

The war danger and the significance of the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party of Germany

The Socialist Equality Party (Germany)
21 September 2017

On the eve of Germany's federal election, everything indicates that Angela Merkel will remain as chancellor, either as a result of the continuation of the grand coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) or in coalition with the Free Democrats (FDP) and/or Greens. The Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) have for several weeks held a double-digit lead in the polls over the SPD, which has now fallen to an historic low of 20 percent. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), Left Party, FDP and Greens are all hovering around the 10 percent mark.

But even if election night brings a surprise result due to the large number of undecided voters, the policies of the incoming government have long been determined: an unprecedented increase in militarism, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus, and social cuts. All parties agree on these issues. This accounts for the remarkable form of the election campaign, which can hardly be called a campaign. The parties are not arguing over different goals and programmes, but seeking to outdo one another with demands for more police officers and more extensive surveillance, a more effective crackdown on refugees and a more aggressive and militarist foreign policy.

Merkel and her policies are anything but popular. Her lead in the opinion polls is based exclusively on the fact that the other parties are unwilling to seriously criticise her. In both the federal and state governments, the CDU, SPD, FDP, Greens and Left Party have been collaborating for some time in coalitions made up of all conceivable combinations.

None of Merkel's rivals, least of all SPD chancellor candidate Martin Schulz, want to discuss the growing war danger, the outrageous levels of social inequality or the erosion of democratic rights, issues that concern the vast majority of the population. They all know that a mobilisation of people on these issues would not only be directed against Merkel, but also against themselves.

Great power politics and militarism

The policies of the incoming government will not be determined by the parties' election promises, but by the international situation and the ruling elite's response to it.

The federal election is taking place amid the deepest crisis of global capitalism since the end of the Second World War. The threat of a third world war has never been greater. A criminal regime is in power in the United States, the world's most powerful military force, which is threatening a policy of extermination that recalls the Nazis. In his speech

at the UN General Assembly, Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea, a country with a population of 25 million people. Twenty-five years of war have turned the United States into a powder keg, and the build-up of soldiers on Russia's borders threatens to transform Europe into a battlefield.

The global economy is extremely unstable. Trade conflicts and protectionism are intensifying. None of the problems that drove the world economy to the brink of collapse in 2008 have been resolved. The political framework that offered Germany a degree of external and internal stability following two world wars—an alliance with the United States, the European Union, the policy of social compromise—is breaking apart.

Germany's ruling elite is responding to this global crisis in the same way it did in the last century. It is returning to the militarist traditions that culminated in the most horrific crimes in history. It is responding to mounting tensions with the United States by seeking to rise to a predominant position within Europe so as to be able to act as a global power. Although these goals are barely being discussed in the election campaign, they are filling the pages of relevant publications.

In a lengthy analysis of the world situation published on 25 August, *Handelsblatt* came to the conclusion that the US has "since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, emerged as a threat rather than a saviour." Germany has to "urgently decide which part of the leadership vacuum left behind by the United States" it wants to fill. Otherwise, there are "others ready to take over this role." This was a reference to China in particular.

A similar argument was made in a 40-page dossier by the German Society for Foreign Affairs (DGAP) on the issue of "Foreign policy challenges for the next federal government." It warned of the danger "that the US is substantially weakening the institutional-based global order and using its power for short-term gains." The next German government had to therefore "firmly implement the comprehensive security policy approach" introduced four years ago. At that time, leading government representatives proclaimed "the end of military restraint" and initiated the return of German militarism.

All of the established parties support this agenda. The most aggressive in this are the SPD, Greens and Left Party. Former Left Party chairman Oskar Lafontaine praised the Left Party "as the only party" not swimming in "the stream of subordination" to the United States and firmly standing up for "Europe and Germany's own interests."

Green Party lead candidate Cem Özdemir appealed for a "foreign policy with a clear framework of values, but also with the courage to implement military methods in situations where diplomatic methods reach their limits." Therefore, the army had to be "appropriately equipped." This would not come "free of charge."

SPD Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel outlined Germany's foreign

policy programme most clearly in an interview with *Handelsblatt*. He wants to “turn Europe into a global political actor,” into a great power that can stand up to the US as well as China and, to this end, double “the efficiency of the European defence policy.” He calls the ending of military service a mistake.

Gabriel explicitly emphasized the agreement of all political parties on this issue. “The good thing about Germany in foreign policy is that, regardless of which party is in government, there have been no major shifts.”

Strengthening the state apparatus and social counterrevolution

Gabriel’s programme of making Europe “a global political actor” has its own unavoidable logic. It requires Germany to subordinate Europe to its will and suppress all social and political opposition. On both issues, Berlin is committed to a close partnership with French President Emmanuel Macron. Both Germany and France view Britain’s exit from the European Union as an opportunity, notwithstanding the economic risks bound up with it, to establish a European army, which London has always opposed.

The chief hurdle they see in implementing this project is the opposition of the working class, which will have to bear the enormous costs of militarism. The labour market reforms and social cuts imposed by Macron by means of a state of emergency and by decree are seen as precedents for breaking the resistance of the working class throughout Europe.

Hostility to war is deeply rooted in broad sections of the German population. In addition, society is deeply divided and many feel they are no longer represented by the established parties. This is the reason why the major parties are seeking to outdo each other with demands for more police, stronger intelligence agencies, comprehensive surveillance and censorship of the Internet.

The Left Party is demanding “more police officers in public spaces” and “protection against verbal attacks” (i.e., censorship) on social networks. The Greens are demanding more recognition for the police and the hiring of 15,000 additional officers. The FDP wants to centralise the intelligence agencies and introduce electronic tags. The SPD and CDU are appealing for close cooperation between the police and intelligence agencies, which has been banned since the experience of Hitler’s Gestapo. The AfD wants to deploy the army domestically.

This security hysteria is not directed principally against potential terrorists, who, like the Berlin attacker Anis Amri, generally operate under the noses of the intelligence agencies, but against the working class and any form of social and political opposition.

The AfD and the rightward lurch of official politics

The probable entry of the AfD, a party of right-wing nationalists, racists and neo-Nazis, into parliament is the result of these policies. In a similar manner as Donald Trump in the US, the AfD exploits anger over the antisocial policies of the established parties by means of right-wing populism, while simultaneously pushing its reactionary essence to the limit.

The established parties have politically and ideologically prepared the ground for the AfD. This cannot be concealed by their hypocritical outrage at right-wing extremist comments by leading AfD members. The media made agitation against refugees acceptable in political debate long

before the founding of the AfD, when they hyped the racist book *Germany Abolishes Itself* by the Social Democrat Thilo Sarrazin.

The AfD has set the tone throughout the election campaign. There was not a single talk show that did not offer the AfD a prominent place to spread its racist filth. The established parties outdid each other with demands for the deportation of rejected asylum seekers and “criminal foreigners.”

The statement by AfD lead candidate Alexander Gauland that one has to be “proud of the achievements of German soldiers in two world wars,” which was widely debated shortly before the election, is shared broadly within ruling circles. When a neo-Nazi terrorist cell was uncovered in the army in early May, representatives of all parties demonstratively gave their backing to the armed forces. Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (CDU), who initially made some critical remarks about the maintenance of traditions from the Wehrmacht, Germany’s armed forces under the Nazis, retreated rapidly and declared that barracks bearing the names of Wehrmacht generals would not be renamed.

The SPD, in particular, condemned all criticism of the army, even of this mild sort, as illegitimate. In an election interview with the Armed Forces Association (Bundeswehrverband), Schulz stated, “We in the SPD thought it was very improper for Mrs. Von der Leyen to ultimately place the members of the armed forces under general suspicion.” This had “damaged trust.”

Ernst Nolte still faced strong resistance in the historians’ dispute in 1986 when he advocated a fundamental revision of the approach to Germany’s Nazi past. Today, the ruling class shares his standpoint.

When Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski told *Der Spiegel* in February 2014 that “Hitler was not vicious” and “historically speaking, Nolte was right,” he received support from leading academics, media outlets and representatives of all parties in parliament. The Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP) and its youth organization, the IYSSE, which publicly criticised Baberowski’s statements, faced hysterical denunciations.

The fake news law supported by Justice Minister Heiko Mas (SPD), which will come into force immediately after the election and compels social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter to impose strict censorship, as well as Google’s censorship efforts, which have blacked out the *World Socialist Web Site* and other left-wing and antimilitarist sites, are aimed at suppressing opponents of the established parties’ right-wing policies.

The rise of the AfD and the rehabilitation of the Nazis’ crimes are inseparable from the revival of German militarism. Germany’s ruling class cannot bolster its military and suppress the opposition to this without repeating its historic crimes. The issues being currently discussed behind the scenes will form the basis of the new government’s programme after the election.

Build the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei)

Under these conditions, the Socialist Equality Party’s election campaign assumes enormous significance. The SGP is the only party to have placed the war danger at the heart of its election campaign, identifying its origins and providing an alternative.

“The fight for a socialist programme is the only way to prevent a catastrophe,” the SGP’s election programme states. “Our election campaign has the goal of building a revolutionary party to unite the working class around the world in the struggle against nationalism, social inequality and war. We are not striving for posts in a coalition, but are fighting to overthrow capitalism and establish a workers’ government.”

The SGP is not yet a mass party. But it is the only party that opposes the

“left” and right-wing defenders of capitalism and fights for the building of an international socialist movement.

The danger of a third world war, which would be waged with nuclear weapons and threaten the very existence of humanity, is enormous. But the same social crisis that produces the war danger also creates the objective conditions to overcome it. Millions of workers and youth around the world will be confronted with major shocks and convulsions. They are seeking a way out of the capitalist blind alley and will find a new political orientation. The decisive precondition for this is the existence of a party that struggles relentlessly for a socialist programme.

The Socialist Equality Party stands in the tradition of the Left Opposition, which, under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, defended Marxism and socialist internationalism against the betrayals of Stalinism. Our revolutionary examples are Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who fought capitalism under the most difficult conditions and defended internationalism amid the nationalist frenzy of the First World War.

A century ago, the Russian workers proved that it was possible to conquer state power, end the First World War and reorganise society on the basis of socialist principles. The fact that the Soviet Union remained isolated and degenerated under Stalin’s leadership does not take away from the historic significance of the 1917 October Revolution. Stalinism embodied the interests of a privileged bureaucracy, which politically suppressed the working class, created tremendous confusion about what socialism actually is and ultimately seized the initiative in restoring capitalism.

The social and political consequences were horrendous. One hundred years after the October Revolution, global capitalism has not solved any of the problems that made the revolution possible and necessary. On the contrary, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union 26 years ago, the capitalists lost all restraint. They unleashed an inferno that now threatens the entire world with nuclear destruction. Humanity once again confronts the alternative: socialism or barbarism.

We call on everyone who is not prepared to tolerate the threat of a third world war, the increase of poverty and the rise of the far-right to vote on 24 September for the SGP’s state lists in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia, and our direct candidates in Frankfurt and Leipzig. Every vote for the SGP is a vote against war and capitalism.

Attend our final election rally on Saturday, 23 September in Berlin. Leading representatives of the SGP and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) will discuss the political situation and the struggle for socialism in the US, Europe and globally.

The principal goal of our election campaign is to prepare workers and young people politically and theoretically for the coming conflicts. Read and study the *World Socialist Web Site*, the daily online publication of the ICFI! Become a member of the SGP! It is high time to participate in the construction of a new socialist mass party!



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