

Militarism and fascist demagogy in the German parliament

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The German parliament (Bundestag) opened the first general debate of the new legislative period last week to discuss two over-arching goals: the imprisonment, persecution and deportation of migrants fleeing the war-torn Middle East, and military rearmament.

The formation of a new grand coalition government between Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) has left the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) the largest opposition party, after it received 12.6 percent of the vote in the 2017 election.

As a result, Alice Weidel, the party's co-leader, was left to perform the customary rite afforded to the largest opposition party: the opening of debate.

Upon approaching the platform, the 39-year-old fascist demagogue launched into a frenzied, profane tirade, at points yelling over the howls of approval from her fellow party members. She denounced the government for draining national vitality and ensuring the "downfall of our nation" by admitting people from "tribal" societies.

The governing parties had done nothing to raise the birth rate for German families, she declared, while "fattening the population" of "Muslim migrants," whom she called "burqas, knife-men and other good-for-nothings."

"Who will pay your state-funded pensions?" She demanded, "Including yours [Green Party member] Mr. Hofreiter, you noisy troublemaker? Your imported gold pieces?"

From the demagogic portrayal of the German people as victims of foreigners, to its racist vulgarity and dog-whistle appeals to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (gold pieces), Weidel's rant was a speech that could have been given by a brown-shirted Nazi parliamentarian in the early 1930s.

But despite Weidel having just called her an "idiot," Chancellor Angela Merkel ignored the inflammatory

tirade that had opened the debate. Without the slightest rebuff to Weidel, Merkel proceeded to outline her vision of a more aggressive role for Germany on the world stage through military rearmament. She said nothing about the AfD's fascist rant against immigrants because her government has largely embraced the AfD's immigration policies.

Many people, horrified by the display of fascist filth in the German parliament, are wondering how it can be, after the horrors of the Holocaust, that such tirades are once again part of everyday political life in Germany. Over recent weeks, representatives of all political parties have agitated against refugees in the style of the AfD and denounced refugee aid organizations as an "anti-deportation industry."

The Bundestag debate exposed the fact that racism and fascism have once again become political tools of the ruling elite. In the final analysis, the same questions that led to a catastrophe in the 1930s are posed today. Germany's elites are responding to the historic crisis of European and global capitalism, the worldwide growth of militarism and war, and the deepening rivalries between the imperialist powers by resorting to an aggressive foreign policy and implementing a vast programme of rearmament.

Merkel declared that the additional billions already made available for defense spending were nowhere near enough. Germany is "committed... to the goals of NATO's Wales summit. That was put in writing in our coalition agreement," she said.

Concretely, this means military spending has to grow to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, which in numerical terms means an increase in spending from the current level of €37 billion to €75 billion. This would make Germany by far the strongest military power in Europe.

"Alongside foreign interventions," Merkel said,

“national territorial and alliance defense is once again of growing significance.” She added: “We not only need to equip our soldiers so that they can perform foreign interventions well, but... they must to the same extent be provided with a much broader range of materiel and military equipment at home, so they can accomplish the additional tasks we have today.”

Merkel made clear that the grand coalition is ready to implement another round of sweeping social attacks to finance the planned military build-up. It is necessary “to contribute to the improvement of our competitiveness, and not just against the European standard, but also compared to what is required globally,” she declared. While this concerns “very much the competitiveness of Europe,” it also includes “very much Germany’s competitiveness.”

As the chancellor pulls on her military boots and prepares to dictate austerity measures on behalf of the ruling elite, she adopts the far-right’s refugee policy. Merkel explicitly praised the detention centres backed by Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, which will serve to confine and concentrate asylum seekers. The issue is “the creation of a functioning repatriation culture in Germany. Whoever has no right to stay must go,” she told the deputies.

The grand coalition’s right-wing agenda has unanimous support in the Bundestag. Significantly, representatives of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens and the Left Party applauded at various points during Merkel’s address alongside deputies from the governing parties. Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the Left Party’s parliamentary group, appealed for “an independent and assertive European foreign policy,” and, to the applause of the AfD, preached anti-Americanism. FDP Leader Christian Lindner called on Merkel to “Lead! Lead this country!”

To cite Leon Trotsky’s brilliant words from his essay “What is National Socialism,” written in 1933, “Not every exasperated petty-bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged within every exasperated petty-bourgeois.”

In his speech, AfD co-leader Alexander Gauland referred directly to Herfried Münkler, the Humboldt University professor and foreign policy adviser to the government, in demanding Germany’s return to a militarist great power foreign policy. “As a ‘power at the centre,’ as an arbitrating power, as Herfried Münkler sees us, Germany has to find a common course for European policy,” he stated.

He then approvingly cited Münkler’s rejection of a “foreign policy bound by values” from his book on the Thirty Years War, which includes the astonishing declaration at the beginning: “A great deal about the disastrous consequences of unconditional commitment to values can be learned from the example of the Thirty Years War.”

What rejection of a foreign policy “bound by values” means in practice was made clear four years ago by Jörg Baberowski, a Humboldt University colleague of Münkler, who is also praised by the AfD. “If one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether,” stated Baberowski in October 2014 in connection with the German army’s interventions in the Middle East.

At the time, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) analyzed the objective driving forces behind the revival of German militarism, warning at the time: “The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learned from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had ‘arrived at the West,’ had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colors as it emerged historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad.”

This assessment has been confirmed by the grand coalition’s reactionary policies and the integration of the AfD into the political establishment. To prevent the ruling elite from implementing its programme of militarism and war by resorting once again to fascist methods, the growing opposition among workers and youth must be mobilised on a conscious political basis. The active struggle for a socialist programme, through the construction of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and the International Committee of the Fourth International, is an urgent necessity.



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