

Leading contenders in Germany's federal election promote militarism, police, social cuts and the wider spread of COVID-19

Peter Schwarz
1 September 2021

The policies of the next German government will be characterised by militarism, police build-up, the dismantling of social gains and the unrestricted spread of COVID-19, irrespective of the result of the federal election on September 26. This was the clear message from the television debate between the main candidates of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, broadcast by the private channel RTL on Sunday evening.

Armin Laschet (CDU), Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) outdid one other in stressing their commitment to the German army (Bundeswehr), a strong state and a restrictive budgetary policy. There were no differences of substance between the trio worthy of mention. All three spoke for an elevated and privileged upper class that has lost all touch with the reality of life for the vast majority of the population.

They reacted to growing social discontent and the intensification of the class struggle by moving closer together and further to the right. A striking feature of the almost two-hour debate was that no mention was made of the current strikes by health workers and train drivers.

The deep divide between the main establishment parties and the majority of the population is also reflected in the latest election polls. For the first time in German history, no party has the support of even a quarter of those polled. The CDU/CSU and SPD are polling at 23 percent apiece, the Greens at 18, the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) at 11 and the Left Party at 7 percent. If the election results correspond to the polls, at least three parties would be needed to form a majority capable of governing.

Germany is presently ruled by a "Grand Coalition" of the CDU/CSU and SPD, headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is retiring after 16 years in office, with Scholz as finance minister. The Greens are nominally in the opposition, although they have supported the policies of the

Grand Coalition in all significant respects.

Already on the first topic, foreign policy and the military consequences of the debacle in Afghanistan, the fundamental agreement between the three candidates was evident.

The Social Democrat Scholz stressed that further international military missions by the Bundeswehr would be necessary in the future. He boasted that since he took over as federal finance minister, "the largest increase in the Bundeswehr budget has taken place ... We are now over 50 billion euros. I worked very hard for that to be possible and will continue to do so in coming years." Without a Social Democratic finance minister, this huge increase would not have taken place, he stressed.

The candidate of the conservative Union (CDU and CSU) Laschet spoke out in favour of forming a National Security Council, better equipment for the Bundeswehr and strengthening the European Union so it could act militarily without relying on America. He accused Scholz and the SPD of delaying the acquisition of armed drones, a claim Scholz vehemently denied.

Baerbock for the Green Party was the most bellicose. She accused the ruling Grand Coalition of constantly giving ground when things got tough and placing domestic political considerations above foreign policy responsibility. "I would change that. As Germans, we have a responsibility in the world."

She spoke out in favour of a massive rearmament. A lack of materiel in the Bundeswehr was "a big, fat problem." NATO's 2 percent (of GDP) target is not enough, she said: "If economic output declines, then we don't have more security, but nominally we have reached our goal."

With regard to coronavirus policy, all three candidates spoke out against another lockdown: "There will be no new lockdown" (Scholz); "As things stand today, we don't need another lockdown" (Baerbock); "We will have to live with the virus" (Laschet).

In view of exponentially increasing infection rates of the dangerous Delta variant, such a policy means the deliberate contamination of the population, resulting in thousands of fatalities and hundreds of thousands at risk of Long COVID and other consequences of the infection. Children and adolescents, who are unvaccinated and now crowded closely together in schools, are particularly at risk.

Laschet, Scholz and Baerbock are determined to continue the current policy, which sacrifices human lives to the profits of big business and the banks. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Laschet is prime minister, already has the highest seven-day incidence in Germany, with an infection rate of 128 per 100,000 inhabitants.

The three candidates also hardly differ on social issues. All they are proposing are some minor shifts in income tax among the top 10 percent. After the assets of Germany's 136 billionaires increased by \$178 billion to a total of \$625 billion in the coronavirus year 2020, Scholz proposes a 3 percent increase in the top tax rate for very high incomes.

Leaving aside the fact that capital gains—which make up a large part of the income of the very rich—are taxed at a flat rate of 25 percent and that German tax law provides thousands of loopholes for top earners, Scholz's proposal does not even go near reversing the tax cut of the last SPD-led government. That government, headed by Gerhard Schröder, lowered the top tax rate by 9 points from 53 to 42 percent.

In view of widespread child poverty (every fifth child in Germany grows up in poverty), Baerbock pleaded for a basic child allowance totaling 10 billion euros. But even this concession is no more than a drop in the ocean. Against a background of exploding rents, an increase in precarious employment, growing old-age poverty and rising inflation, the numbers of the poor are growing rapidly.

Laschet was more honest when he spoke out against any tax increase for the rich and big business. He justified his position with the time-worn and false argument that the enrichment of a few leads to economic growth that benefits all.

All three candidates are aware that the murderous consequences of their coronavirus policies and growing inequality will lead to fierce social conflicts. In chorus, therefore, they all advocated a strong police and surveillance state.

Laschet demanded the installation of surveillance cameras in public places, better equipment, more staff and public support for the police, the relaxation of data protection and the legalisation of data retention by the authorities. He accused the SPD of opposing such measures.

Scholz strongly contradicted him. With the support of the SPD, parliament had long since passed a "very tough law"

allowing data retention. However, it was still being reviewed by the European Court of Justice and could come into force as soon as the court gave the green light. Together with Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, Scholz boasted he had also massively expanded the federal police force and planned to continue doing so for the next few years.

Scholz emphasised that he had no problems with video surveillance, saying, "Where I had responsibility, I also made use of it." Scholz was referring to his time as mayor of Hamburg. In this capacity, he was responsible in 2017 for the brutal suppression of protests against the G20 summit by a gigantic police contingent and the prosecution of many left-wing youth, some of whom were sentenced to long prison terms.

On the issue of domestic rearmament, Baerbock also sought to outdo Laschet and Scholz from the right. The Greens were not to blame for what the CDU/CSU had failed to do in government, she said. Video surveillance has long existed at railway stations and other public places. The bigger problem was that there were too few posts in the judiciary and too few police officers in public places. "I want us to equip our police better. The state needs money for that," she concluded. "That means ensuring that in future with tax revenue."

It is significant that in the course of the almost two-hour debate, not a word was said about the extensive far-right networks uncovered in the country's police and military apparatus, the growth of far-right crimes against leftists and Jewish institutions, and the activities of far-right AfD. These burning issues, which have attracted strong public attention, have disappeared without a trace. The reason is that the AfD and its neo-Nazi supporters are needed to implement the right-wing policies of the future German government.

The television debate made clear—and the candidates underlined this once again—that all three parties are prepared to form coalitions with one another to implement a right-wing programme in the interests of big business and the banks. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is the only party standing in the election to oppose this development on the basis of a socialist programme that expresses the interests of the working class, i.e., the vast majority of the population.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact