

SPD wages law-and-order campaign in Germany's federal election

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"I'm of the view that they just need a good slap in the face so they realise who sets the agenda in this country." This statement, referring to the Eisenbahnstraße, a predominantly immigrant neighbourhood in Leipzig, was not made by Frauke Petry, Björn Höcke or another leader of the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD), but by Social Democratic (SPD) chancellor candidate Martin Schulz.

He made the statement on Sunday evening on "A Roundtable with Martin Schulz" on the private broadcaster RTL. The so-called town hall meeting was the first major national appearance in the election campaign by the SPD chairman.

The programme, which was allegedly to show Schulz in discussion with normal citizens, was carefully stage-managed. A central place was occupied by questions like "What would you do to enable me to feel secure in this country again?" The broadcaster interspersed this with polls allegedly showing that the main domestic security problem is controlling immigration and refugees.

Schulz used the appearance to portray himself as a hardliner who would not be outdone by anybody on law-and-order issues. Calls for "more police," "more police on the streets" and "respect for the police" ran like a red thread throughout the programme. "We cannot allow the criminals to drive Ferraris and the police to chase them on bicycles," was one typical statement from the SPD chairman. He proudly referred to the fact that his father had been a police officer and performed decades of service in a cop car.

On refugee policy, Schulz appealed for the immediate deportation of "threats" and "criminals." "Anyone seeking protection and planning attacks has nothing to gain in this country," he boasted. This is the typical language of the far right, which constructs an amalgam between those seeking protection, terrorists, and criminals so as to legitimize strict border controls and mass

deportations.

Schulz advocated an immigration law that would only allow selected immigrants useful for the economy into the country, while all of those who enter the country "illegally," i.e., as refugees, would automatically lose the chance of legally immigrating.

Confronted by a young person from Afghanistan, who had integrated excellently after 20 months in Germany but is now threatened with deportation, Schulz promised to call Bavarian Minister President Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU), a hardliner on immigration issues, and put in a good word for him.

Schulz's performance on RTL says a great deal about the character of the SPD. When the party last held the position of Chancellor, between 1998 and 2005 under Gerhard Schröder, the SPD created a huge low-wage sector with the Agenda 2010 reforms and initiated a massive transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top by implementing business-friendly tax reforms. At the same time, the SPD opened the door for the return of German militarism by directing the first foreign intervention by the military in Yugoslavia.

The SPD is now mobilising right-wing voters with law-and-order slogans, and appealing for the strengthening of the state apparatus to suppress mounting opposition to social inequality and militarism. After serving as Chancellor Merkel's loyal coalition partner for eight of her twelve years in power, the SPD is now seeking to outdo the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) from the right. Schulz, who as president of the European Parliament was complicit in the imposition of brutal austerity policies on Greece, the sealing off of the EU's external borders to refugees, and the organisation of military interventions in the Middle East and Africa, is seen as just the man for the job.

An SPD congress in March elected Schulz with 100 percent of the vote as chancellor candidate, and in June a

further congress adopted an election programme containing all of the right-wing measures Schulz now presents on RTL in the style of the AfD.

The SPD programme declares security to be “a central requirement for the people,” and that it is “the task of the state” to guarantee this. An entire chapter is devoted to this issue. “Our police deserve recognition and respect for their important work,” it states. “A prerequisite for a state capable of action is a police force and judiciary capable of action.”

The SPD demands, among other things, the creation of 15,000 positions in the police force, the introduction of video surveillance technology, the expansion of the Federal Criminal Police Office to a coordinating agency for all police forces, and the provision of modern IT equipment to investigative agencies. Under the pretext of “detering terrorism,” the SPD calls for the tightening up of existing laws, a centralisation of the state and federal security agencies, as well as closer “cooperation between the police and domestic intelligence agencies.”

The SPD also wants to strengthen controls on the external borders of the Schengen Zone and integrate the European police authority Europol more closely with the EU’s border security agency Frontex. The federal domestic intelligence agency, whose ties to right-wing extremists are notorious, will serve “as an early warning system for our free and democratic society.”

In addition, the SPD plans to combat the “spreading of fake news” on the Internet. To this end, it is calling “for better training and equipping of the police and judiciary in this area,” and for the holding of “the providers of social networks to account.” These are to be obliged to “cooperate effectively with prosecuting authorities,” and “penalised with punitive fines” if they do not do so.

The “struggle against fake news,” as Google’s censorship of progressive websites shows, is a synonym for censorship. It is aimed at suppressing information and opinions that contradict the official propaganda of the government and the state.

The development of the SPD into a right-wing party of law and order is closely bound up with its support for German militarism. Schulz and his predecessor as party chairman, Sigmar Gabriel, are vehement advocates of the creation of an independent European army and the advancing of a German imperialist policy independently of the United States. This requires a major military build-up.

While Schulz has criticised Merkel’s declaration in favour of an increase in defence spending to 2 percent of

GDP, this is purely for tactical electoral considerations and is a fraud.

The SPD’s election programme clearly states, “We recognise the need for a modern and effective army which must have appropriate capacities for national and alliance defence as well as international crisis management. The soldiers must be able to rely on the best possible equipment and sufficiently qualified personnel being made available for them.”

This cannot be achieved without a major hike in military spending.

The federal election is taking place in the midst of the deepest global crisis since the high point of the Cold War. The confrontation between the United States and North Korea threatens to provoke a nuclear war, which would draw in Russia, China and the rest of the world. NATO troops are mobilising on Europe’s borders with Russia. The European Union is threatening to break apart in the wake of Brexit and its relations with the United States are at the breaking point.

The ruling elite is responding to this crisis by resorting to the most despicable traditions of German imperialist policies. It is preparing a huge military build-up and strengthening of domestic state repression after the election that will be incompatible with democratic structures.

The SPD is offering itself as the party best placed to carry out this policy shift. There is no opposition to this among the established parties. The Greens and Free Democrats support this agenda. The only question with which they are concerned is whether it can best be enforced with Merkel’s CDU or Schulz’s SPD. The Left Party hopes to take its place at the cabinet table alongside the SPD, and is prepared to accept any policy to achieve this. The Left Party also calls for more security and police.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is the only party standing in the federal election with a socialist programme, which aims to unite workers around the world in struggle against war and capitalism. The building of the SGP now assumes great significance in order to prepare for the coming social and political struggles.



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