

reach and pierce the walls of the Kremlin or destroy concrete bunkers as deep or deeper than Moscow's subway system.

Of course, Volodymyr Zelenskiy wants them and any weapons or aid in a war now looking less and less like the triumph he predicted a year ago. Should his wishes, which often sounded more like demands, be fulfilled?

That mythical Jupiter fathered three sons with Europa (I hope he was back in the body of Jupiter by then). Three sons of modern Europa met in a hastily arranged "Paris-Berlin-Warsaw" summit in early March to reach an agreement about Ukraine, especially about Taurus. Poland's Tusk, only four months into his top job, is seen as more moderate than his predecessor. But he seems no less eager to supply anything if it damages the hereditary Russian enemy and solidifies Poland's role as main USA outpost in Eastern Europe. However, he soon had to hurry home to mollify farm tractor drivers blockading borders to protest cheap Ukrainian grain imports.

Macron, who had spoken boldly of sending in "European" troops to oppose the Russians, toned that down with the words: "Maybe at some point – I don't want it, I won't take the initiative – we will have to have operations on the ground...to counter the Russian forces... France's strength is that we can do it."

Evidently Scholz had stepped on the brakes with Tusk and Macron: "To say it sharp and clear: as German chancellor, I will send no Bundeswehr soldiers into Ukraine!" So, at least for now – no Taurus!

Was his seemingly bold front a façade for a general German downward skid in Europe? There was a decline of the economy in 2023. A predicted puny plus of 0.2% for 2024 could mean that Germany is already in a recession, for only the second time since 1945. Economy Minister Habeck warned: "We cannot continue this way!" One expert's brief analysis: "Germany has lost cheap energy from Russia, flourishing trade markets in China and an almost cost-free guarantee of security from the USA."

Olaf Scholz's three-party government has rapidly declined in popularity. The Greens, who promised a "green economic miracle" a year ago, have made one ecology compromise after another, like their go-ahead for big docks for liquid gas from US frackers to replace the Russian gas-oil cut by war, politics and that suspicious explosion of the Baltic pipeline. The new docks threaten both major bird emigration stopovers and some of Germany's most idyllic beach resorts (once peopled, back in GDR days, by happy, mostly nudist bathers).

Ecology disputes turned dramatic with Elon Musk's Tesla gigafactory on Berlin's outskirts, his first and largest in all Europe and now capable of turning out 500,000 E-cars a year,

beating out VW. That meant chopping down 740 acres of the protective forest ring around Berlin and draining into crucial aquifers. But Musk now aims at a million cars – costing 420 more forest acres and drying-up ponds and creeks. The village hit hardest voted “No!” and one group plans to defy a planned police onslaught in tree houses and platforms. On March 5th a secret, more extremist group set fire to a high-voltage power pylon, cutting local electricity for a few hours and shutting down production for a few days. Such disputes are getting hotter.

Rounding out the picture, Germany has been facing its biggest strike wave in years: railroad engineers, bus and tram drivers, airport personnel, public service workers, kindergarten teachers, even clinic doctors. Their demands are mostly for enough pay to catch up with inflation and frightening rent increases but also – for many – for a 35-hour work week with no cut in pay.

While the compromising Greens strain to hold onto their dwindling professional college-graduate base and the Social Democrats struggle to win back working-class support, the weakest of the three partners, the Free Democrats (FDP), closest to big-biz, keep flirting with the Christian Democrats across the aisle, blackmailing attempts by the other two to seem socially conscious by resisting remaining environmental restrictions, preventing rules against child labor on products from abroad, limiting aid for the many poverty-ridden children in Germany, reducing assistance for the elderly and, above all, insisting on keeping or lowering low taxes on the super-wealthy, using the old trickle-down argument. More and more, the coalition is coming to resemble a free-for-all wrestling match.

But they agreed on one main issue: in Ukraine, keep that war going! Till victory! The Greens, always most valiant with Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock hoping to see Russia “ruined,” are being overtaken as word and banner bearers by the Free Democrats, who now boast a “Defense Committee” spokesperson who is formidable in word, appearance, personality and even name: Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann. Her imperative calls for more weapons until total victory over the Russians rouse up TV viewers almost every single evening. And even when a majority in the Bundestag ended the Taurus debate by voting “Nein” to a Christian Democratic bill to give Kyiv the missiles, she broke the ranks of coalition party discipline and voted “Ja” with the opposition.

Somehow I haven’t yet heard anyone remark that Düsseldorf, which she represents, is also home to Rheinmetall, Germany’s leading armaments manufacturer since 1889. After great sales records in World War I it had giant success in World War II, largely by working thousands of miserable POWs and forced laborers to the bone. Now super-good times are

back again thanks to its Panther tanks and all kinds of weapons and explosive ammo. Company boss Armin Papperger, who took home a tidy € 3,587,000 in 2022 (about \$3.9 m) and expects this year's company earnings to finally top its € 10 billion goal made a happy prediction of "a continuing strong growth increase in sales and earnings." But who could dare to suspect any connection between Rheinmetall and its Düsseldorf neighbor, Frau Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann. (BTW, big hunks of those handsome sums also go to Blackrock in Manhattan's Hudson Yards and other solid Transatlantic benefactors.)

But in his crumbling coalition Olaf Scholz's leading Social Democratic Party has also been vigorously supporting the Ukrainian cause! It was he who dramatically called for a "Zeitenwende" an "historic turning point" – with an extra fund of € 100 billion for a major military build up – in Ukraine, Germany, the European Union and NATO, with drones, jets, artillery, ammo, tanks, missiles (but at least not yet the Taunus for Kyiv.

But his Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democrat) is never sated; for him the Bundeswehr is always far too weak. "It must be made fit for the challenges ahead. Germany needs a Bundeswehr that can fight, one which is operational and sustainable. Germany must defend itself, because 'war is back in Europe.' The Bundeswehr must become fit for war again. I know that sounds harsh... But I am concerned with nothing other than preventing war. That is why credible deterrence is the motto of the hour – to be able to fight in order not to have to fight. An important signal in this context is the formation of the brigade in Lithuania."

Despite all disavowals, some beans have recently been spilled about NATO military experts secretly helping Kyiv ever since 2014. A mysteriously leaked report on a meeting of top German brass revealed plans for helping Ukraine use the Taunus to destroy the Russian bridge to Crimea. The whole atmosphere in Germany is becoming frighteningly "kriegstüchtig," to use Pistorius' word – "ready for war." He also raised the question of renewing the military draft whose last vestiges were ended thirteen years ago – this time perhaps including women. The proposal was a trial balloon – and soon dropped, at least for this pre-election season. Another trial balloon came from the Education Minister, Bettina Stark-Watzinger, who called for air raid drills in schools, with renovated or new shelter rooms in the cellars and more visits by officers to prepare children for the worst – or recruit them. When protests against this proposal grew too strong she modified it a bit – to stress, aside from war, readiness for possible floods or other climate catastrophes.

Weapons, weapons, weapons – the more the better! With ever louder talk about "the foe" and "protective measures", as if Putin were amassing troops or maneuvering warships along

German borders – instead of just the opposite taking place in the Baltic and Lithuania – and no longer so secretly in Ukraine. The blitzkrieg-laden spirit of 1941 Germany is all over the media, with no audible recollections of Stalingrad in 1943 or a wrecked and wretched Berlin (and Dresden, Hamburg and all the others) in 1945.

The reports on Gaza since October contrasted markedly with the anger over the Russian attack on Ukraine; they almost never mentioned Hamas without the prefaced adjective “terrorist” but showed few pictures of devastated Gaza which, for me, bitterly recalled those German cities I saw a few years after the war, like Dresden. Over and over we were shown Israeli soldiers bravely firing away; at what? Or digging in wrecked hospitals; for what? Or showing those “compassionate” parachute drops, a sad joke when small crowds of Israelis were somehow permitted to block hundreds of truckloads of really tangible assistance – and while Germany joined the USA in sending weapons to Netanyahu while stymying UNO efforts to end the slaughter.

But the heart-wrenching pictures of weeping fathers and dead or maimed children in Gaza could not be ignored. Demonstrations, led by Arabs in Germany but including many other, also Jewish Germans, grew larger, despite all attempts to prevent, limit or sideline them. Their calls for negotiations and peace sometimes included the war in Ukraine – and a rejection of SPD-FDP-Green-CDU-CSU militarist unity. But then came the giant rallies against the fascistic Alternative for Germany (AfD). In the past often harassed or at best ignored, they were now amazingly well-organized and coordinated, clearly promoted from above and blessed in the media. I suspect they were consciously aimed at deflecting a progressive, pro-peace trend born of horror at the hugely disproportionate Israeli response to October 7th, misusing a popular anti-AfD cause for the purpose, together with an increased stress on opposing anti-Semitism, while equating it with any criticism of Israeli repression and extreme brutality. It was good that the rallies opposed racism and fascists, but they were no longer leaning toward united left opposition.

Is there now any opposition to top level policies? Yes, of a sort. Or rather of approximately four sorts.

Within the ranks of the Social Democrats, while many admire dynamic (and ambitious?) Minister Pistorius, some others may be coming to their senses. Most courageous recently was Rolf Mützenich, chair of the SPD caucus in the Bundestag and long known as a rare opponent of militarism. During the Taurus debate he asked the Bundestag delegates: “Isn’t it time not only to speak about waging a war but to start thinking about how we can freeze a war and then end it as well?” He had hardly finished his brief remarks with question when the

counterattack began, from fellow politicians and from most of the mass media. Two nasty words recurred shamelessly: “Appeasement” and “Cowardice”. Unlike Pope Francis, who dared to voice similar sentiments, Mützenich had no shred of any “infallibility” status, and the truly vicious attacks forced him to stage a partial retreat to save his neck. But the words had been uttered and some may have listened. As for appeasement, Neville Chamberlain and Daladier let Hitler expand in Spain, then tolerated his expansion eastward to Austria and Czechoslovakia because it meant closing in on the hated USSR. His all-European attack in June 1941 was more analogous to EU-NATO eastward-aimed unanimity than the reverse!

Olaf Scholz often vacillates. But at times, unlike some ministers, he seems to listen to and echo people like Mützenich. “German soldiers must at no point and in no place be linked to targets this Taurus system reaches...Not in Germany either...This clarity is necessary. I am surprised that this doesn’t move some people, that they don’t even think about whether ... a participation in the war could emerge from what we do.”

But then, Scholz certainly learned arithmetic at school. The European elections are due this June, Bundestag elections next year, with key state elections in between. In the polls his Social Democratic party is stuck at about a weak 15%, half its traditional Christian rivals and even behind the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Opinions change frequently but 80% now favor diplomatic negotiations for Ukraine and 41% want less weapons sent there. Scholz – or Germany – cannot really change course in such basic matters. But he may think that dragging his feet rather ambiguously might win back more voters.

A second group demanding negotiations and an end to the Ukraine war, perhaps very surprisingly, is the AfD. Although it supports big business, NATO, the draft and German rearmament enthusiastically, it calls nevertheless for negotiations, peace and a resumption of normal trade relations. It is possible that the AfD simply wants only to further increase its popularity, especially in eastern Germany, where there is the least military enthusiasm – and it is already amazingly strong (and dangerous) position, at about 30%. Of course they are called “Putin-lovers.” Who knows, perhaps they are. But their top woman in leadership, Alice Weidel, is intelligent, shrewd, a skilled speaker, and made an eloquent plea for peace, while thanking Mützenich and congratulating Scholz for not sending Taurus to Kyiv. Thus creating a difficult complication.

And then there is the Linke party, which has seen itself from birth as the “party of peace”. Indeed, over the years it has opposed every deployment of German troops or ships outside its borders, it has opposed the payment of giant sums to Rheinmetall and its siblings at home or abroad, it has opposed the export of German weapons to nearly every oppressive government

that could be found, it has opposed every form of militarization. A brave and exemplary record, alongside its fight for a higher minimum wage, more money for seniors, for child care and women's rights. Its stand also forced Social Democrats and Greens to take better positions, if only to avoid a drift of their voters to the small yet potentially growing Linke.

Perhaps it was its successes which became its weak point. Not only the delegates who got elected on the national, state or local level but also their staffs and assistants had good jobs. Some tended, too often, to become a part of the mistrusted "establishment" in the eyes of dissatisfied and disappointed voters – or then non-voters. Their increasingly respectable status led to interest in "identity rights", immigrant rights, gender rights, but too often to a growing distance from neglected, underpaid, overburdened working people, including temps and the jobless. Some leaders, hoping to crown state cabinet posts with those in a national coalition, watered down their rejection of NATO and its relentless eastward moves and threats. Their rejection of even meager approval of the giant peace demonstration led by Sahra Wagenknecht last year on flimsy grounds borrowed from the mass media proved the last straw for many members and led to the formation of a breakaway party, called (temporarily it is hoped) Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht.

Some in the Linke, convinced Marxists, think it was a mistake to split and leave the party instead of fighting it out, even though they were outvoted by conformist, status quo leaders who now want to force them out just as they did to Sahra Wagenknecht and her adherents. And some believe that if the Linke again becomes more militant in something whose name is hardly even whispered these days (class conflict) then it can be rescued from menacing-oblivion. It is already in great trouble, nationally down to 3%, which would bar it from the next Bundestag.

As for Sahra's BSW, it stands full square for negotiations and peace, like no other, and certainly for working people's rights and needs. But much of its program remains vague as yet and seems to be turning out to be less militant than expected. It polls 5 to 7% nationally, not bad for a newbie with rudimentary state structures but less than some had expected in view of Sahra's popularity. The European Union elections in June and the state elections in September will show how the two stand, now as rivals in a divided Left.

As for the bellicose forces, some pro-American "Atlanticists" are worried about being cast adrift after November 5th by that unpredictable man from Mar-a-Lago, or they are studying geriatric tables. Others, the Germanic wing, who reject American infiltration, from music styles to dirty slang, are scheming and dreaming of the good old days of smart uniforms, clicking heels, Iron Crosses and people knowing their proper place. But they all join

Rheinmetall, Lockheed and the others in hoping the warring may last until they get new chances to win out in broad Eurasian expanses, re-establish Germany's proper position in the world and perhaps for some, a hope to avenge that disaster for their grandfathers back in 1945. More and more, we are engulfed by all their war talk – and preparatory action.

What is desperately needed, not only in Germany but especially in Germany, is a new consolidation of all those in any party, or no party, who still have unaddled brains in their heads and a heart in their chests for an end to the killing and starving of Ukrainians, Russians, the Palestinians and the still as yet far too small number of brave Jewish Israelis (like the “refuseniks”) to build up a dynamic peace movement like that against the Vietnam war, or against missiles in West Germany in the 1980s, or the marches to prevent the Iraq war or, I recent months, to rescue the tortured million and more innocent people of Gaza – yes, and those 100 hostages as well. Such a movement is desperately necessary; the clock is ticking away. Can the Jupiters of the world be dethroned? For Europa and for the world. Is that possible?

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