

German government plans reintroduction of military conscription

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Germany's grand coalition government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats wants to reintroduce general military conscription. This was reported by various media outlets over the past weekend, including *Spiegel Online*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Tagesschau*.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party conference in autumn is scheduled to adopt a resolution to reintroduce military service and include this in its joint programme with the Christian Social Union (CSU).

Bundestag (parliamentary) deputy Oswin Veith, who is also president of the Association of Reservists, told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that conscription should “last 12 months and apply to young men and women over 18”. Another CDU politician, Patrick Sensburg, announced that in the face of an unstable world situation, compulsory military service “for the very purpose of an army, the defence of one's own country” was indispensable.

The proposal is also receiving support from the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Parliamentary deputy Fritz Felgentreu expressed the party's position clearly: “We must conduct a social debate over whether we are presently making the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) as attractive as possible, will we actually reach the numbers of personnel we need for national and alliance defence”.

There is absolute consensus in the grand Coalition over the goal of making the Bundeswehr “attractive”, i.e., powerful.

Some politicians—both in the opposition, as well as in the ranks of the CDU and SPD—have expressed reservations about the reintroduction of compulsory military service. They fear this will damage the building of a professional army, which was introduced

seven years ago. Professional soldiers, who serve for several years, are far more effective and less subject to the pressure of public opinion than conscripts who leave after 12 months.

They therefore support the introduction of universal conscription, for men and women, with an option for either military or civilian service. After finishing their school education, adult German citizens should “serve Germany” for 12 months—either with the Bundeswehr or with the Agency for Technical Relief, in the health system, or in old age care.

The obligation to choose between compulsory civilian service and the Bundeswehr would increase the pressure to volunteer for the Bundeswehr and at the same time provide the state with cheap labour in caregiving and other sectors. Young people are to be forced into exploitation in the health sector, or drawn into the German war machine.

However, the introduction of such compulsory service would require a fundamental change in the constitution. The Armed Forces Commissioner, Hans-Peter Bartels (SPD), was skeptical about the legality of the proposal. He told *Bild am Sonntag*: “That falls under the ban on forced labour”. He considers it “quite unlikely that 700,000 young men and women will be compulsorily conscripted annually for one or other task, however sympathetic the idea may sound”.

The discussion about the reintroduction of conscription fits seamlessly into the right-wing and militaristic course of the grand coalition. Ever since being sworn into office on March 14, the SPD and the CDU have been demonstrating daily that they are pursuing a stubborn agenda of warmongering and great power politics, with the aim of strengthening the interests of German business on a global level.

At the end of July, in an interview with *Spiegel*,

Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen revealed the vehemence with which the German bourgeoisie is upgrading its military capabilities. Asked by *Spiegel* about the relationship with US President Donald Trump, von der Leyen stated, “We Europeans are challenged—in our own best interests, and not to please the US president”.

She expressly supported Trump’s call for higher arms spending: “President Trump demands more effort from all NATO partners—he has a point there. Germany must urgently equip the Bundeswehr better and more completely. That’s why our policy turns of the past few years have been correct, and we have to keep going strong here”.

One searches in vain for any fundamental criticism among the opposition parties. In words that sound remarkably similar to those of von der Leyen’s, the parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, recently called for a “self-confident foreign policy”, a strengthening of the “German internal market” and more funding for the police and the judiciary. The Greens, under Anton Hofreiter, also accuse the government of being unable to “equip soldiers with the necessary basic equipment” and to enforce German interests abroad.

The course being followed by the ruling class is unmistakable: at the beginning of July, the Bundestag passed the new budget for the remainder of the calendar year, as well as a financial plan until 2021, which massively increases military and police spending. A further 5.4 billion euros are planned for internal security, as well as an increase in the current military budget of just under 40 billion euros to 42.9 billion euros.

The minister of defence is firmly committed to the NATO goal of investing two percent of Germany’s Gross Domestic Product into the military. While wages are stagnating throughout Germany and there are shortages everywhere in education, social care and social security, the bourgeoisie is pumping huge sums of money into the war machine. Even a German nuclear bomb is now being called for.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, von der Leyen brazenly stated: “There is a good understanding among the population that our security situation is permanently changing. And that’s why we need a Bundeswehr that can act together with our allies. That is now the broad

consensus”. That is a lie. If the support for rearmament and war were indeed as great as she claims, there would be no need for the reintroduction of compulsory military service.

On the contrary, the establishment parties are becoming ever more rabid because the international working class is on the rise. Around the world, workers are going on strike and protesting against social cuts and militarization. A majority explicitly opposes the disgusting and inhumane policies of the grand coalition

Just last weekend, massive protests supporting the campaign “sea bridge—create safe harbours!” took place in Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne and Leipzig against the government’s refugee policy, which the CDU and SPD have adopted from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). According to a recent survey by *Der Spiegel*, 67 percent of Germans clearly disagree with the current shift to the right in politics.



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