Following state election defeats

Germany’s grand coalition closes ranks and steps up right-wing offensive

Johannes Stern
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Germany’s grand coalition government, consisting of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), has responded to major defeats in recent state elections and growing opposition by stepping up its right-wing policies.

Just before the official meetings to commemorate November 9, the centenary of the November Revolution and the 80th anniversary of Germany’s night of pogroms (*Reichspogromnacht*), it was announced Friday morning that the country’s military budget will increase next year in excess of what was originally planned. In 2018, this budget totaled €38.5 billion. It is now due to exceed €43 billion in 2019. This corresponds to an increase of 12 percent and is €323 million more than the previous planned total.

In a nearly 16-hour “clean-up” session, the cabinet made further changes to the draft budget of Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, paving the way for rapid military rearmament. According to media reports, so-called “commitment appropriations” were adopted permitting arms projects costing billions.

The largest single item is the purchase of heavy transport helicopters, involving an investment of about €5.6 billion by 2031. This was reported by the military blog *Augen geradeaus!* An additional purchase is a new multi-purpose combat ship (type MKS180), estimated to cost about €5 billion by 2028.

According to the blog, “One of the most expensive projects,” the Tactical Air Defence System (TLVS), was “initially planned in the new budget in a merely symbolic manner.” However, “the plan provides that, if necessary, funds from other budget items can be shifted here.”

Already in its coalition agreement, the conservative “union parties” (CDU and CSU) and the SPD had pledged to increase defence spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, resulting in an annual military budget of more than €75 billion. They are now working feverishly to achieve this goal.

“There is little public knowledge of the billions that will flow in future to the federal armed forces for procurement of the Eurofighter combat aircraft,” *Augen geradeaus!* notes. Some €2.5 billion in commitment appropriations have been earmarked to replace older fighter jets with new Eurofighters, which will be “upgraded for further tasks, such as combat against ground targets.” Additional appropriations target the acquiring of new submarines and some 140,000 sets of modern combat clothing.

The centenary of the November Revolution and the 80th anniversary of Germany’s night of pogroms were marked by speeches by a number of leading government politicians, whose unctuous words about “democracy” and the “lessons of history” cannot hide the fact that German imperialism is once again preparing for war, including against its allies of the post-World War II period.

Following the US midterm elections, Foreign State Minister Nils Annen (SPD), demanded a strong German-European foreign and defence policy in response to Donald Trump. “We have to do our homework in Europe and keep together, especially in the case of a trade dispute,” he said. “On those issues where we disagree, the Americans have a strong position. We can answer ‘America first’ only with ‘Europe United.’ ”

The aggressive foreign policy of the grand coalition goes hand in hand with intensified attacks on social and democratic rights. The pensions package passed by the German government on Thursday serves only to reinforce the meagre levels of pensions, which are already leading to rampant poverty in old age, while preparing for further attacks on state pensions in the future. On the same day, the government, with the support of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), tightened up the country’s asylum law and imposed further restrictions on refugees.

Following the country’s bitter historical experiences, the overwhelming majority of the population rejects war and fascism, but the ruling class is intent on reviving its anti-

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democratic, militaristic and authoritarian traditions.

This became clear again on November 8 in discussions in the Bundestag about the UN Global Migration Pact. The leader of the AfD, Alexander Gauland, used the occasion to rant against the "left-wing dreamers and globalist elites" who "secretly wanted to transform our country from a nation-state into a settlement area."

Instead of drawing the obvious parallels between Gauland's ravings and the policies of Hitler and Goebbels, the other parties in parliament accused him of acting "against the national interest of Germany."

The UN migration pact is a measure to reduce the number of refugees in Germany, they stressed. "Is there anyone with a clear mind who seriously believes that fewer migrants come to Germany when they have no access to basic services in other countries?" declared the union party politician Stephan Harbarth, to applause from the CDU, the CSU, the SPD, the neo-liberal FDP, the Greens and the Left Party. "Not at all," he continued. "Anyone who supports the Global Migration Pact creates the conditions that will reduce incentives to come to Germany."

The SPD plays a key role in promoting the government's right-wing and anti-working class policies against growing opposition. Although the SPD has slumped in the polls and is now ranked at just 13 percent, it is determined to continue its deeply unpopular alliance with the union parties.

"We have linked arms and rely on the power of cohesion," declared SPD leader Andrea Nahles, following a meeting of the party executive committee last week. There will be no special party meeting to discuss remaining in the grand coalition. Any such proposition had been ruled out by a large majority of the executive, Nahles said.

There are two main political considerations behind the SPD's resolve to maintain the grand coalition. On the one hand, it is determined to push ahead with the revival of German militarism and re-establish Germany as a major military power following the defeats suffered in two world wars. Germany was "too big and too strong economically for us to comment on world politics from the sidelines," the then-foreign minister and current federal president Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) declared at the Munich Security Conference 2014.

Second, the SPD fears a mobilisation of the working class against its reactionary policies and is preparing to forcefully suppress all opposition. Significantly, during the commemoration in the German parliament of the November Revolution, Steinmeier justified the counterrevolutionary alliance between social democratic leaders and the German army (*Reichswehr*), which drowned the revolutionary uprising of the workers in blood.

SPD Chairman Friedrich Ebert, who took over as head of the German government on November 9, 1918, "initially wanted to prevent chaos, civil war and military intervention by the victorious powers; he was driven by the desire to give people work and bread," Steinmeier claimed.

He admittedly had "no justification whatsoever for unleashing the brutality of the nationalist Freikorps." At the same time, it was true, however, that "the people's representatives around Friedrich Ebert had to defend themselves against the attempt of the radical left to prevent the elections to the National Assembly by force."

All of the parliamentary parties—from the right-wing extremist AfD to the governing parties to the Left Party and the Greens—applauded Steinmeier. This underscores that the entire ruling class is closing ranks to press hard with its right-wing policies, while preparing for future revolutionary class struggles.

The Left Party and the Greens are vying with one another to establish closer cooperation with the grand coalition, and both demand a more aggressive government policy. When the Bundestag debated "equal living conditions" last Thursday, Left Party leader Dietmar Bartsch begged to be involved in the future work of the government. "At least those who govern in the states or have responsibilities in the municipalities" must be involved, he declared.

As for the Greens, party leader Annalena Baerbock said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*: "The SPD has declared that it continues. The Union has declared that it continues. The chancellor has declared she will continue in office. So we have a government and it has to do its job: govern this country and tackle problems."

Baerbock also called for a more aggressive great-power policy: "The EU must be able to conduct world politics in a dramatically changed situation," she said.

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