

German Social Democratic Party leader calls for strengthening of federal police

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German Vice Chancellor and economy minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD, Social Democrats) called last weekend for a strengthening of the federal police. In an interview with *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper, he deplored equipment deficiencies and criticised interior minister Thomas de Maiziere (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), whom he held responsible for the situation.

Over the past 11 years, during which time the CDU has controlled the position of interior minister, there have been continuous cuts to the federal police, Gabriel complained. The police now lacked €45 million alone to purchase new helicopters, which were urgently required for the rapid deployment of “special forces.”

Gabriel demanded that the federal police had to be appropriately equipped with “sufficient personnel and the necessary technology.”

The leader of the SPD’s parliamentary group, Thomas Oppermann, announced in the same edition of the paper that there would be improvements in the course of the upcoming budgetary consultations. “If the finance minister intends to make savings at the expense of the security of our citizens, this is a false approach.” In the budget negotiations, the SPD would ensure that the federal police’s operational capabilities were not be put in jeopardy.

The SPD is supported in its push by the police trade union (GdP), whose deputy chair Jörg Radek noted that three helicopters which crashed have not been replaced. The federal police has called for €45 million in the 2017 budget for the modernisation and maintenance of the fleet, but this has not been approved by the finance ministry. “That is irresponsible,” Radek complained, and warned that if cuts continued in the coming years, the operational capability of the federal police would be at risk. According to the GdP, the 2017 budget falls

short by a total of €183 million.

The former federal border protection force, which was renamed the federal police in 2005 by the then SPD-Green Party government under Gerhard Schröder (SPD), acts as special forces for the German government for the deportation of refugees, which it carries out with extreme brutality. It is also now actively involved in sealing off Europe’s external borders. In this, the federal police collaborate closely with the EU border agency Frontex.

The federal police are frequently in the headlines for their racist methods. Human rights organisations have criticised the discriminatory checks on individuals. They arbitrarily stop people (“regardless of suspicion”) with different skin colours or of non-European origin to harass them.

Accusations of abuse against a police officer in Hannover were made public a year ago after he allegedly tortured refugees in a custody cell. A 29-year-old refugee from Afghanistan was his victim in one case. The officer wrote to his colleagues on Whatsapp that he had “got rid of him. An Afghan. With an entry ban. Stuck a finger up his nose. And choked him. Was funny. And dragged him through the cell by his foot restraint. It was so nice. Squealed like a pig. It was a present from Allah.”

A 19-year-old Moroccan was also abused in the custody cell at Hannover’s main train station. The officer wrote in a telephone message, “It was a Moroccan. I turned him white.” His superior said “that he heard him from upstairs, that he squealed like a pig. Then the bastard ate the stale leftovers of meat from the fridge, off the floor.”

In April, the state prosecutor suspended an investigation because no “structural problems” with the force had been uncovered.

The federal police have been increasingly militarised in the recent period and are to be turned into a paramilitary force. The notorious GSG 9 Special Forces unit was already part of the federal border protection service, and now the federal police. At the end of 2015, it was complimented with the new BFE+ special unit.

The so-called “evidence securing and detention unit plus” is heavily armed. Along with black combat gear, its standard equipment includes helmets and bullet-proof vests, as well as the G36 assault weapon used by the army. In addition, it is also equipped with armoured vehicles.

The federal police are thus to be transformed into a paramilitary unit as in other European countries, like the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS) and *Gendarmerie Mobile* in France, the Italian *Carabinieri* and the Spanish *Guardia Civil*. Such militarised forces are *de facto* army units. The federal police have already been training with these other European forces for years in house-to-house combat and other civil war scenarios.

The repeatedly invoked justification of the “war on terror” is a transparent pretext. In the first place, it is the wars waged by the US and its allies, including Germany, in the Middle East and North Africa, which have produced terrorism. Islamists militias are part of the war machinery of the imperialist powers, which have supported them with money and weapons in Syria against President Bashar al-Assad.

Secondly, the domestic military build-up is merely the corollary of this foreign policy. Since 2014, the German government has been pursuing its economic and geostrategic interests ever more openly with military means. Militarism, the break-up of the European Union, the emergence of new international finance crises and mounting social attacks are producing growing resistance among the population. The powers of the state are being stepped up in preparation for major class battles.

The differences between the SPD and CDU in this matter are purely tactical. In recent days, SPD leaders spoke out against the deployment of the army within Germany. Mayor of Hamburg and deputy SPD leader Olaf Scholz told DPA news agency, “I don’t think much of (...) the deployment of the army domestically, at least if it goes beyond what the constitution already provides for.”

Gabriel criticised the CDU/CSU for distracting

attention from the real problems of the security services with debates about the deployment of the army domestically. “Whoever demands the expansion of army deployments domestically is dismissing the work of our police officers,” he remarked.

Such verbal jousting is utterly fraudulent. As a party of government, the SPD agreed to the German army’s new white paper last month. There it is stated, “The armed forces can support the police to effectively tackle serious incidents by assuming sovereign powers of intervention and coercion under strict guidelines.”

The Social Democrats consider it more effective to carry out the accelerated creation of a paramilitary police force at the current juncture. This has the advantage of avoiding the overturning of the separation of the army and police laid down in the constitution. The federal police stand under the interior minister and do not have to be concerned with legal challenges at the Supreme Court, which a domestic deployment of the army could trigger, nor with parliament.

But this changes nothing about the aims being pursued—the suppression of resistance and opposition within Germany. The special forces of the federal police look like the military, exercise like the military and are to be deployed as such. The huge police deployment in Munich after the horrific shooting spree by an 18-year-old on July 22 was a trial run. Following on the Munich mobilization Gabriel’s demand for more funding for the federal police should be taken by the working class as serious warning.



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