

German Chancellor candidates Baerbock, Laschet and Scholz threaten Russia and promote war and militarism

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Last Thursday evening saw the first joint TV debate by the three candidates for chancellor from the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens in September's general election.

Held at broadcaster ARD's Berlin studio, the remarks of the trio—Armin Laschet (CDU), Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens)—on foreign and European policy underscores why workers and young people must support and build the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) in the election campaign. The candidates of the ruling class all stand for militarism and war.

At the beginning of the discussion, in response to a question from the moderator, Laschet, Scholz and Baerbock, unanimously stated that for them, the US was the most important foreign policy partner. At the same time, however, they raised concerns that the “America First” course remained in place under the new President Joe Biden. This posed great security challenges for Germany and Europe.

The three candidates sought to outdo each other with their demands for an independent and more aggressive German-European foreign and defence policy.

Laschet called for defence spending to be increased as quickly as possible to the so-called 2 percent target, which the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats had first committed to at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014.

“The Alliance has pledged to invest two percent of its gross domestic product, depending on the country and its size, in joint defence and joint security. And this statement stands and there is no reason for Germany to deviate from it now, unlike all the other countries.” The grand coalition had “repeatedly taken decisions that have moved closer to this goal. And that must continue in the coming years.”

This is tantamount to a declaration of war. Amid the pandemic and under conditions where the gulf between rich and poor is constantly widening, further vast sums are to flow into the military. Since 2014, Germany has already

increased its defence budget from €32 billion to over €50 billion (about 1.5 percent of GDP). With projected economic growth, the envisaged 2 percent target means increasing the military budget to over €80 billion annually.

Scholz boasted that as acting finance minister, he had pushed for the massive increases of recent years, which have been accompanied by brutal social attacks. “I have made sure every year that the defence budget has been better funded than before. That is why we have come so far.” As chancellor, he said, he wanted to continue on this course. “I believe we have to continue to make progress on this, bit by bit, in the future. ... That we are spending more money on the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] is right, and it was right to do so over the last few years.”

The Greens candidate Baerbock was the most aggressive. Her rhetorical distancing from the 2 percent target comes from the right. She suggested that an abstract fixation on 2 percent was not enough to ensure the necessary rearmament. “You have lofty goals, but you don't meet them,” she criticised. “If we care about our own security,” she said, we must “first analyse what do we need. ... If we have cyberattacks, maybe we need more spending on our security.”

The problem with the 2 percent target, she said, was that “you don't define it by the security interest.” The 10 billion euros that the finance minister has made available in addition in recent years had “not contributed to the security of the Bundeswehr, because soldiers still rightly complain that their protective materials are not safe. And we are still procuring new helicopters that do not fly.”

Baerbock also criticised the grand coalition from the right regarding the development of a German-European great power policy. “In the last four years, where the Americans have completely dropped out, it would actually have been the moment when the Europeans said: we are now stepping up to the world policy level. We are becoming capable of world politics.” Now, this had to happen quickly—with all

the consequences. Europe must be “capable of global politics” and “on an equal footing with the Americans.”

The choice of words alone underlines the reactionary and megalomaniac traditions to which the German ruling class once aspired. “Weltpolitik”—world politics—was the rallying cry with which the German Empire set its course at the end of the 19th century for an imperialist foreign and colonial policy that led to the mass slaughter of the First World War. Now, the infamous term, long considered taboo after Germany’s crimes in two world wars, is being revived to once again drum up support for an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

As in the first half of the 20th century, the offensive aims to bring Europe under German leadership, and it is directed primarily against Russia. All three candidates poured out declarations of solidarity with the right-wing, anti-Russian regimes in Eastern Europe—first and foremost Poland, the Baltic states and Ukraine—and attacked Moscow.

Laschet spoke out in favour of the completion of the Nordstream 2 pipeline for “economic reasons” but indirectly threatened the nuclear power Russia with NATO’s nuclear arsenal. He said he did not know whether the Eastern European states would find it “reassuring if, for example, we were no longer to contribute to NATO’s nuclear safeguards in Germany and the weapons were to be withdrawn.

“In a world where nuclear threats are still there,” Laschet concluded, “Germany must also make a contribution.”

Exactly 80 years ago, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, murdered six million Jews and killed 27 million Soviet citizens in a terrible war of extermination. But that did not stop Baerbock from threatening Russia militarily. She said that one had to talk about the question of “reinsurance” and “look conventionally” at how “we guarantee the security of our European and Eastern European neighbours.” They felt “particularly threatened, especially by the stationing of Russian missiles in Kaliningrad.” Unlike Laschet and Scholz, Baerbock rejected Nordstream 2.

All three candidates agreed to introduce majority voting at the EU level in order to act more quickly and more effectively, especially in foreign and defence policy. It was necessary to move away from the “unanimity principle ... otherwise, we are not a good player in the world,” Scholz explained. “Whoever wants to be sovereign and strong, whoever wants to ensure that we are not pushed around in the world,” must be able to “speak with one voice” and that presupposed “majority decisions among the foreign ministers.”

With the statement, “Israel has the right to defend itself,” Laschet, Baerbock and Scholz backed Israel’s war against Gaza, which until Friday’s ceasefire had cost the lives of at least 232 Palestinians, including 65 children. In doing so,

they made it unmistakably clear that they are prepared to defend the economic and geostrategic interests of German imperialism with the most brutal force.

The war offensive abroad goes hand in hand with a massive stepping up of the repressive powers of the state at home. At the end of the discussion, when it briefly turned to questions of immigration policy, the candidates argued along the lines of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) for a strengthening of Fortress Europe. “A free Europe needs a secure external border,” Baerbock stressed. And Laschet added, “Today, protecting the external border is already a European task. I think it must also be strengthened at the European level.”

The discussion must be understood as a warning. The next federal government will continue and intensify the right-wing policies of the grand coalition at all levels—regardless of which party ends up forming a coalition with which and who becomes chancellor. The contempt that all capitalist parties have for the lives of workers is especially evident in the pandemic. The murderous “profits before lives” policy has cost the lives of more than 87,000 people in Germany alone. Significantly, none of the candidates said a word about this.

In the election, the SGP is the only party resolutely opposing the turn by the ruling class to militarism, war and dictatorship. While the Left Party courts an alliance with the SPD and Greens—parties of war and austerity—the SGP is arming the growing opposition with a socialist programme.



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