism in the Weimar Republic and the role of capital in the promotion of Hitler fascism, has provided a very illuminating account of the interplay between the factions in the Weimar period, sharpening our view of today's developments:

*"... that the simultaneous practice of fulfillment policy<sup>25</sup> by the government and the struggle of the 'economy' against the fulfillment policy were two related sides of the policy of German imperialism and that both, fulfillment policy and catastrophe policy, served **not only** certain group interests, **but** in their combination **also** the overall interest of the German monopoly bourgeoisie. The two were not mutually exclusive opposites, but complemented each other and were capable of increasing each other's effectiveness: the more fiercely and bitterly they were opposed by the catastrophe politicians in Germany, the more the German governments'willingness to fulfil'" had to gain in value in the eyes of the Entente powers. ... Of course, this does not mean that fulfillment and catastrophe politicians played a game in which the roles were distributed in advance - the murders of Erzberger and Rathenau speak unequivocally against such a view. Although there was often enough a conscious, agreed division of labor involved, the 'play' as a whole was improvised, with each of the actors being guided by their own interests on the one hand and by the circumstances on the other. If, in the end, a drama emerged of which one can say that the two main opponents, despite all the bitter rivalry, were basically working towards the same goal, it was because the **preservation of the overall imperialist interest, i.e. the preservation and strengthening of the rule of German imperialism** (emph. add.) was the top priority for both and because the ways and means to achieve this were ulti-*

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25. This was the name given at the time to the policy that sought to "fulfill" the provisions of the Versailles Treaty; in contrast to "catastrophe policy", which provoked f.e. the occupation of the Ruhr area by France in 1923 through non-fulfillment (with consequences that were also incalculable for capital, such as galloping inflation, revolutionary resistance, etc.)





*mately not determined by subjective wishes and intentions, but by objective circumstances” [2, p. 163 f.].*

With Gossweiler's trained eye on the past, we can see what is happening before our eyes today:

The **ostensible** subservience to US imperialism in the policy against the Russian Federation and the support of the Zelensky regime in Ukraine. This is entirely "fulfillment politics" in the face of the Nord Stream pipelines being blown up, an act of violence that German imperialism currently has nothing to oppose militarily. It is a gesture of submission to the Anglo-American oil cartel, which they wanted to escape with Russia's oil and gas supplies. In the face of sluggish "decarbonization", fracked gas is submissively being purchased in the USA – dear and dirty.

This policy of fulfillment is officially supported by a broad consensus. The BDI<sup>26</sup>, which represents the interests of the monopolies, and the leadership of the German trade unions (DGB) are full of almost insistent solidarity with Ukraine. The sanctions against the Russian Federation (RF) are officially approved, but are circumvented and undermined by the relevant companies wherever possible. This also applies to the People's Republic of China. On the open stage of the influential business newspaper "Handelsblatt", the losses caused by increased energy prices as a result of the sanctions are lamented. However, these protests and the (proto-fascist) "Alternative for Germany" (AfD), which is using them to raise its profile, are increasing the room for maneuver vis-à-vis US imperialism. The SPD-led government is threatening with the fascist danger in order to gain concessions. And in doing so - quite incidentally - strengthens the fascist forces. After all, they are needed by German imperialism when it comes to driving the unruly people to the slaughter in the war that is once again becoming possible.

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<sup>26</sup> BDI = Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie = **Federal Association of German Industry**