

New German Christian Democratic candidate for chancellor promotes policies of herd immunity, austerity and war

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The Christian Democratic candidate for Chancellor in September's general election is incumbent North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state premier Armin Laschet. He succeeds Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who has been the lead candidate for the CDU and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) in the last four federal elections and has governed the country as chancellor since 2005.

The decision was preceded by a power struggle lasting several days between Laschet and Markus Söder, the right-wing conservative Bavarian state premier and CSU leader. Söder, who justified his claim to the candidacy by pointing to higher popularity ratings among voters and within the Union (CDU/CSU), ultimately bowed to the decision of the CDU executive.

Before the decisive vote on Monday evening, a whole series of notoriously right-wing party figures, including Bundestag (federal parliament) President Wolfgang Schäuble and former parliamentary group leader Friedrich Merz, had campaigned for Laschet.

In his first statements and interviews after the candidate selection, Laschet left no doubt that as chancellor he would continue and intensify the anti-working-class and militarist course of the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (SPD). This applies above all to the murderous "profits before lives" policy in the pandemic, which has already cost the lives of more than 80,000 people in Germany alone.

Speaking to the ARD programme "Farbe bekennen" (Show your colours) on Tuesday evening, Laschet defended the ruthless policy of opening up the economy in the interests of the corporations, which has once again led to a massive increase in the number of infections and deaths in recent weeks. "My line was very straightforward, and it still applies today. When incidence figures go down, you must roll back encroachments on fundamental rights," he said. That had also been his "position last spring."

Even then, the state government in NRW led by Laschet, in coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), had ensured the unsafe return to businesses and schools, consciously calculating on the loss of human life. There will be "school communities that will have to mourn the death of teachers, school administrators or family members, which can sometimes have a sustained impact on school life and everyday school life," declared NRW state

Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer (FDP) in April 2020.

Laschet himself stands for the murderous herd immunity policy more than any other German state premier. He has repeatedly called for a quick end to all coronavirus measures. Most recently, he praised the decision to overturn the so-called "Easter truce" originally announced by the federal and state governments. It was necessary to get out of the "permanent cycle of lockdown" and "now open a new chapter," he explained. "Pure closure" had "come to its end" and his state government would launch temporary projects "possibly quickly after Easter."

At his first press conference as a candidate for chancellor on Tuesday, Laschet spoke openly about the interests behind the aggressive reopening policy: "We have big budgetary challenges after the pandemic." He said that one was "currently alleviating many challenges by taking on debt. But sustainability means paying it back after the crisis, also in the interest of future generations." There must be "no more of the same."

That is unequivocal. The gigantic sums that have flowed into the accounts of large corporations and the super-rich as part of the coronavirus emergency aid packages are to be recovered from the working class through harsh social cuts and attacks on jobs and wages. And not only in Germany, but, as happened after the economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009, all over Europe. "We know we will not be strong in Germany if Europe is not strong," said Laschet. "And therefore, our neighbours will also face great challenges after the pandemic, and we will also only be able to answer them together as Europeans."

The herd immunity policy and social attacks at home go hand in hand with Laschet's call for a more aggressive German-European foreign policy. "Our contribution as Europe must become more offensive in a world of authoritarian social models. We must fight for our values of freedom and solidarity and justice, of human dignity in this world," he declared at the press conference.

Earlier, he had already positioned himself as a hardliner in a comprehensive foreign policy interview. Speaking with the chief correspondent of the Reuters news agency in Berlin, Andreas Rinke, in an interview which appeared under the headline, "I am a *realpolitik* politician" in the current issue of *Internationale Politik* magazine, he refused to be cast as a "Russia-appeaser" and called China "a geostrategic challenge." At the centre stands the demand for a massive arms offensive to assert the interests of German and

European imperialism worldwide—even independently of the USA.

“If you want a common European security policy, you also have to produce the means of defence together,” Laschet said. “If you want to speak the language of power, you also need the instruments of power.” Therefore, he said, “achieving NATO’s 2 percent target is not an American imposition but in our interest. We have to improve our own capabilities.”

By this, Laschet means the procurement of the most lethal weapons systems, with the declared aim of waging war. For example, the “European drone project,” which he “advocated in the coalition committee,” was a “European lighthouse project that stands for European capacity to act.”

To the question of whether Germany should “become more involved in foreign missions,” Laschet responded with an explicit defence of Germany’s war policy. The “mission with the French” in Mali, for example, was in the “German and European interest.” And if “the continued presence is necessary” in Afghanistan, where German troops have been stationed for two decades now, “the Bundeswehr will still remain.”

When Laschet criticises imperialist war policy, he does so from the right. In Libya, he was “in favour of intervention at the time for humanitarian reasons,” but “admits that the situation has not improved significantly since then.”

Laschet’s conclusion is not to end the murderous wars that have claimed millions of lives and reduced entire countries to rubble in recent years, but to make them more effective: “Interventions from outside do not only need a mandate under international law, they also need to be strategically thought through. Too many interventions aimed at ‘regime change’ have failed in the last 20 years, partly because too little thought has been given to the challenge of the period afterwards.”

To develop a German-European war capability, Laschet advocates close cooperation with France. With the Aachen Treaty, “numerous suggestions” of French President Emmanuel Macron “would already be taken up and supplemented by German proposals, such as cooperation in arms procurement, artificial intelligence, foreign policy or battery production.”

The question of a “common army” could also “certainly be a long-term perspective.” However, “first of all, we have to ensure that Europe acts together on security. We must strengthen PESCO [Permanent Structured Cooperation, part of the EU security and defence policy] and push ahead with joint projects.”

Significantly, in the *Internationale Politik* interview, Laschet advocated a possible “consensus” with the Greens precisely on foreign and defence policy. In the CDU-FDP-Green exploratory talks in 2017, they had “come very far” in foreign policy fields. He reminded those who were sceptical about cooperation with the Greens “of the Bundestag elections in 1998: at that time, it was also said that foreign policy, in particular, would make an alliance with the Greens difficult. And then the public experienced that the first German war mission since 1945, with the bombing of Belgrade, happened under an SPD-Green government of all things.”

The policies of militarism, social attacks and herd immunity are supported by the nominally left-wing parties in the Bundestag. The SPD’s candidate for chancellor and current finance minister, Olaf

Scholz, increased the military budget only a few weeks ago by another five percent, to almost 50 billion euros. And with Annelena Baerbock, the Greens have also chosen an outspoken militarist as their candidate for chancellor on Monday.

The Left Party has also made it clear that it would fully support this reactionary course as part of a possible SPD-Left Party-Green government coalition at federal level. In interviews, the new party leaders Susanne Hennig-Wellsow and Janine Wissler have signalled their support for foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr. At the state level, the Left Party is already putting the “profits before lives” policy into practice with the parties of social cuts and war, the SPD and Greens.

In the “Farbe bekennen” programme, Laschet declared that the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) should not have any “influence on the shaping of German politics.” However, after the 2017 federal elections, all the establishment parties increasingly adopted the programme of the extreme right and integrated the AfD into the political system. Laschet himself has engaged in xenophobic agitation during the pandemic. When mass infections occurred in the slaughterhouses of meat billionaire Clemens Tönnies last year, he did not criticise the slave-like working conditions, but rather claimed that “Romanians and Bulgarians” had brought the virus in from their homeland.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is the only party to oppose the turn to fascism, war and dictatorship by the ruling class, and to arm the growing social and political opposition among workers and youth with an international socialist programme. “Life not profits!”, “Defend all jobs!”, “Stop militarism!”, “Never again fascism!” and “For the United Socialist States of Europe!” are the central demands in the SGP election programme.



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