

Germany: SPD chancellor candidate Schulz attacks Merkel from the right

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The more the Social Democratic Party (SPD) declines in the polls—the party is running four weeks prior to the federal election at 22 percent, far behind Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) at 39 percent—the more it lashes out aggressively in its election campaign. In ZDF’s summer television interview on Sunday evening, SPD Chancellor candidate Martin Schulz attacked the German Chancellor from the right on foreign and domestic policy issues.

Schulz used the first four minutes of the 18-minute interview, which was broadcast on primetime television, to furiously attack Turkey. The Turkish President was breaking “all international regulations” and was intervening “in a drastic manner into the election campaign of another country.” He then threatened, “This has nothing to do with Mr. Erdogan ... it is a violation of all regulations. ... German politicians must respond to this unacceptable way of behaving by Mr. Erdogan.”

As German chancellor, he would “consider very tough measures against Turkey.” This included sanctions and an end to negotiations about expanding the customs union with Turkey. One could “not continue to accept that innocent citizens of our country rot in the prisons of an arbitrary leadership in Turkey” and that the Turkish president “gives us the run-around.” One would “have to get used to” the fact that Schulz “has principles” and would, if necessary, resort to “tough measures.” He added that he did not care if this meant the SPD would lose votes among voters of Turkish origin in the election.

Schulz’s hysterical threats against the Muslim-majority Turkey and almost 1.5 million Turkish citizens living in Germany underscore the right-wing essence of the SPD’s election campaign. The SPD is

responding to mounting opposition in the working class with nationalism and barely concealed racism so as to divide the working class and appeal to the most right-wing voters.

Everyone knows how dishonest Schulz’s blather about democracy and human rights is. It is obvious that the AKP government in Turkey is indiscriminately clamping down on opposition forces and journalists, and establishing an authoritarian regime in Turkey. But in Germany, the ruling class is responding to deepening social divisions with the same methods. Only on Friday, the CDU-led Interior Ministry banned the left-wing platform linksunten.indymedia.org with the full support of the SPD. Hardly a week goes by in the election campaign in which the grand coalition does not unveil new measures to strengthen the police and intelligence services, spy on the population, and to censor the Internet.

Schulz used the second half of the interview to make personal attacks on Merkel, a tactic the SPD election strategists have apparently stolen from Donald Trump in the United States. For example, according to Schulz, the chancellor is using “federal infrastructure at a knockdown price to fly to election events.” There are “a whole series of points where the people feel Angela Merkel is disconnected.”

In his closing appeal, Schulz declared that he had “presented a nuanced programme,” while the CDU was satisfied to state, “We have Angela Merkel, that’s enough for the future.” All of this “has happened once before,” he recalled. “The last four of Kohl’s 16 years” were “years of political stagnation and agony,” which he wanted to “save Germany” from. It is well known what this means. The “nuanced” SPD programme at that time consisted in the Agenda 2010 and Hartz laws, which introduced the largest wave of social cutbacks in

post-war Germany.

Schulz's campaign is so aggressive and repugnant that he is seen by wide sections of the population as the "greater evil" in comparison to Merkel. In the second summer interview of the evening, the chancellor sought cynically to portray herself as the caring mother of the German population. Asked about Schulz's attacks, she recalled the oath of office she had taken, to serve "the well-being of the German people." She was seeking "to do justice" by this oath.

In truth, Merkel's quieter and sober style conceals an extreme militarist policy that is shared by all parties in parliament and is being prepared behind the backs of the population for the period following the election. In a lengthy interview in the weekend edition of *Handelsblatt*, Merkel appealed for more independence for Germany in foreign policy and a massive build-up of the military.

She repeated her statement made in a Bavarian beer tent, which has since become famous, that Europe had to "take our fate into our hands" and ranted at *Handelsblatt* editor Gabor Steingart about a "European century," the construction of a European army, and "different interests" from the US. Among other things, Europe needed "a joint Africa policy," a "joint Syria, Iraq, Iran policy," and a "joint Russia and China policy," stated Merkel. Anything else would infringe "upon Europe's interests."

German defence spending had to be substantially increased to achieve this, she continued. Merkel recalled that Germany had "confirmed in the white paper adopted by our government last summer" that it would meet NATO's 2 percent target for defence spending. "Then we began to increase our defence budget and we have already done this in the past two years. And I think it has been revealed to everyone that the army needs to be better equipped."

In reality, in the wake of the horrific crimes perpetrated by German imperialism in the last century, the majority of the population is opposed to the military build-up and war. In a Forsa poll commissioned by *Stern* magazine in February, 55 percent of respondents spoke out against an increase in defence spending over the coming years. Only majorities of Alternative for Germany supporters (62 percent) and Free Democratic Party supporters (53 percent) backed a military spending increase.

Nonetheless, Schulz and the SPD are also attacking Merkel from the right on this question. In their recently published "Principles for a Social Democratic security and defence policy," the Social Democrats, with whom the Left Party and sections of the Greens are striving to form a coalition, are described as the "better" party of German militarism.

"Instead of adapting our armed forces to the challenges of the 21st century, the CDU/CSU defence ministers zu Guttenberg, de Maiziere and von der Leyen have bungled the reform of the army, and allowed the Defence Ministry to degenerate into a career platform for over-ambitious CDU politicians," it states. The suspension of military service had been "rammed through," "without preparing politically and organisationally for it." The army was now forced "to struggle with hollowed-out structures and poor equipment which have emerged due to the CDU/CSU cost-cutting programme."



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