

Thirty years of German unity: Berlin increases military spending, incites nationalism and war

Johannes Stern
9 October 2020

In his speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of German unity, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier sought to portray the reunified Germany as a guarantor of a peaceful world order.

In contrast to the German Reich under the Kaiser based on “Prussian dominance, militarism, and nationalism,” which led directly “to the catastrophe of the First World War,” we live today in a “reunited, free, democratic country at the heart of Europe,” said Steinmeier on October 3 in Potsdam.

Thirty years after reunification on a capitalist basis, this propaganda is not merely dishonest. Under conditions of the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s, escalating international conflicts and mounting tensions between the major powers, the ruling elite is once again showing its true colours. It has embraced “militarism and nationalism,” built up a fascist party in the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and is systematically resurrecting an aggressive imperialist foreign policy.

The general debate on the budget held in the days leading up to Steinmeier’s speech was revealing in this regard. In her speech on the new defence budget, Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer unveiled a major new rearmament drive.

“All of the major purchase plans, above all plans for European cooperation, will only be enforceable if additional funds are made available in the future,” she stated. This applies “to the Eurofighter as well as the German-French FCAS project and the NH90 helicopter. If German and European companies are to receive the liquidity they need, new promises must be made.” This is “a concern of the entire federal government,” she said.

The costs for the projects initiated by the grand coalition are tremendous. The FCAS (Future Combat Air System) is a European air combat system which includes a

combination of sixth generation utility fighter jets, drones, satellites and command-and-control aircraft, and could potentially have its own nuclear capabilities. The development alone is expected to cost €8 billion. Total costs are estimated to reach at least €100 billion. The *Handelsblatt* daily reported last year that the system could gobble up “up to €500 billion” by “mid-century.”

Other plans, like the purchasing of armed drones, are to be implemented immediately. The issue in 2021 will be “to equip our soldiers with material,” said Kramp-Karrenbauer. The “deployment-ready initiative” begun in February is showing “the first signs of progress,” she added. These include “the increase in flying hours for the Eurofighter and other air force aircraft” and the arrival of “more than 1,200 modern trucks for the soldiers.” However, all of this is “not sufficient.” Additional developments are necessary, including “the key plan to purchase armed drones for the army.”

The defence minister made no secret of the fact that Germany is arming itself with the deadliest weapons in order to wage war around the world in defence of its economic and geostrategic interests—increasingly against its erstwhile allies. “If our business model is global, our security policy must also be global,” she said. “Therefore, I must make clear once again: we Germans, as a guarantor of security, have to do much more—not for Trump or anyone else, but for our own security.”

Kramp-Karrenbauer identified Germany’s spheres of influence and interest as “the EU’s neighbourhood, in a semi-circle from the northeast to the southwest,” which includes the Middle East and North Africa. She also pointed to resource- and population-rich Asia. “The federal government’s new doctrine on the Indo-Pacific defines Germany’s role in this crucial region of the world, where a great part of our prosperity will be

generated,” according to the defence minister.

The federal government will therefore “expand its security policy engagement in the Indo-Pacific,” which could include “the participation in exercises in the region” and “various forms of naval presence.” Concrete plans have evidently already been prepared. “If COVID allows” we will “be present with the army in this region next year,” said Kramp-Karrenbauer.

The ruling elite’s aggressive rhetoric in support of mad war plans on a vast scale recalls the darkest periods of German history. Rüdiger Lucassen, a former soldier and adviser in the Defence Ministry, informed the parliamentarians, “A state does not maintain its armed forces to dig wells somewhere or help a grandmother across the street. Armed forces must be willing and able to use deadly military force.” For this, “the army needs team spirit, pride, and a unique professional ethos.”

Martin Hohmann, who was expelled from the Christian Democrats in 2004 after giving an anti-Semitic speech, and now sits on the parliamentary defence committee for the AfD, urged the federal government to implement the commitments in the new doctrine of the armed forces at an even faster pace than was originally planned. “Mrs. Minister, get on with creating this fighting force! Take action!” he urged Kramp-Karrenbauer. “Along with the change in course on equipment, we also need a change in course on fighting spirit, a fighting spirit in society and politics.”

Hohmann’s speech underscores the extent to which even foreign policy has assumed fascist characteristics. He provocatively cited the designated US ambassador, Douglas Macgregor, who recently stated that Germany “spends millions on undesirable Muslim invaders” instead of investing in its armed forces.

Nobody in parliament defied this fascist and militarist agitation. On the contrary, the speakers for the nominally left-wing opposition parties made clear that they are in fundamental agreement with the course pursued by the grand coalition. While there is allegedly no money available in the era of the pandemic for health care, education, wage increases and safe working conditions, all parliamentary parties have closed ranks around a programme of rearmament. They are all ready to enforce military rearmament with the same ruthlessness against the opposition of the population they have used to impose the return to unsafe workplaces and schools.

Tobias Lindner, the defence policy spokesman for the Greens, described the grand coalition’s rearmament plans as “good” and merely criticised their insecure financing.

In the current draft budget, there is “especially in the area of purchasing ... a smorgasbord of dream projects for which financing has been fictively awarded but actually blocked.” This is “irresponsible towards our soldiers.”

The Left Party, which played a key role 30 years ago in reintroducing capitalist relations into eastern Germany, is now fully on board with German imperialism.

At the beginning of his speech, party spokesman Michael Leutert stated that he wanted to “start with two positive things.” Firstly, he read “with interest that the support for ex-soldiers of the NVA (East German Army) in crisis situations will be increased for the German army.” And secondly, “the finances for the military intelligence service will be increased.” He then also indicated his party’s support for rearmament. “I think we have a consensus in this room on national defence; that is not up for debate.”

Officially, the defence budget will increase next year by a further €1.16 billion to reach €46.8 billion. In reality, it is already much higher. In the economic recovery package adopted by the grand coalition in early May, an additional €10 billion was set aside to strengthen the army. Point 10 of the programme stated that in particular “security projects and arms projects with a large portion of German value creation that can begin in 2020 or 2021 should be immediately implemented.” The value of project—€10 billion.

Like the astronomical sums handed over to the financial oligarchy within the framework of the coronavirus bailout package, the billions provided to the military are to be squeezed out of the working class. In his budget speech, which is set to be passed by parliament in December, current Finance Minister and Social Democrat Chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz thundered that the notorious debt brake would soon come into force once again. We will be successful “in reducing the debt rate in the years to come once again” and “reach a stage where we ... no longer need to make use of the emergency rules,” he added.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact