

German government increases military spending, cuts education and health care

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The 2021 federal budget passed last week makes clear the priorities of the ruling class: not the health and lives of working people, but the interests of German imperialism at home and abroad. While the budgets for health, education and social affairs have been massively cut compared to this year, spending on the military and the security apparatus continues to rise.

Next year, for example, the defence budget will be increased by a further €1.3 billion to €46.93 billion. It has thus increased by almost €15 billion since 2014. In fact, it is even higher. The German government had already reported defence spending of over €50 billion to NATO for this year, as numerous military expenditures are hidden in other budget items. Money for the federal Interior Ministry, led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), will also be increased to €18.46 billion. This is almost €3 billion more than this year (€15.67 billion).

The additional billions for the security forces and the military are just the start of a massive arms offensive. The economic stimulus package adopted by the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in early May already included €10 billion for “new armaments projects with a high proportion of German value-added.” In the new defence budget, €7.72 billion is earmarked for military procurement, which will swallow up billions more in the coming years: for 2021 alone, €350 million have been earmarked for the procurement of the A400M wide-body transport aircraft, €442 million for the Puma infantry fighting vehicle, €998 million for the acquisition of new Eurofighter fighter jets and €379 million for the construction of the multi-role Combat Ship 180.

While billions are being spent on militarism and war, cuts are being made in education, health and social

welfare. The budget for education and research is to fall by €70 million next year to €20.24 billion. The cuts in the other two departments are even more severe. For example, the budget for the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will fall by €5.7 billion (!) to €164.92 billion, and the budget for the Ministry of Health by €5.95 billion (!) to €35.3 billion.

The so-called coronavirus bailout packages passed in March, and the 2020 supplementary budget, were always primarily billion-euro gifts for big business and the banks. Now, even the minimal additional spending that had been earmarked for pandemic control is being reversed. In addition, the new budget prepares even more comprehensive social attacks. “We must also always remember what public debt means,” Chancellor Merkel warned in her government statement on the budget. “It means, of course, burdening future budgets, it means the need to pay it back, and it means restrictions on future spending and future generations.”

The entire Bundestag (parliamentary) debate underscored that the ruling class sees the pandemic primarily as an opportunity to advance its policies of militarism, strengthening the repressive powers of the state at home and imposing social austerity.

Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) praised the budget as a “visible sign saying thank you to our troops at home and abroad, not only to give them warm words but also to make clear as budget legislators: The Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) are important to us, we stand by them, we put our money where our mouth is.” By this, she means preparing for new wars and crimes. She used the main part of her speech to “very briefly describe why we need armed drones.” Like the Americans, she said, the Bundeswehr needed to be able to “take out” enemy positions from the air.

In a fascist tirade, Martin Hohmann, who was expelled from the CDU in 2004 for an anti-Semitic speech, and now sits on the Bundestag's defence committee as a deputy for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), called on the grand coalition to implement its rearment and war plans even more aggressively. He defended the right-wing terrorist networks and practices in the elite Special Forces Command (KSK), saying, "Of course, in such a unit there is a special kind of communication, of rituals and a sometimes coarse humour. There are sometimes pig heads flying at a party." Ultimately, however, "these fighters" were "ready to go into action for Germany and German interests at any time and to stake their lives for others."

He appealed to Kramp-Karrenbauer, "Madam Minister, please don't let yourself be infected by the hysteria of the general campaign against the right! Do not unsettle these men!"

The grand coalition has long been putting this right-wing extremist party's policies into practice, protecting far-right networks in the army and police. From the outset, Kramp-Karrenbauer's planned restructuring of the KSK was aimed at organizing this elite force, riddled with neo-fascists, to be more effective in pursuing the interests of German imperialism externally and suppressing growing social opposition at home.

In essence, the supposedly left-wing opposition parties also support this course. Their speakers also beat the drum for strengthening German foreign and war policies and increasing police powers.

Green Party defence policy spokesman Tobias Lindner said, "We need ground-based air defence; we have one right now that requires modernization." Moreover, he said, the Bundeswehr has heavy transport helicopters "that are over 40 years old—new ones are urgently needed," fleet service boats "that we need to replace promptly," and plenty of "old materiel that is falling apart at the seams" and needed to be replaced "with new, functioning materiel." He said one must "really ask whether this coalition and where this coalition is setting the right priorities."

Left Party spokesman Michael Leutert expressed similar views. "We have a fundamental problem; because German foreign policy is simply no longer visible," he said. He said Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party SPD) had "recently failed as

head of the foreign ministry to position Germany strategically in such a way that the Federal Republic remains capable of acting." The world, he said, "has been undergoing rapid and dramatic change for years, with all the effects that are well known. Shifts in power, the breaking away of international certainties." This made it even more important to define "a strategic framework for action" that "naturally has our interests in mind."

In his speech, Victor Perli, who sits on the Budget Committee for the Left Party, bragged about how he had advocated arming the police. He said he had "a tough debate in the committee" with the (notoriously right-wing) Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) over the issue. "But there is a happy ending: thanks to the efforts of the Left Party, 2,000 federal police officers are now enjoying winter boots. That's nice news for once."



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