

Germany's federal election campaign and the danger of global nuclear war

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The media and political parties have long sought to keep the issues of war and militarism out of Germany's federal election campaign. But reality is now catching up with them. US imperialism's aggressiveness towards North Korea, Russia and China, and the Pyongyang regime's testing of a nuclear weapon have brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war, which calls into question the very survival of humanity. A danger which the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and International Committee of the Fourth International has been warning of for some time is now being openly discussed.

On Wednesday, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres drew parallels to the situation in 1914 and declared, "If you look at the history of the First World War, it was on a step-by-step basis, one party doing one thing, the other party doing another, and then an escalation taking place."

In an article headlined "The firebrands," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* posed the troubling question, "Who knows whether in such a situation, things will happen in the end that at the outset nobody wanted. It is no coincidence that the sleepwalkers, who led Europe into the First World War in the summer of 1914, are being discussed once again."

The last session of Germany's parliament (Bundestag) prior to the election was overshadowed by the danger of nuclear war. Even before Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) opened the session with a speech, deputy leader of the Social Democrat (SPD) parliamentary group on foreign and defence affairs, Rolf Mützenich, stated, "A nuclear shadow once again lies over the world—from North Korea, but also due to a careless, ranting US president, who is expanding the nuclear shadow. Mrs. Chancellor, I think you would deserve all honours if you sharply contradict such an American president in your remaining period in office."

SPD Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel warned in his speech of "a phase in which we not only talk about conventional rearmament, but about a return to the darkest hours of the Cold War." Globally, "all the talk is about rearmament ... In China, India, Latin America, the US,

Russia, Europe, Africa, everywhere we are talking about rearmament, nothing else is being discussed anywhere."

"The political symbol, the political action that must come from Germany cannot be that we will join in with this arms race," proclaimed the foreign minister. "Germany's signal, regardless of who has governed this country, has always been that Germany wants to be a voice for peace and a power for peace in the world and will not participate in rearmament." Gabriel described NATO's decision that member states should spend 2 percent of their GDP on defence as an "error"—"Even though Social Democrats supported this compromise at the time."

In November 1933, Leon Trotsky wrote the article "The pacifist Hitler." He described how even Hitler pledged himself to "peace" and "international understanding" at the beginning of Nazi rule. The Third Reich, Trotsky noted, was at the end of 1933 still too weak "to be able in the next period to speak any other language than that of pacifism." However, in the course of a few years, after it had rearmed, it would transition from "'my peace' to 'my struggle' and even to 'my war'."

Gabriel required less than five minutes in the Bundestag to transition from the phrases about peace and disarmament to call for the build-up of Germany's armed forces. "Of course we must improve the armed forces' armaments, because, by the way, cuts have been made to the armed forces for 12 years," raged the Social Democrat. Gabriel identified the right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, who was defence minister from 2009 to 2011 and is currently attempting a political comeback, as the individual chiefly responsible for this.

The direction of Gabriel's criticism of the NATO 2 percent target is clear. Germany is rearming and preparing, along with the other great powers, for war, but on its own terms.

The "main issue at stake must not be how much we spend, but rather the issue is what we spend it on," Gabriel declared to the deputies. What is at stake is "the right strategy." And he has been told by "every soldier who returns from a

foreign deployment”: “Yes, we need the military. But dear Mr. Gabriel, don’t believe that simply through more defence and military spending you can secure peace and stability, and combat the movement of refugees. You have to fight hunger, poverty, hopelessness and the lack of a future. You have to do that.”

This is a barely concealed criticism of the US-led wars in the Middle East, to which Gabriel wants to counterpose an allegedly more “humane” European interventionist policy, dominated by Berlin.

“Europe bears responsibility for Europe’s security,” Gabriel wrote in his latest book with the revealing title “Remeasuring.” “In foreign and security policy, we have to be capable of strategic awareness and taking action, because we are not yet good enough. This includes defining our European interests and articulating them independently of the US. This obstinacy to some extent requires an emancipation from adopting positions developed in Washington.”

Gabriel’s declared goal is the establishment of a European army capable of enforcing its global interests independently of NATO and the US, and, if necessary, in opposition to the latter. It’s “not merely about purchasing new weapons. it’s about more strongly integrating Europe’s arms industry and to pool resources. It’s about the creation of a joint European security identity, which through increasingly integrated structures clears the path to a European army.”

Gabriel knows very well that US plans to strengthen its nuclear arsenal endanger this policy. A “return to the darkest hours of the Cold War” would increase Germany and Europe’s dependence on the US, and undermine Berlin’s economic and geopolitical interests, which stand in ever deepening contradiction to those of the US. He intends to utilise the remainder of the election campaign to transform the widespread fear of a US-incited nuclear war into support for German militarism.

The Left Party and Greens, who are striving to establish a government with Martin Schulz, the SPD chancellor candidate, after the election are working towards the same goal. They introduced a motion in the Bundestag on Tuesday calling on the German government to “withdraw” its support for NATO’s 2 percent target and “immediately initiate talks with the US aimed at withdrawing the US nuclear weapons stationed at Büchel from the Federal Republic as soon as possible.”

Jan Korte, who spoke in favour of the Left Party’s ultimately defeated motion, left no doubt that it was not motivated by pacifist goals, but the strengthening of German imperialism against Washington. The motion also noted “that we are independent and sovereign—including from the United States of America—and make our own policies here.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is the only party that opposes the US nuclear war plans, no less than European and German rearmament, and fights from the standpoint of the international working class against the growing war danger. In our election statement: “Against militarism and war! For socialism!” we state:

“The danger of a third world war cannot be prevented through appeals for peace to the ruling class. The struggle against war is inseparably bound up with the fight for socialism. The SGP calls for the building of an international anti-war movement based on the following principles:

“The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population. “The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

“The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

“The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights.”



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