

The German elections and the threat of dictatorship

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The latest edition of the German weekly magazine, *Der Spiegel*, complains about the “lethargic election” in Germany and calls for politicians to exhibit more courage to make “unpopular decisions”. Under the heading “The Compliant Republic”, *Der Spiegel*’s authors criticize the “political cowardice” of parties and politicians, who have adapted themselves to German citizens’ “unwillingness to reform”.

The magazine cites 84-year-old philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who lectures readers on the “failure of the elite”. Habermas raises the question: What does “unpopular” really mean? Answering his own question, he claims the electorate must be expected to support political solutions that are necessary and reasonable. It is not acceptable, he argues, that the government demands painful austerity measures from all other countries in Europe, but cringes at the prospect of implementing such measures at home.

According to Habermas, the exercise of “opportunistic maintenance of power” results in Germany’s blindness to its leadership responsibilities in Europe. Although Europe is in a state of emergency, Germany is dozing rather than dancing on the volcano of social crisis.

The government in Berlin is only strong and unyielding when it comes to social cuts for others, writes *Der Spiegel*. It expects southern European lands to submit to austerity measures that have caused “dramatic social and political turmoil” in several countries. These include “pension reductions of up to 30 percent, severe cuts in social welfare and health care, mass layoffs in the civil service”. Although the authors believe such measures are necessary, they urge that “Germany would be able to exact tough social policies from the southerners more credibly, if it itself were ready to introduce at least a fraction of such measures”.

In other words, the next government should intensify the social counterrevolution in Europe, while advancing it

also in Germany. In doing so, it should neither fear the verdict of the electorate, nor shrink from the protests and opposition of the population.

This is a call for authoritarian forms of rule and dictatorial measures.

Der Spiegel’s editorial view is that the most likely political body to implement such a course of action is the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Under Gerhard Schröder the SPD-Green coalition expected the population to accept “the social hardship of the Agenda 2010 policies” and did not capitulate to popular pressure.

The authors go into raptures when they write about “Comrade [Franz] Münterfering”, the former SPD parliamentary faction leader under Schröder. He is said to have “dared what [current Chancellor Angela] Merkel never dared. Not then and not now. Something that hardly any democratically elected politician has ever dared”. He had the courage to confront the country with unpopular policies. He confounded majority opinion and initiated reforms that made the country “fit for the future”.

The article approvingly quotes Müntefering’s declaration that democracy is fine, “but unfortunately very much conditioned to legislative periods”. In other words: it is an unfortunate fact that democracies require elections from time to time, and governments can be voted out. If one pursues his line of reasoning, then the simplest solution to this “democracy deficit” is to entirely jettison elections, or stage them in such a way that there is nothing to vote for.

The *Der Spiegel* editors seek help from political scientist Herfried Münkler to justify this reactionary and anti-democratic position. Münkler is a tenured professor, teaching political theory at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Humboldt University in Berlin. He has previously written about the benefits of authoritarian forms of rule and the “need for Bonapartist solutions”.

He demands in *Der Spiegel*: “There has to be a group

of leading politicians who are willing to take risks [meaning social protests and election defeats] for the sake of the future”. But he regrets that this is not happening and hardly any politicians are capable of long-term thinking. There is a lack “not only of courage to initiate unpopular measures”; there is also a reluctance to engage in strategic thinking, says Münkler. The rewards go to those “who think morally, not strategically”. This will result in “long-term serious damage” to society.

Münkler does not outline his proposals in any detail, but the implications are clear. The systematic impoverishment of millions of Hartz IV welfare recipients and low-wage workers may be morally reprehensible. To promote the interest of the ruling financial aristocracy, however, a brutal austerity course is just as “strategically” inevitable and necessary as the granting of €700 billion (US\$933 billion) to bail out the banks.

Three years ago Münkler, a supporter of the SPD, published an essay titled “Lame Lady Democracy”, calling for a “fresh, uninhibited look at the relationship between democracy and dictatorship”.

The call for authoritarian forms of rule is directly related to the sharpening of the social crisis. The Merkel government’s aggressive austerity drive has plunged southern European countries into a devastating social and political crisis. This has rebounded on Germany, where the social crisis is already well advanced, despite claims to the opposite. The division of society has progressed further in Germany than most other European countries.

Nearly a quarter of all employees, or 8 million people, work in low-wage jobs. Half of these, 4.1 million, earn less than €7 (US\$9.30) an hour. Systematic wage cutting is underway in factories and offices. In addition to temporary workers, who have been exploited by employment agencies for years, there has been a growth in the army of “contracted workers” employed to do piece-work without any social security. Some 4.5 million people live on miserly Hartz IV welfare benefits—i.e., €374 (US\$500) a month, plus rent and heating costs.

Wealth is on the increase at the other end of society. The luxury of a privileged layer knows no bounds. The number of millionaires living in Germany has exceeded the 1 million mark for the first time. “There are precisely 1.015 million millionaires—an increase of 6.7 percent over last year”, reports the daily *Tageszeitung*, adding, “The assets of the millionaires grew even faster than did their actual number. They increased from US\$3.4 trillion to US\$3.7 trillion—a growth of 7.7 percent”.

In other words, the social attacks, which have had

devastating consequences for millions of families, are used to direct social wealth into the pockets of the rich and super-rich.

In view of the growing opposition to this policy of social counterrevolution, spokesmen for the ruling class in politics, the media and universities are calling for authoritarian structures and forms of government. Edward Snowden, whistleblower and former employee of the US National Security Agency (NSA), has revealed the extent to which the population is monitored, including in Germany. Behind a democratic facade, the build-up of a police state is already well advanced.

All the mainstream parties are supporting this development. Faced with the growing social crisis, they are closing ranks. While the Chancellor defends her reactionary austerity program, the SPD has appointed Merkel’s former finance minister, Peer Steinbrück, as its leading candidate for the chancellorship in order to underscore its agreement with the government on all important matters. The Greens seek a coalition with the SPD, but are also available for a coalition with Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The Left Party offers the SPD and the Greens their support and is backed by all the pseudo-left groups.

This “grand coalition” of all bourgeois parties, extending from the right wing of the Christian Social Union (CSU) to the left wing of the Left Party, is opposed by only one party: the Socialist Equality Party (PSG). The PSG seeks to mobilise the working class on the basis of an international socialist program and warns that, as in the 1930s, the ruling class will not shrink from defending its profit system by resorting to dictatorship and fascism.



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