

German Left Party and Greens demand expansion of police powers

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6 September 2017

Following the televised debate between German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) and her challenger, Martin Schulz (Social Democrats, SPD), the smaller parties held two debates on Monday.

On the ZDF broadcast channel, Alexander Dobrindt (Christian Social Union, CSU), Katrin Göring-Eckhardt (Greens) and Dietmar Bartsch (Left Party) met for a debate.

The public broadcaster ARD held another debate including Joachim Hermann (CSU), Cem Özdemir (Greens), Christian Lindner (Free Democrats, FDP), Sahra Wagenknecht (Left Party), and Alice Weidel (Alternative for Germany, AfD).

Like Merkel and Schulz, the representatives of the smaller parties all advocated a major build-up of the domestic state apparatus. The call for more police dominated both debates. The participants sought to outdo each other with demands for more police officers, the militarisation of the police and improvements to surveillance technology.

ZDF devoted the first third of the debate to the issue of internal security.

The Left Party's Bartsch got the ball rolling. He declared that "the central issue for internal security" was "the equipping of the police." Since 1998, he said, "18,000 positions have been cut from the police. That is a major deficit." The justice system also must be better equipped, both with personnel and materially, Bartsch added, and enforce existing laws more firmly.

Transport Minister Dobrindt also called for "significantly more police officers," who should be better equipped and granted wide-ranging investigative powers, including dragnet surveillance. Above all, he demanded "respect and recognition" for the police. Politicians have to support the police and should not start criticising them after every incident, Dobrindt

said.

The Greens' Göring-Eckhardt stated she was "very much in favour of the police being recognised," and also called for the hiring of new officers. She evocatively described the psychological impact on a homeowner who is the victim of a burglary. More police need to be on the streets, she claimed.

The only sharp disagreement emerged over who was responsible for cutting police jobs. Göring-Eckhardt accused the CSU of weakening the police. Bartsch attacked Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere (CDU) for bowing to Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble's austerity demands. Bartsch noted with satisfaction that "all parties agree" that more police officers are needed.

The debate also became a contest between the participants over internal security. The "liberal" Lindner called for the merging of the intelligence agencies and the introduction of electronic tagging, while Bavarian Interior Minister Hermann demanded more video surveillance. The AfD's Weidel appealed for the joint deployment of police and soldiers, as well as the comprehensive deployment of surveillance cameras.

Like Merkel and Schulz on Sunday, the representatives of the smaller parties barely touched upon issues impacting millions of people. The growing threat of war on the Korean peninsula, the wars in the Middle East, and the major build-up of Germany's armed forces were entirely absent from both debates.

Although growing social inequality and poverty were mentioned in passing, none of the participants could offer a credible response to the social crisis. It is well-known that the SPD and Greens at the federal level, and the Left Party in the states where it has served in government, have led the way in cutting social spending, eliminating jobs at the municipal level and

creating a huge low-wage sector.

The hysterical obsession of all parties with internal security and the construction of a massive police and surveillance apparatus in a country which, at least on the surface, appears relatively quiet and peaceful can only be understood in the context of the deep crisis of international capitalism.

The German ruling elite sees its interests threatened everywhere by wars and crises, while the alliances of the post-war era, particularly with the US, are breaking apart. The ruling elite is responding with a massive military build-up and the pursuit of an aggressive global foreign policy.

In a background article titled “Red alert,” *Handelsblatt* wrote recently, “In the coming four years, German politics will have to focus much more strongly than in the past on political crises, which also contain potential economic risks. Some of these crises are playing out in far-flung regions of the world, such as the conflict in Korea, Venezuela, or in the South China Sea. Some of these crises are unfolding on Europe’s doorstep, such as in Turkey, Syria, North Africa or on the Arabian peninsula. Or even in the midst of the EU with Brexit.”

Germany’s ruling elite knows that intervening in these crises, and the wars and great power politics bound up with them, will provoke widespread opposition, which will be intensified further by the social crisis that is being exacerbated by the growth of military spending. They intend to block these by building an apparatus of mass repression. All political parties are united on this question.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is the only party standing in the election on a socialist programme, directed against war and capitalism.



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