

German government bypasses parliament to fund military project

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The war in Afghanistan has thrown down the gauntlet to Europe's armed forces. The military superiority of the US over its European allies could not have been demonstrated more clearly.

The conclusion drawn on this side of the Atlantic is the need to intensify Europe's military capabilities. Regardless of the expressions of solidarity with the Bush government, the European Union (EU) is eagerly working towards establishing its own powerful armed forces, independent of American command structures. Next year, a 60,000-strong EU intervention force should be ready for operations.

The new military transport—Airbus A 400 M—forms the heart of the European weapons programme. In mid-December last year, representatives of the European countries involved agreed the production of what is the largest European military project. The Transall planes, which originated as a result of Franco-German co-operation in the early 1960s, are now completely outdated and the European armed forces have had to rely upon renting large Antonov transports from Russia or similar American machines. This is now set to rapidly change.

The Airbus A 400 M is regarded as a versatile platform as it can function as a troop carrier, transport heavy equipment or be used as a military hospital airplane. Its transport capacity is twice as great as its predecessor, the Transall, and it flies 50 percent faster (780 kph). It can move an entire anti-missile defence system or carry a Tiger anti-tank helicopter. With its range of 7,600 kilometres and its air refuelling capability, the A 400 M can operate in virtually any theatre. Military experts stress the role these machines can play in independent world-wide military operations.

The building of 196 military Airbus A 400 M

transports is considered the largest European armaments project. The first machines should be ready in 2007; the German armed forces expect to receive the first models in 2009. The planes are being produced by the European Aeronautic Defence and Space company (EADS), which was established in summer 2000 from a fusion of Germany's DaimlerChrysler Aerospace (DASA), France's Aérospatiale Matra and the Spanish Construcciones Aeronauticas (CASA). EADS owns 80 percent of Airbus, with the remainder being held by Britain's Bae Systems. Altogether, a workforce of 40,000 will be involved in the production of the A 400 M.

US manufacturers Boeing and Lockheed Martin previously controlled 90 percent of this market. With the production of the Eurofighter, EADS is also trying to break into another sector of the arms market dominated by the US. Next year, Germany is to take delivery of the first Eurofighters, said to be the most modern fighter-bomber, and has ordered a total of 180 planes.

During the procurement of the Airbus 400 M the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party government displayed such determination that one could easily forget that the Greens and even sections of the SPD were at one time advocates of pacifism. Germany's order for 73 machines is by far the largest, followed by France with 50 and Britain with 25.

During the debate concerning the financing of these airplanes, which will cost at least 8.6 billion euros, the Schroeder government has repeatedly disregarded democratic norms. The government did not shrink from pushing through unapproved military expenditure, if necessary without parliamentary agreement.

In December, Germany along with seven other European governments signed the contract to build 196

of the military transports, knowing that the present budget only included 5.1 billion euro for 40 of the 73 machines intended for Germany. If the agreed numbers of aircraft were not purchased, the lower production figure would mean the unit price would rise, thus the other European countries insisted upon a special clause in the contract for Germany, which anticipated the *Bundestag* (parliament) giving its unreserved agreement by January 31, 2002. Moreover, it was laid down that if Germany ordered fewer machines, it would have to carry the extra costs incurred by the other countries as well.

By signing the contract, Germany's defence ministry acted without regard to the right of the *Bundestag* to decide the budget. On January 24, against the votes of the conservative opposition, which unreservedly agrees to such military spending but is using the difficulties financing the acquisition for tactical electoral considerations, the government coalition pushed through a *Bundestag* resolution that shifts the shortfall of 3.5 billion euros onto next year's budget.

In protest, the opposition launched a case before the Supreme Court accusing the government of riding roughshod over constitutional law and budget procedures. Only by the assurance of Defence Secretary Rudolf Scharping (SPD) that the government would unreservedly adhere to the rights of parliament to determine the budget, was it possible to deflect the case at the Supreme Court.

The dispute over the financing of the 73 Airbus A 400 M transports conceals the simple fact that the government has decided to carry out a military spending programme which overshadows everything undertaken by Germany's Armed Forces since they were reconstituted after the Second World War. However, in light of national elections due this autumn, the government is avoiding passing the enormous costs immediately on to the general public, postponing a part of the burden until after the elections.

But the facts are clear. While the government tries almost daily to justify ever harsher cuts in social spending by pointing to the high level of national debt, behind the backs of the population the "SPD-Green" coalition is drastically increasing military expenditure, not only for the current year but also in the future.

Attempts by the government to spread out these defence costs are not without good reason. Several

times in the past, increasing military expenditure at a time of social cuts has unleashed violent conflicts and social protests.

In the spring of 1928, when the conservative German government decided to build a new armoured cruiser and parliament agreed the 9.3 million *Reichsmark* expenditure, while at the same time carrying through vicious social cuts, the SPD stood in opposition. In the subsequent parliamentary elections, in May 1928, the Social Democrats and the Communist Party organised a campaign under the slogan: "No armoured cruisers, but bread for our children!" and received broad support. The SPD became the strongest parliamentary faction and Hermann Mueller became chancellor of a grand coalition.

Only a few months later, in August 1928, the SPD ministers capitulated to the pressure of the military and agreed the building of four armoured cruisers during the parliamentary recess. They not only unleashed a storm of indignation among their supporters, but also opened the way for the most reactionary political forces—with well-known consequences.



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