

Germany: Demands grow for Merkel's resignation

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Demands for the resignation of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, are getting louder. In the past few days, leading representatives of the business community, political parties (including Merkel's own Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and the media, while not calling for the chancellor's immediate resignation, have insisted instead on an "orderly transition" in one or two years at the latest. The longer negotiations on a new ruling coalition continue, the more likely such forces will press for a rapid change at the top of the government.

Der Spiegel appeared on December 16 with an editorial titled "The ruins of Merkelism." It bluntly called upon the chancellor to resign: "If Merkel is so concerned about stable relations, then she should be able to see that this is precisely what the country lacks if she surpasses the record periods in government of Adenauer, 14 years, and Kohl, 16 years."

On December 20, *Handelsblatt* devoted four pages to the theme "Business leaders distance themselves from Merkel." It cited a number of corporate bosses and economists who warn against a "continuation of existing policies" and urge fresh "reforms."

Jürgen Heraeus, head of the technology group which bears his name, declared: "France and Austria have shown us how fresh, unused forces tackle courageous reforms or reform their own parties." The head of the retail chain Tengelmann, Karl-Erivan Haub, complained: "Germany is merely managed, but no longer reformed." He called for "a renewal of personal at the head of both main parties." He also cited Austria as role model.

On December 27, YouGov published a survey showing that only 36 percent of respondents favour Merkel remaining in office for another four years, while 47 percent call for her resignation.

The regional papers responded by joining the chorus of those calling for her resignation: "The coming weeks will demonstrate to Merkel: randomness does not bring percentage points. Whoever fails to deliver, is finished" (*Stuttgarter Nachrichten*). "The Union [Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union] should

prepare for the end of the Merkel era and regulate the succession" (*Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*). "If Merkel is concerned about the prospect of being tossed out of office, then she should use the time to establish a successor" (*Rheinische Post*).

In interviews, two leading representatives of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Wolfgang Kubicki and Nicola Beer, indicated that their party would be ready to participate in a new government if there was a replacement for Merkel as chancellor. Jusos (Social Democratic Party youth movement) Chairman Kevin Kühnert called on the SPD not to enter a grand coalition because it would extend Merkel's term in office.

Handelsblatt reported that pressure was mounting on Merkel in both her own party and the sister party, Christian Social Union, to "organise her last major act, a changeover." Merkel had "recognised the seriousness of the situation" and was striving to involve younger CDU politicians, such as State Secretary Jens Spahn (37), middle-size business representative Carsten Linnemann (40) and the head of the Young Union (youth movement of the CDU) Paul Ziemiak (32). At the same time, a "generational change" had already begun with the replacement of Saxony Premier Stanislaw Tillich (58) by Michael Kretschmer (42), both CDU, and Bavarian Premier Horst Seehofer (68) by Markus Söder (50), both CSU.

While there is much talk in the media about a generational change and complaints about Merkel's long tenure in office, virtually nothing is said about the political reasons for the pressure for change. With 12 years in office, Merkel can look back at the third longest term in the history of the Federal Republic (after Kohl and Adenauer) but, at age 63, she is younger than both of them when they resigned (Kohl was 68 and Adenauer was 87).

In an article published on December 23, the WSWWS wrote: "Negotiations on forming a new government are dragging on so long because the ruling elite requires an entirely different regime to launch a vast programme of rearmament, pursue great power policies abroad and impose itself

ruthlessly at home.”

That is what is behind the growing pressure on Merkel. Even though her name is synonymous with rescuing the banks with billions of public money, harsh austerity policies in Europe and Germany's return to great power politics and militarism, this is considered inadequate by those speaking on behalf of the German ruling class.

This is most clearly expressed by Dirk Kurbjuweit in the above-cited editorial in *Der Spiegel*. “Merkelism” represents “consensus, peace, stability over everything,” he writes. “Therefore, the leader of Merkelism cannot provoke, must show no clear contours, must avoid any conflict and must calm the citizens... Merkel was unable to introduce major reforms, this would have caused strife, an end to peace and quiet...”

By “major reforms,” Kurbjuweit means, on the one hand, further attacks on the social rights and past gains of the working class, in line with the demands of big business and finance, and, on the other hand, an accelerated program of rearmament to prepare for conflicts at home and abroad. Such policies are highly unpopular, and—to employ the vocabulary of *Der Spiegel*—threaten to disturb the “calm of citizens.” As a result, such policies are barely discussed in public, but all the more so in business and military circles.

One example is the new study by the government think tank German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), which states that Germany must “do everything in its power to establish Europe as an independent global political power factor based on its own geopolitical conceptions.” Only “as a power factor with independent creative potential” does Germany have “a chance to influence the international order.” To this end, “the total share of public expenditure for the shaping of German foreign relations” (i.e., foreign, military and development policy) must be increased as quickly as possible from the current 15 to 20 percent of the federal budget.

This is to be accomplished at the expense of social spending. The “peace dividend,” which consisted in reducing “spending on foreign and security policy in favour of social spending,” must be reversed, the SWP study demands.

In his recent speech on foreign policy to the Körber Foundation, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) expressed very similar views.

It should be noted that Merkel's critics attack her mainly because of her refugee policy, although under her watch Europe's external borders have been hermetically sealed and refugees are being deported inhumanely from Germany or detained in Turkey, Libya and other African countries.

The onslaught against refugees, the most exposed layer of society, is central to the right-wing turn underway across the

political spectrum. All of the CDU politicians who are now being feted as a new generation to take over after Merkel—Spahn, Linnemann, Ziemiak, Kretschmer, Söder, etc.—demand tougher policies against refugees.

When leading business representatives cite Austria as role model, where the sister party of the CDU/CSU has formed a government alliance with the far-right Freedom Party, this makes clear that the far-right Alternative for Germany could soon be part of a government in Germany. An intensified offensive against the working class and aggressive great power politics once again requires the assistance of the far right.

No opposition to this course can be expected from the SPD, the Greens or the Left Party. They agree on all fundamental questions and share the view that Germany must pursue its foreign policy interests in a more aggressive manner in the face of the EU crisis and growing conflicts with the US and China. Left Party parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch has expressly supported Gabriel's recent great power speech.

The demand for “more security”—more police and stepped up surveillance—is common to all parties represented in the Bundestag. As far as refugee policy is concerned, differences between the parties are purely verbal. They disappear as soon as one looks at what is happening in practice in the various federal states. Discrimination against refugees is just as marked in Thuringia (headed by a Left Party premier) as in Baden-Württemberg (Green Party premier) and Bavaria (CSU).

The struggle against social decline, the arming of the state, militarism and the growth of right-wing extremism requires the building of a new, socialist party of the working class. This is the aim of the Socialist Equality Party and its affiliated organisations in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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