

German economy minister celebrates the expansion of the Suez Canal

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The German Minister for Economic Affairs Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) travelled to Egypt last Thursday, just a few weeks after his sensational foray into Iran. The occasion was the opening of the expansion of the Suez Canal by Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

As in Tehran, the SPD chairman left no doubt about the purpose of his trip: the advance of German imperialism into the resource-rich and strategically important regions of the Middle East and North Africa.

Even before his flight Gabriel boasted, “The expansion of the Suez Canal is an impressive feat of engineering, which thanks to the involvement and the know-how of German companies also succeeded in record time”.

According to an official announcement by the German government, Gabriel wants to combine the visit with “hope for an economic upturn and stability in Egypt.” For Germany, he said, “as an exporting nation, the waterway was of great importance”.

Next to the Panama Canal, the 163-kilometre Suez Canal is the most important artificial shipping route in the world. Last year, more than 17,000 vessels passed through the waterway, moving a quarter of the world’s ship-bound merchandise. Germany ranks tenth among the nations using the canal, and thus ahead of the United States and France.

Up to the present the Suez Canal, opened in 1869, was mainly passable in only one direction. Now it has been widened in several places, and expanded to two lanes for a 72-kilometre new passage. German companies were involved in the project, including Herrenknecht AG, which shared responsibility for the construction of four tunnels and supplied special tools and machinery worth €160 million.

The expansion of the canal is a symbol of the close collaboration between the imperialist powers and one of the bloodiest dictatorships in the world. Al-Sisi has established a counter-revolutionary regime of terror in Egypt.

Since the military coup against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi in 2013, the Egyptian security forces have killed thousands of opponents of the regime, imprisoned tens of thousands and sentenced more than a thousand political

prisoners to death. Now the imperialist powers are seeking to develop strong ties with the dictator.

Just a few weeks ago, the German government rolled out the red carpet for the executioner of Cairo in Berlin. At a joint press conference with al-Sisi, Chancellor Merkel said that she “attached great strategic importance to relations with Egypt.” The German government was working on developing ways “of trying to secure the stability and prosperity of the country.” In this, Germany wanted to “be an important partner who can help.”

It is now clear what this “partnership” and “help” mean. In its latest edition, *Der Spiegel* reports that the German government has approved significantly more arms exports worldwide between January and the end of June 2015 than in the same period last year. “The increase in exports to the Arab states and North Africa” was especially drastic. Here the value has more than doubled, rising from €219 to €587 million.

According to a report by *Tagesspiegel*, the Egyptian regime would “also like to use police equipment from Germany in their own country”. The dictatorship’s “wish list” includes armoured police cars, protective clothing, listening devices and other “non-lethal equipment” like rubber truncheons or rubber bullets.

The rearming of the Egyptian military and police to suppress the Egyptian masses is directly connected to securing Germany’s imperialist interests in the region.

Significantly, one of the heavyweights of German big business, Siemens CEO Joe Kaeser, also participated in the canal expansion opening ceremony. Kaeser is an open admirer of al-Sisi, with whom he signed contracts and letters of intent worth €10 billion euros in March of this year at an economic conference in Sharm el-Sheikh. Among these contracts is the largest single order in the nearly 170-year history of Siemens, amounting to nearly 8 billion euros.

Gabriel and Kaeser clearly enjoyed the nationalistic and militarist spectacle organised by the Egyptian army. Together with other international state guests—including French President Francois Hollande, King Salman of Saudi

Arabia, King Abdullah of Jordan, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the North Korean “number two” Kim Yong Nam and the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (!)--he rose to applaud when the first freighter, the largest container ship in the world, *Maersk*, sailed fully laden past the VIP stand.

Al-Sisi himself arrived on the royal yacht “Mahrousa”, on which the then-Egyptian viceroy Ismail Pasha had traversed the canal at its historic opening in 1869. The dictator was followed by warships of the Egyptian Navy, while war planes and helicopters thundered over the tawdry scene. A total of 10,000 police officers and 230,000 soldiers were mobilized to secure the opening ceremony.

The expansion of the canal was itself an act of mass violence perpetrated by the Egyptian military. On the direct orders of al-Sisi, the work was completed in just one year instead of three. The Egyptian army, which de facto controls and manages the Suez Canal, was in charge of the construction, and had technical supervision of the project. Among other things, the tunnels under the waterway had to be built wide enough so that tanks can pass in both directions without any problems.

The expansion of the canal is only the central element of a huge industrial zone that is to be built between the cities of Suez and Port Said. According to the regime’s plans, this should include an international logistics centre as well steel and cement plants providing a million new jobs by 2030.

The German elites are electrified by the “effectiveness” of the Egyptian military dictatorship, which drowned the Egyptian revolution in blood and is now striving to create “attractive” conditions of exploitation for international finance capital.

In an editorial the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* gushed, “As the army leadership has now had a second fairway built in just one year, it has made two things clear: What it wants is quickly implemented; and it does what benefits it. Army-controlled companies drove the project forward; the new Suez Canal will strengthen the economic power of the army.”

And further: “In the future, vessels will not just quickly pass through [the canal]. An international trans-shipment terminal will be a hub for large shipping companies, and industrial zones around the canal--which connects Asia with Europe--will create jobs. Egypt is back as a location in the world economy.”

The return of an aggressive German imperialism, which again aspires to leadership in Europe, Asia and the world, not only requires close collaboration with dictatorships, but is directly linked to the return of authoritarian forms of government and police-state measures in Germany itself.

Just a few days before Gabriel flew to Egypt, the now-

dismissed Attorney General Harald Range had opened proceedings for treason against the *Netzpolitik.org* blog. In June, the German police authorities arrested the internationally renowned journalist Ahmed Mansour at Berlin-Tegel airport.

These are the methods of al-Sisi! Anyone who dares to uncover or criticize anti-democratic and militarist developments in Egypt must reckon with draconian punishment. The Egyptian regime is currently preparing new so-called “anti-terrorism legislation” in order to strengthen its repressive apparatus. Among other things, special “anti-terrorism courts” are to be created in order to sentence the accused more quickly.

The dictatorial character of the new law is so striking that even some of the German bourgeois media criticized it. *Die Zeit*, for example, wrote about “Egypt’s new rules” in July: “The definition of terrorist acts as violations of ‘public order’, ‘social peace’ and ‘national unity’ are framed so nebulously that in the future this could include the activities of human rights groups, trade unions, publishers and Internet sites.”

If the German elites have their way, these “new rules” will also be introduced at home. According to official agendas compiled by the German government, there are at least six conferences scheduled by the end of the year with Egyptian intelligence and police representatives that will discuss the fight against “terrorism”. In November, Egyptian officials are scheduled to attend the international symposium on explosives hosted by the Federal Criminal Investigation Agency (BKA) in Magdeburg, to talk with their German colleagues about “terrorism and combating extremists”.



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