

German government supports war preparations against Syria

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The entire incoming German cabinet met at the weekend in the Meseberg castle, 70 kilometres north of the capital, Berlin. The two-day retreat in the government guest house has become a tradition. Officially, it serves for the new cabinet to “get to know each other” and for “team building,” as Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and her deputy Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) explained after the meeting. In fact, it was a matter of concretizing and intensifying the militarist and anti-working-class line that the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats set out in the coalition agreement.

This was already shown by the guests and topics of the first day. German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) boss Reiner Hoffmann and employers' association president Ingo Kramer and then-NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker were all invited guests.

The meeting with Hoffmann and Kramer aimed to deepen the close cooperation between the trade unions, employers' associations and government, which, over the past 20 years, has made Germany one of the most unequal countries in Europe, with a huge low pay sector, growing poverty and intolerable conditions in the public sector.

This corporatist alliance is now being renewed in the context of fierce strikes, first in the metal-working and electronics industries and now in the public service, and a showdown between the government and working class in neighbouring France, in order to paralyze and repress the resistance to militarism and welfare cuts. From the beginning, the DGB and the employers' associations supported a new edition of the grand coalition, which was so hated by the population it had

been voted out in the general election.

Precisely what Hoffmann and Kramer discussed and agreed with the government in Meseberg was not made public. But before the press, the head of the DGB called on the government to implement its reactionary programme, the most right-wing since 1945, as quickly as possible. “You have to pull together now and start working,” he said on his arrival at the castle.

Kramer urged the government to continue the austerity measures. The favourable economic situation would not last long, he said. “A change in interest rates is on the horizon, protectionism in more and more countries threatens our exports, tax cuts in the US and other countries will redirect investment.” He insisted that companies need even more flexibility.

The second theme was closely linked to the first. The government meeting took place in the midst of the most intense war preparations against nuclear armed Russia since the Cuban Missile Crisis. In recent weeks, the US and its allies have systematically exploited an attack on former double agent Sergey Skripal and an alleged poison gas attack in the Syrian city of Duma to whip up a campaign against Russia and prepare for an attack on Syria, which could easily lead to a military confrontation between the two largest nuclear powers in the world. US President Donald Trump is threatening Russia in language that has not been heard since Hitler and Goebbels.

These war preparations serve to defend Western imperialist interests in the Middle East through a military escalation after the wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria led to a debacle. They are also intended to channel growing social conflicts within the US and Europe outward. It would not be the first time that a government started a war abroad to forestall the threat of a social uprising at home.

The visit by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg to Meseberg undoubtedly served to coordinate the preparations for war against Syria and Russia. But nothing about this was made public. Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD), however, had already made clear in the days before that they unreservedly support military action by the United States, France and the United Kingdom.

“The fact that such poison gas attacks take place, and repeatedly at that, without anyone being held accountable for these heinous crimes is actually an untenable situation,” Maas said on Tuesday, although everything suggests that the event was a deliberate provocation and there is no evidence that the Syrian government or Russia were responsible, let alone that an attack even took place. The task now was to maintain pressure on Moscow, said the German Foreign Minister. Russia was not behaving constructively and, “It cannot go on like this.”

Merkel’s government spokesman Steffen Seibert had described the alleged use of poison gas on Monday as “disgusting,” “inhuman” and a violation of the “elementary rules of international humanitarian law,” and declared, “This must not go unpunished.” The Chancellor herself said on Wednesday, “There are serious indications pointing in the direction of the Syrian regime. On that basis, further evaluations will be carried out.” On Tuesday, after a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, she said, “We need very, very clear language.”

State Secretary Niels Annen (SPD), who is responsible for the Middle East in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told *Bild* newspaper, which published supposed images of poison gas bombs to agitate for war, the images from Duma do not permit “business as usual,” and “Those responsible for this crime must be held accountable.”

The Greens have also joined the chorus of warmongers. Green foreign minister Franziska Brantner called on the grand coalition to “finally pursue an active Syria policy to help the civilian population threatened by the Assad regime with toxic gas and other weapons.” Children were also affected by the attacks, which “the government should not tolerate any longer.”

The German media is also participating in the war propaganda. For example, a commentary by Stefan

Kuzmany on SpiegelOnline bluntly admits that there was “no independent, i.e., universally recognized, investigation into the Duma attack,” and that Trump was provoking a “war of the major powers” with frightening irresponsibility. Nevertheless, he advocates a military strike, “And yet one can conclude that such an attack is now necessary and right: at least as a symbolic act.”

Four years ago, on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, numerous media outlets and politicians supported the thesis that Germany had slid into the First World War without any guilt, which Christopher Clark had rehashed in his book *The Sleepwalkers*. Today, they are deliberately marching with open eyes into a catastrophe that threatens the survival of humanity.



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