Chancellor candidates Laschet, Baerbock and Scholz advocate massive military build-up

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On Saturday, the second TV debate took place between Armin Laschet (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and Annalena Baerbock (Green Party). The three candidates discussed foreign and security policy. Like the first debate, the event underlined the importance of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) campaign. All candidates of the ruling class advocate a massive military build-up and are preparing to expand the hated war policy of the current grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats.

The discussion, co-moderated by the head of the Munich Security Conference Wolfgang Ischinger, took place immediately following the attack on German troops in Mali, in which 12 Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) soldiers were injured, some seriously. Since then, an aggressive militaristic campaign has been raging. Politicians and the media argue that the current deployment is not sufficient and are demanding a more robust mandate and better armaments for the German soldiers.

Baerbock, Laschet and Scholz joined in this chorus. During the discussion, they all spoke out in favour of the acquisition of combat drones. Baerbock boasted that the Greens had already agreed on the procurement of these murderous weapons at their last party conference. “There are situations where drones can also be useful for the safety of Bundeswehr soldiers,” she explained. They are needed “when members of the Bundeswehr go into the field and then fall into open traps.”

The other two candidates expressed similar views on combat drones. “The first thing is to acquire them.” After that, “you can discuss under which criteria Germany uses them,” Laschet explained. Scholz, when asked whether “the procurement of armed drones for the Bundeswehr would be decided” in the next legislative period, also answered unequivocally: “I say explicitly, my position is, we have launched the Eurodrone.”

Despite the escalation of violence in Mali, which is increasingly becoming a second Afghanistan, the candidates spoke in favour of a continuation and possible expansion of the Bundeswehr mission in the resource-rich and geostrategically central country. If France “changes its strategy,” it must be again discussed “what the German contribution can be then,” Laschet demanded. One must be “prepared if security is threatened in such a way that one has to do more, that one then also does more.”

Baerbock stressed, “We are the largest country in the European Union, and therefore Germany needs a stance on such foreign missions.” She and the Greens considered the UN mission Minusma, in which up to 650 Bundeswehr soldiers are currently involved, “still the right thing to do.” She criticised the European Union's training mission EUTM Mali as not robust enough. The Greens no longer actively supported it because it “does not take the security of our soldiers into account.”

During the discussion, questions were posed to the candidates by international military and government politicians—including former US General and CIA Director David Petraeus, former Polish Foreign and Defence Minister Radek Sikorski and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Selenskyj. They were meant to suggest that Germany's return to an aggressive foreign and defence policy was not only desired internationally but strongly demanded.

German imperialism is responding to the contradictions of the capitalist system with this aggressive policy. As in the last century, it is trying to secure markets, raw materials, strategic influence and world power by force.

The entire discussion revealed the extent to which militarism and war once again dominate German politics. Scholz pleaded for further arms deliveries to Israel, whose military had reduced the Gaza Strip to rubble only a few weeks ago. Laschet argued for more German intervention in Lebanon and throughout the Mediterranean, and Baerbock was the loudest in calling for more aggressive action against Russia and China.

80 years ago, on 22 June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and launched a horrific war of extermination in which at least six million Jews were systematically murdered, and 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives. Today, a NATO war against the nuclear power Russia would put the survival of the entire human race into question. The recent confrontation between a British warship and Russian forces in the Black Sea shows how great this danger is.

All this did not stop the Green Party candidate for chancellor from threatening Russia militarily. She called for “rapidly deployable units towards Eastern Europeans” and reiterated her party's demand for arms deliveries to Ukraine. In contrast to

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Scholz and Laschet, she spoke out in favour of an immediate halt to the construction of the almost completed Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Baerbock also called for a more aggressive course concerning China. “We have to show dialogue and toughness,” she declared. Of course, “China is central to our exports and imports concerning jobs in Germany and concerning our prosperity. And the same applies to Russia.” However, she said, one could not “pursue a purely economic course and say in beautiful prose that human rights are important to us, but when it comes down to it, one does not act accordingly.”

The former pacifists of the Green Party are experts in pushing Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy under the guise of democracy and human rights. In reality, it is about naked imperialist interests.

“A clear stance on values also serves our European industries and jobs,” Baerbock explained. “Even the BDI says we have to drive both with a view to human rights and international competitiveness: Dialogue and toughness.” With “a view to China,” this means “not just uttering words about European sovereignty, but defining it.”

As on the eve of the First and Second World Wars, the ruling class is pursuing the goal of organising Europe under German domination to impose its economic and geostrategic goals in competition with the other great powers. All three candidates declared that they would work to achieve qualified majorities in the EU on foreign and security policy issues. In this way, they want to lend German interests a faster and more aggressive emphasis, also vis-à-vis the US.

“The USA has said ‘America is back’—and we need a European response to that,” Baerbock said in summing up the ambitions of the ruling class. Laschet agreed with her. Scholz also called for “a commitment to the further integration of Europe and European sovereignty.” However, this should “not be merely a Sunday speech.” When one talks “about European sovereignty,” it means “hard power becoming an important issue for Europe.”

During the discussion, the candidates engaged in a veritable contest over who was the best militarist and who could most quickly upgrade Germany’s Armed Forces and make them ready for war. Scholz levelled the accusation that a CDU/CSU and Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition had meant austerity and “the arms budget, in particular, being used as a piggy bank for public finances.” It had been “a bad time for the Bundeswehr.”

This had changed, he said, largely thanks to him. “In the time I have been Federal Minister of Finance, we have brought about a substantial increase in the defence budget to now over 50 billion euros,” he boasted. “The huge increase of the last few years is the basis on which to build, and it must not be called into question.”

Laschet pointed out that there were already “many places in the world where Germany is involved in UN missions.” Nevertheless, he said, there must be “a willingness to do more” and to increase the military budget to the so-called 2 percent target. This had been “promised as a perspective” and must be “adhered to.” Our Bundeswehr must also be “made better and this must also be enforced in domestic politics,” he said.

This is a declaration of war on the working class and the youth in two respects. They must bear the war costs in several ways, as cannon fodder on the battlefields and in the form of further attacks on their democratic and social rights. Since 2014, the grand coalition has already increased the defence budget from €32 billion to over €50 billion (about 1.5 percent of GDP). Even with the current economic growth—relatively low because of the coronavirus pandemic—the two percent target means an increase of the military budget by another €20 billion.

Baerbock was also the most aggressive on this issue. Her rhetorical criticism of the 2 percent target comes from the right. She supported the “basic tenor of the 2 percent target,” namely “that Europeans take more care of their own security.” However, an abstract fixation on the 2 percent was not sufficient to achieve the necessary military clout. This was something that “not only the Greens, but also high-ranking military officers, and including other nations, have noticed.”

The latest debate is a warning. Regardless of who succeeds Angela Merkel (CDU) as chancellor following the elections, and whichever parties govern together, the next federal government will intensify the right-wing policies of the grand coalition. All of the capitalist parties—including the Left Party, which is courting an alliance with Scholz and Baerbock—are willing to walk over corpses, as has already been shown in the pandemic. Their “profits before lives” policy has brought death to more than 90,000 people in Germany.

The SGP is the only party that opposes this murderous development and provides the widespread opposition to militarism and war with a socialist programme. Our election manifesto says: “Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the great powers are preparing for new wars in order to pursue their economic interests.... Millions are to die so that the German financial elite can pursue its imperialist interests with military force. We demand: An immediate end to all foreign interventions! Dissolution of NATO and the German armed forces! Billions for education and jobs instead of rearmament and war!”

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