

Germany's Grand Coalition for austerity and war

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When the Social Democrats talk against austerity, every worker knows that a new round of social attacks is imminent.

With the coalition negotiations in the final stretch, Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Martin Schulz stepped in front of the cameras yesterday and announced an agreement on European policy between his party and the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU). (The two parties are known collectively as the Union). The result was “a much-needed signal for a new departure for Europe.” Successes from the SPD point of view are “more investments, an investment budget for the euro zone and an end to the austerity dictates.”

That was obviously a lie. Only a few minutes later, the CDU Economic Council clarified that the adopted chapter on European politics was by no means the “end of the austerity dictates.” European policy would “even in a grand coalition not be made at SPD headquarters,” Economic Council Secretary General Wolfgang Steiger (CDU) told Reuters.

In fact, there are no fundamental differences between the Willy Brandt Haus (the SPD headquarters) and the CDU headquarters in matters of fiscal policy. Both the SPD and the Union plan to intensify the austerity policy through which they have already plunged millions of workers and young people in Germany and throughout Europe into poverty and unemployment in recent years. The exploratory paper issued in the first phase of coalition talks included phrases such as, “We want to strengthen the EU’s competitiveness in the context of globalization,” and, “We want to push for fiscal control in the EU.”

According to media reports, the Union and SPD have agreed in their coalition paper, which is expected to be presented today, to regulate banks less strictly. With

regards to Brexit, they agreed that Germany, as the EU’s financial center, should be made more attractive to banks and international finance. In addition, the notorious “Black Zero” (Schwarze Null) of former Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble will remain in place. Together with the SPD’s Hartz “reforms,” it has made Germany one of the most socially unequal countries in Europe.

Behind Schulz’s “Departure for Europe” stands a deeply reactionary political agenda. The SPD and its chairman are pursuing the goal of deepening the ongoing social counterrevolution, together with French President Emmanuel Macron, and transforming the European Union from an economic into a military alliance in order to impose its imperialist interests on its international rivals.

Already at the SPD special party conference in January, Schulz called for the speedy implementation of a common European military and great power policy in close collaboration with France. “Only a strong and determined SPD can make our country and Europe strong... It’s about a lot,” he shouted at the delegates. Europe is waiting “for a Germany that is aware of its responsibility for Europe and acts decisively, and that will not be possible without the SPD.” The proposals of French President Emmanuel Macron would be “on the table.”

The anti-social impact of these proposals has been reiterated in the past week. On Thursday, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and Minister of Public Finance Gerald Darmanin announced a comprehensive attack on civil servants. It aims to completely remove the legal status of workers’ rights established after the liberation of France from Nazi occupation. The Macron government is planning massive layoffs, a weakening of civil servant status, performance-related pay and the

increased use of contracted employees instead of lifetime civil servants.

This offensive is enthusiastically supported by the ruling class in Germany. “Now Macron wants to slaughter France’s sacred cows,” cheered the German daily *Die Welt* and demanded similar measures in Germany. “Here, too, many public employees work at the federal, state and local levels. Together with the 1.85 million officials, it is about 4.6 million. The cost of around 250 billion euros per year is about one-fifth of government spending.”

There is no doubt that the SPD and the Union parties are planning savings on this scale in order to free up the necessary billions for their desired military upgrades. The comments of influential security politicians show that the coalition partners are discussing a comprehensive armaments program behind the backs of the population that evokes memories of the Wehrmacht’s buildup in the 1930s.

“Crucially, since 2014, German policy has taken a different course, not so much because it was announced in speeches or coalition agreements, but because the situation requires it,” wrote the president of the Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS), Karl-Heinz Kamp, in a guest post in the German weekly *Focus*.

In other words, the policy of the next government is determined not by the promises of the SPD and CDU/CSU or by what they will write into the coalition agreement, but by the international crisis of capitalism and the reaction of the ruling class to it. “With Russia’s aggression in the east and the chaos in the Mediterranean there are again direct threats,” wrote Kamp.

Then he added approvingly: “[T]he German defence budget is rising again, and so are the expenses for the police, the intelligence services and for development aid. Also, new military equipment has been procured. In the last four years, the Bundestag approved arms projects for around 32 billion euros—in the previous legislative period it was only 6 billion. In early 2016, parliament was presented with an investment plan worth 130 billion euros, with 1,500 concrete individual projects ranging from the protective vest to battle tanks.”

The hollow promises made by the Union and the SPD in recent days—such as spending more money on education, housing and social affairs—are simply

intended to disguise their reactionary program. The ruling class fears the growing resistance among workers and youth against their anti-social and militarist policies. While the SPD and the Union parties want to bring the coalition talks to a quick conclusion, the unions are desperately working to prevent a repetition of last week’s massive strikes in the metal and electrical industry. *Handelsblatt* reported on “a possible agreement” between IG Metall and the bosses for today.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party of Germany) bases its call for new elections on the growing opposition to social cuts, militarism and dictatorship. The strikes in the metal and electrical industries must be continued and linked to the broadest possible mobilisation of the working class throughout Europe and internationally on the basis of a socialist programme. The ruling class in Germany must not be allowed to bring to power the most right-wing government since the overthrow of the Nazi regime in order to prepare for new wars and social attacks.



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