

Candidates denounce refugees, demand state build-up at German election debate

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The much-hyped televised debate between Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) and her Social Democratic challenger Martin Schulz on Sunday evening was a disgusting political spectacle. Merkel and Schulz agreed on virtually every issue and appealed, among other things, for a stricter crackdown on refugees, more police, and a more aggressive German and European foreign policy.

Questions affecting millions of people—social inequality and war—were only mentioned in passing. The major military build-up planned after the election, which both parties fully support, was not even discussed.

For the first hour of the one-and-a-half hour debate, the only topics dealt with were refugee policy and relations with Turkey. Encouraged by the moderators, both candidates made increasingly aggressive statements against refugees and the Turkish government. Schulz repeatedly attacked the Chancellor from the right. In 2015, Merkel opened the borders for refugees without consulting other European Union (EU) member states, Schulz stated. He added that he could only advise her against “doing it all over again.”

Merkel explained that she had been working for some time in close cooperation with the SPD to seal Europe’s borders and shut down refugee routes. She praised the recently signed migration agreement with the Egyptian al-Sisi regime, one of the most brutal and bloody military dictatorships in the world. But the Chancellor’s call for more deportations did not go far enough for Schulz. “We could be a lot quicker there,” he said.

On foreign policy, Schulz’s threats against Muslim-majority Turkey came thick and fast, and he left no doubt that the SPD is also to the right of Merkel on foreign policy matters. “I emphatically take a different

view on the question of how to deal with Mr. Erdogan,” he blustered. The only words the Turkish president understands are “Now it’s over.” As Chancellor, he would take a “hard line” towards Turkey, stop all payments to its government and “break off talks on joining the EU.”

The cynicism of Schulz’s invocations of democracy and human rights was revealed when he, like Merkel, praised the EU’s anti-refugee agreement with Ankara. This dirty deal, which the EU negotiated with Erdogan in the autumn of 2015, is a component of the EU’s “Fortress Europe” policy and has prevented refugees from the war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan from reaching Europe.

In spite of North Korea’s latest nuclear test, the discussion of the crisis in the Korean peninsula was brief. But it shed light on Germany’s new great power ambitions and growing tensions between the US and Germany. “Some time ago, I suggested that the Europeans had to engage more strongly. Because we have to be clear about one thing: the US alone, under this President, won’t manage the heavy lifting. Even the constructive forces in Washington don’t know when the President will fire off his next tweet and destroy one or another diplomatic opportunity in the process,” said Schulz. Germany therefore has to get together with Trump’s opponents in Washington, Mexico, Canada, and EU partners to stand up to Trump.

Merkel also declared that there are “deep-going differences with the American President,” but still insisted that Germany needs the US as a “power for peace.” She praised the cooperation with the US in the wars in Syria and Iraq, and Washington’s recent announcement that is increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan. She naturally did not explain the base

calculation behind this. The ruling class knows full well that it is dependent upon the US war machine so long as Berlin and the other European powers prove incapable of plundering the resource-rich and strategically important regions of the Middle East and Central Asia without Washington's support.

The vast gulf between the political elite and their media lackeys and the rest of the population was demonstrated in the section on "social justice." The moderators blustered about how good economic conditions in Germany were and asked Schulz if he was "living in another country" when he criticised current conditions. In reality, Germany is one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, with 36 German billionaires owning more wealth than the poorest half of the population. Around one in six residents of Germany lives in poverty and one in five works in a low-wage job paying less than €10 per hour.

Schulz and Merkel sought to divert attention away from their own responsibility for the social catastrophe by pledging a modest increase for spending on families, and promising to combat unemployment and precarious work. When the SPD last held the post of Chancellor with Gerhard Schröder, the party introduced the largest wave of social cutbacks in Germany's post-war history with their Agenda 2010 and the Hartz laws. The SPD has governed for eight of the past twelve years alongside Finance Minister Schäuble and Merkel, and has pressed ahead with austerity policies throughout Europe.

In the last section of the debate, both candidates spoke out in favour of a major strengthening of the state apparatus in the name of the war on terror. "I will do everything to ensure the authorities are up to the job. We have to adopt all preventive measures in order to identify threats and deport them," Schulz stated. The Social Democrat called for hiring 15,000 new police officers and boasted that he himself is "the son of a police officer." He therefore knew "what these people accomplish" and intends to "invest a lot of money."

Merkel had no intention in being outdone in this drive to establish a police state. She said that she intends to improve security standards in every state and introduce a "model police law," so that all police officers in Germany obtain the same equipment. By way of concrete examples, the Chancellor mentioned the "relevant interception and opportunities for data

capture on social media" and "dragnet controls" and "video surveillance." The ability to "read mobile telephones" had been introduced by her government, she boasted.

Merkel and Schulz's right-wing programme is supported in all essentials by all of the capitalist parties. In a debate last Wednesday evening, the leaders of the Left Party, Greens, Free Democrats and AfD advocated more police and more funds for domestic security.

Three weeks before the election, the polls show Schulz trailing far behind Merkel, and not gaining any ground. But regardless of the outcome of the September 24 vote, the ruling class will bring a government to power committed to a massive military build-up, the cutting of welfare benefits and wages, and the establishment of a police state. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is the only party decisively combatting the rightward lurch of official politics and fighting for a socialist solution to the global capitalist crisis.



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