

German Chancellor Angela Merkel visits Kiev

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23 August 2014

German Chancellor Angela Merkel travels today to Kiev to meet with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk. She will also meet with local government officials. The trip was “a sign of support,” stated German government spokesman Steffen Seibert on Friday.

The chancellor’s visit takes place at a time of deep crisis for the regime in Kiev. The country’s economic outlook is grim. Industrial production fell in July by 12 percent, and a decline of 15 percent in the harvest is anticipated. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects a drop of already minimal real wages by 3.3 percent this year.

Since negotiations over gas prices with Russia have failed thus far, and Kiev has not been able to pay off outstanding debts, next winter threatens to bring a halt to the gas supply. The regime has already stopped providing warm water in many cities.

Although the army claims territorial gains in the war being led by the government against pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country, the number of military and civilian casualties is growing on a daily basis. Poroshenko has now ordered a further mobilisation in order to be able to send two further brigades against the separatists. There were already strong protests against the previous call-up of troops throughout the country.

The government is also under the pressure from the extreme right-wing forces it has relied upon since the coup in February. Over the past week, the fascist Right Sector threatened to withdraw its fighters from the east and to lead them to Kiev unless all of their members were released from prison. The government agreed to the ultimatum.

The Kiev regime is hoping for financial and military support from the German chancellor’s visit. The leaders would discuss “support for our European reforms,” said foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin to the

Kölner Express. “We need a Marshall Plan for Ukraine,” he urged. While the US played the main role in the Marshall Plan after World War II, he suggested Germany could play the main role today.

Such an initiative has support among sections of German big business. “We need a real Marshall Plan, which will cost Germany a lot of money but will also be very useful,” wrote Markus Felsner, chairman of the external trade association for Eastern and Central Europe. “From Lviv to Luhansk, one of the most exciting growth markets is spread right across our doorstep.”

Potential financial aid would not signify an improvement of conditions for the working class. On the contrary, it would be used to bring about a further deterioration in living conditions for working people and to impose social attacks. Above all, it would increase Germany’s influence, and transform the country into a low-wage centre and a cheap supplier of raw materials.

This has been the goal of the major German intervention in Ukraine from the outset. The country was to be brought under the control of the European Union (EU) in order to push back Russian influence. When then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich refused last November to sign an agreement with the EU, German politicians, businesses and party foundations organised and supported the protests on the Maidan. After the demonstrations failed to bring about the desired result, the German government relied increasingly on the extreme right-wing forces of Right Sector and Svoboda, in order to put the regime under pressure.

Then in February the US and Germany orchestrated a coup based precisely on these fascist forces to bring a new government to power, which was utterly dependent on the Western powers and contained fascists from Svoboda. One of the new government’s first acts was

the signing of the association agreement with the EU.

The disastrous situation in Ukraine is a direct product of the intervention by German and US imperialism. Shortly after the coup, loan deals were agreed with the new regime making devastating social attacks a condition for financial support from the IMF. This included an increase in gas prices for workers, as well as tax cuts for businesses.

But above all, Germany and the US intensified the confrontation with Russia. Moscow responded to the aggressive expansion of the EU and NATO's sphere of influence by incorporating the Crimean peninsula into Russia and backing the pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country, who did not accept the regime in Kiev.

The Ukrainian government began a major offensive in April against the Donbas region controlled by the separatists. They proceeded with extreme brutality, and are responsible for the deaths of at least 950 civilians. At every stage, the Ukrainian government has been working closely with its masters in Berlin and Washington.

In spite of the negative impact on German business, the German government intervened at the end of July to adopt EU sanctions against Russia in order to put the country under further pressure.

Merkel is attempting to use her visit to stabilise the regime in Kiev. This includes negotiations with Russia over a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier met with his Ukrainian and Russian counterparts in Berlin last weekend without any concrete results. Poroshenko is meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin next Tuesday.



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