

Social Democratic chancellor candidate Schulz calls for well-equipped German army

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Just days ahead of the televised debate between Social Democrat (SPD) Chancellor candidate Martin Schulz and Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU), the SPD is trying to portray itself as a party committed to disarmament and peace.

During his trip to Washington, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel gave his backing to Schulz's call for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Germany. "I am certainly convinced that it is important for us to once again speak about arms controls and disarmament," the Social Democrat told the German news agency DPA. The issue concerned Europe and Germany in particular, he said, adding, "In that context, I found the statement by Martin Schulz that we have to focus on finally getting rid of nuclear weapons from our country to be correct."

Estimates suggest that some 20 US nuclear weapons are stored at the German army's (Bundeswehr) airfield in Büchel. Last week at an election meeting in Trier, Schulz called for the weapons to be withdrawn. "As Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, I will advocate ... for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons stored in Germany," he declared.

SPD election strategists, who are desperately trying to turn around Schulz's low poll ratings, have apparently been studying current opinion polls. According to a recent poll by research company Civey, 63.5 percent of Germans want the government to call for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons stored in Germany. Almost half, 47.1 percent, think the government should "definitely" call for this. Less than one in three Germans (29 percent) are of the opposing view.

Nobody should be deceived by the pacifist phrases in the media statements by SPD politicians. The vast majority of the population favours the withdrawal of American nuclear weapons because they oppose

militarism and war. However, Gabriel and Schulz are not concerned about peace and disarmament, but rather want to transform the widespread opposition to US imperialist wars into support for German militarism.

An interview Schulz gave to the Bundeswehr Association published on August 28 leaves no doubt about this. Schulz began by reassuring his interviewer that he would not "subordinate" himself to "rearmament policies à la Donald Trump." He then portrayed himself as the best candidate to uphold the interests of the soldiers and the SPD as the leading party of German militarism.

"We want a well-equipped Bundeswehr that is up to the growing challenges of the future. We owe that to our soldiers. To meet the rising demands of international interventions, cyber-deterrence and defence, we need a modern armed forces capable of action," stated Schulz.

The Social Democratic candidate repeatedly called for a major military build-up and an expansion of the army. "We need a Bundeswehr in which the best minds make decisions and with troops prepared for crisis situations ready to deploy," he said. "For this purpose, we have to better equip the Bundeswehr with personnel and materially." It was clear "that the Bundeswehr will need billions in additional funds."

In response to the question "What value does defence policy have in your party's election campaign," Schulz answered, "A high one! I visited the Bundeswehr's Joint Operations Command already in May in Geltow. I was able to get a precise picture of the current status of the Bundeswehr, beyond the discussions I regularly have with the chairman of the Bundeswehr Association, Lieutenant Colonel Wüstner, and many others." This dialogue was "very important" for him. "It also creates trust. All politicians should talk more with the soldiers

instead of talking about the soldiers,” he said.

The soldiers had to “be able to trust that the best possible equipment will be made available to them and that conditions of service will be adapted to today’s standards.” This included “more equipment and flying hours.” And “the urgently required securing of new recruits” can “only be improved if the conditions of service are changed.”

Asked about his “goals for the coming legislative period,” Schulz mentioned the establishment of an independent European foreign and defence policy and the building of a European army. The SPD wants “to press ahead with the European security and defence policy together with our partners in Europe. Already the permanent cooperation proposed in the Lisbon Treaty makes possible concrete measures for closer cooperation and division of labour on the path to a defence union and onwards to the long-term goal of a European army.”

Schulz, with whom the Left Party and sections of the Greens want to form a coalition, constantly attacked the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) from the right. “With the SPD, there would have been no boosting of personal profiles and career planning at the expense of the Bundeswehr. Had the successive CDU/CSU ministers listened to us, the failures of the recent structural reforms would not have occurred. They cannot continue to transfer new mandates and tasks to the Bundeswehr without giving it the personnel, military equipment and funding for this. The Bundeswehr cannot be equipped according to the financial situation.” Under SPD leadership, the Bundeswehr will “be treated better.”

The clearest demonstration of the extreme right-wing and militarist character of Schulz and the SPD is that they deem even the most toothless criticism of the Bundeswehr to be inadmissible—even when it concerns extremely troubling developments like the emergence of neo-Nazi terrorist cells. “We in the SPD thought it was very improper for Mrs. Von der Leyen to recently place all members of the Bundeswehr under general suspicion,” he said. This had “damaged trust.”

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