

German Chancellor Scholz's first speech: Praising Merkel, threatening Russia and committing to mass infection

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On Wednesday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats, SPD) gave his first formal address in the German Bundestag. It confirmed the assessment of the WSWs that the programme of the so-called traffic light coalition of SPD (red), Liberals (FDP, yellow) and Greens is a declaration of war on the working class.

It became clear in the course of the speech, delivered by Scholz in the monotone of a government administrator, that in every area his cabinet will intensify the reactionary policies of the outgoing Grand Coalition (SPD and Conservatives, CDU)—social cuts, armament of the police and military and mass infection with the coronavirus.

Scholz, who was Labour and then Finance Minister before becoming Vice Chancellor under Merkel, began with a defence of the government's coronavirus policies to date. He stressed that his government will not slacken its "fight against the virus." Behind such platitudes as "We will fight the battle with the utmost determination" and "We will win this fight," he focused exclusively on expanding the national vaccination drive.

Claiming that if everyone were to pitch in, the stated goal of 30 million vaccinations by the end of the year was achievable, "then we'll have come a decisive step forward by the end of the month." But this is demagoguery and intentional deception.

A broad-based vaccination campaign is necessary, but not sufficient, to protect the population and eliminate the virus. The scientists of many nations have demonstrated this clearly. With the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, further measures, especially a comprehensive lockdown of retail stores, schools, nurseries and businesses, become all the more urgent.

Last week, the pharmaceutical company Pfizer/BioNTech announced the result of preliminary studies showing that antibodies from doubly vaccinated individuals showed significantly reduced efficacy. Fully vaccinated individuals apparently do not have the same degree of antibody protection against the Omicron variant as they do against earlier variants of the virus, according to a press release from the company.

Scholz's claim that by expanding the vaccination campaign, "Germany will manage to leave the wave behind" is thus demonstrably false. It serves to implement the demands of business associations, which, since the beginning of the pandemic have strictly rejected any lockdown that restricts production and

trade, cost what it will in health and lives. Scholz's administration is only intensifying this profit-before-lives policy.

Scholz announced a hard line against a "hateful minority" of vaccination opponents whom he blames for the low vaccination rate in Germany. He claimed that "part of the truth of this pandemic" is that currently, "every adult in Germany could have been vaccinated twice long ago" and at least "all particularly at-risk citizens could have been boosted. ... We would have had the pandemic under control by now." Then we would all now "be having a tranquil pre-Christmas period with our old freedoms and our families and friends."

In reality, the right-wing opponents of vaccination are a small minority whose demonstrations and protests are played up beyond all measure by politicians and the media. The coronavirus catastrophe, which has already claimed more than 105,000 lives in Germany, was not caused by some cantankerous contingent of the population but by the German government, in which Scholz was vice chancellor.

"Part of the truth of this pandemic" is that the Grand Coalition downplayed the coronavirus crisis from the beginning, made light of the danger, for months sabotaged and denied a systematic vaccination campaign, closed vaccination centres in September, ended the "epidemic emergency of national scope" at the end of November, and ruled out life-saving lockdowns.

Scholz defended those policies as he heaped praise on his predecessor, Angela Merkel. "Dr. Merkel has served the Federal Republic of Germany in an impressive manner as Chancellor for 16 years, at all times oriented to the matter and to the facts, always completely unpretentious and never putting on airs, always with courage and with wisdom, with pragmatism and with prudence," the Social Democrat exclaimed to applause from the Greens, FDP and the Left Party.

Scholz was full of praise for Merkel (and himself as vice chancellor) because the Merkel era witnessed an enormous shift to the right. Never since the 1930s has Germany been as deeply socially divided as it is today. While stock prices shoot up inexorably, and billionaires enrich themselves uninhibited, ever more people live in naked poverty.

Never before have so many people in Germany worked for so long in low-wage jobs. Even full-time work is often insufficient to make a decent life. In 2019, every fifth child and every sixth

inhabitant of Germany lived in poverty, a total of 13.2 million people. That was before the pandemic, which has dramatically exacerbated the social divide. But Scholz simply denied that there ever was such a division: “Much is said at the moment about the supposed division within our society. To this I declare: our society is not divided.”

In order to suppress growing social resistance, Scholz announced a massive arming of the police. “Those who work in the police force or in customs, in security agencies or public order offices, deserve our respect, ladies and gentlemen,” he exclaimed. “On behalf of the entire federal government, I thank all those who, day and night, on the streets and in difficult situations, ensure the safety of citizens and the order of our community.”

This recognition, however, “must also have substance,” said Scholz. “That’s why we will ensure that the federal police are well staffed and well equipped and make them more attractive as a service.”

The foreign policy part of his speech also seamlessly tied in with the policies of Merkel’s government, which strove for years to develop Germany into a political and military great power.

To “make Europe more able to act,” Scholz wished to turn qualified majority decisions into the rule in the EU, “even in areas where that is not the case today.” This would enable Germany to impose its will on other EU members.

Scholz desires to further strengthen Fortress Europe and seal it off from refugees more hermetically than even now. “I just spoke with the Polish prime minister about the situation on the border with Belarus and assured him of our solidarity,” he reported. “Borders must remain inviolable, and the cynical abuse of refugees for hybrid attacks on our eastern neighbours must stop; we will reaffirm that at the European Council tomorrow.”

The new chancellor emphatically declared his support for strengthening NATO and arming the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) accordingly. He said the EU summit, which began Thursday in Brussels, would, “for the first time discuss a new basic security policy document, the so-called strategic compass.” Germany, he said, would actively participate in this discussion and invest to “achieve NATO’s capability goals.”

Like Merkel before him and new Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) just days ago, Scholz also threatened Russia. “Let me repeat here—in case everyone has not yet understood—what my predecessor in office said,” Scholz said. “Any violation of territorial integrity will have a high price.” Foreign Minister Baerbock expelled two Russian diplomats from Germany that same day.

At the same time, Scholz called on Moscow to engage in “constructive dialogue.” He added, “But this must not be misunderstood as a new German Ostpolitik [the politics of West Germany toward the former East Germany].” Former Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik had initiated “détente” with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s. Scholz accused Russia of grievously violating the principles of international law and the peace of Europe by annexing Crimea.

Scholz continued: Germany and Europe wish to act in their interests vis-à-vis China “with self-confidence and engagement.” No one can “close one’s eyes to critical human rights situations

and must call out violations of universal norms.”

Scholz offered China “fair economic competition for mutual benefit, with a level playing field for all,” while rattling his sabre: “We are using the strength of a united Europe and the single market to assure fair competitive conditions for our companies to compete globally.” The most important partner in this, he said, is the United States, which—unsaid by Scholz—is preparing for war against China.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is the only party to oppose the traffic light coalition with a socialist programme. Its party congress resolution from late November states:

The working class will inevitably come into conflict with the new coalition and all the parties in the Bundestag. The SGP has prepared the working class politically for this confrontation. In the election campaign, we decisively opposed the all-party coalition and fought as the only party for an international, socialist programme.

In our election appeal, we stressed: “No social problem can be resolved without expropriating the banks and major corporations and placing them under the democratic control of the working class. Their profits and wealth must be confiscated, and the trillions given to them over the past year must be returned. The world economy must be reorganised on the basis of a scientific, rational plan.”

In the inevitable and nascent conflict between the working class and the traffic light coalition, this programme becomes crucially important.



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