

No to the domestic deployment of the German army!

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The German army's so-called "Coronavirus operation" got under way officially on Friday. It is the largest military operation in post-war Germany. "It is in fact the case that for the first time in our history, we have established in the context of the crisis our own Coronavirus task force with 15,000 active soldiers," Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (Christian Democrats, CDU) announced Thursday on public broadcaster ARD's *Morgenmagazin*.

In reality, the number of soldiers being deployed is even higher. Internally, the total number of soldiers being made available is "set at 32,000 for the 'Coronavirus assistance' contingent," reported the military blog *Augen geradeaus!* (Eyes front!). In addition to the 15,000 armed forces personnel from the army, air force, and navy, a further 17,000 soldiers from the medical service are involved. An army spokesman commented that the soldiers could be ready for operational deployment in between 12 to 72 hours.

The official propaganda is portraying the army operation as a medical assistance mission. The task is to make available "medical institutions that are already integrated into the civilian system, the task is logistics, offering a helping hand," stated Kramp-Karrenbauer. They are "already playing a major part in assistance in a range of ways, from helping provide for car drivers stranded at the border to assisting with ambulances. So we are helping where we can."

In a previous comment, the WSWS remarked that the major nationwide deployment of the military sheds light on the disastrous state of the civilian health care system. Following decades of vicious spending cuts and privatizations, it is not even close to being prepared to deal with a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospitals everywhere lack personal protective equipment, trained medical personnel, and intensive

care beds. According to reports, the military has received hundreds of appeals for help from the federal states and municipalities over recent days.

But regardless of how much medical assistance the army actually provides, the deployment serves another goal. Leading generals are openly declaring that the key issue is imposing military-police control over the population and defending the institutions of the capitalist state.

In an interview with the online news platform *t-online.de*, Lieutenant Gen. Martin Schelleis, who as territorial commander of the army is head of the "Coronavirus operation," answered the question of where "the army could be especially important" by saying, "That is difficult to predict, both for us and the civilian authorities which have to request us. At the same time, we are reserving the soldiers for a few potential capabilities that could be called for ... not least for tasks related to security and protection."

Police activities on the basis of Germany's Basic Law are also possible, he added. According to Schelleis, a federal state could "request assistance from the army in case of a catastrophe occurring or at least being imminent, and their own police is incapable of handling the situation with support from police forces in other federal states or from the federal police. Soldiers could then be deployed domestically to support the police or under police command."

The army's official website declares menacingly, "The army is armed and ready for any situation." The army's soldiers "always remain operational, guarantee international stability and stand ready to protect the country domestically and provide assistance to the public authorities." To accomplish these tasks it is necessary "for the units to ensure that during the coronavirus crisis, the number of infected army

personnel remains as low as possible.”

In the context of German history, this is a serious warning. Under the Kaiser, in the Weimar Republic, and under Nazi rule, the army served as an instrument of domestic repression, and was deployed to suppress social and political protests, and revolutionary uprisings. Exactly 100 years ago, in early April 1920, regular army units supported by the far-right Freikorps, who had taken part in the Kapp Putsch, marched into the Ruhr region to brutally suppress opposition from the Red Ruhr Army and sympathising workers.

Under conditions of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, which are being intensified by the social and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the ruling elite once again fears the spectre of socialist revolution.

In a guest commentary for *Der Spiegel*, Marko Buschmann, the former head of federal affairs for the Free Democrats, warned, “The brief period of time bought by the state for society, notwithstanding the use of vast resources, will soon run out.” Nobody should deceive themselves. “The people won’t accept this for very long. To put the matter bluntly: revolution could soon be in the air if it goes on like this.”

Already in late February the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* acknowledged, “Capitalism is on the defensive, and socialist thought is on the march. In Germany as well.” With concern, the mouthpiece of the Frankfurt stock exchange pointed to a poll in which “55 percent said capitalism does more harm than good.” Other polls showed that capitalism was only viewed positively by 16 percent of respondents. By contrast, 45 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “socialist ideas are currently valuable for the progress of society.”

The dramatic effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the response by the ruling elite have discredited capitalism still further. As in the financial crisis of 2008-9, the government has transferred billions into the pockets of the major corporations and financial oligarchy. At the same time, it is making clear that it is ready to sacrifice the health and lives of millions of workers to protect private profit. Although the pandemic continues to escalate—with cases in Germany surpassing 100,000 and more than 1,500 deaths—the media and politicians are demanding that businesses need to get up and running as soon as possible.

Under these conditions, all parties in parliament support the military. On Thursday, Social Democrat (SPD) Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declared his support for the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence. “We stick to our promises,” he said in Berlin prior to a video conference with his NATO colleagues. Germany has already increased its defence spending by 45 percent since 2014, he boasted. The grand coalition could not make its priorities clearer.

The so-called opposition parties also support the army’s domestic deployment. According to the army’s official website, requests for assistance have also been made by the federal states of Berlin and Thuringia. Both states are governed by SPD/Left Party/Green coalitions. The state government in Thuringia, which is headed by Left Party Minister President Bodo Ramelow, is even preparing to hand over responsibility for the security at a refugee accommodation centre in Suhl to the military. According to an army spokesman, the state has applied for “the supplying of soldiers to enforce house rules on a shift schedule.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei opposes the domestic deployment of the military. The working class must counterpose its own socialist programme of action to the German bourgeoisie’s attempts to return to militarism and dictatorship. All of the military’s medical capabilities—including intensive care beds, ventilators, and protective masks—must be transferred to the civilian authorities and used to protect the population’s health. The same applies to the tens of billions spent annually on rearmament and war. Foreign military interventions, which also cost billions and are aimed at ruthlessly exploiting and oppressing other countries, must be ended immediately.



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