

Oppose the German government's austerity and war budget!

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Over the past four days, the Bundestag (parliament) debated the budget for the coming year. In the midst of a devastating social catastrophe and an impending nuclear world war, all parties supported the war and austerity course of the “traffic light” coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Green Party.

The government's draft budget is a declaration of war on working people. While inflation and exploding energy prices are decimating the standard of living of broad sections of the population and a recession threatens in the winter, the government is planning cuts in almost all social areas. Corporations and businesses, on the other hand, are being handed gifts worth billions.

Although the inflation rate in Germany is approaching 10 percent, the debt ceiling, limiting public spending, is to be adhered to again and the overall budget cut from €495.8 billion to €445.2 billion in nominal terms compared with the current year. In real terms, it is therefore likely to fall by almost 20 percent! In 2021, the federal government had still spent €556.6 billion.

The cuts will affect countless areas. The most glaring cuts are in the health sector, where the budget is being slashed from €64 billion to €22 billion amid a deadly pandemic that has claimed the lives of well over 30,000 people in Germany this year alone. Last summer was the deadliest since the pandemic began.

While health insurance contributions are being raised, further burdening workers, no money has yet been included to compensate hospitals for increased energy costs. According to the German Hospital Association, 96 percent of hospitals are already unable to cover their expenses with current revenues; 40 percent face immediate bankruptcy. This will further exacerbate the unbearable working conditions in hospitals and drive the public health care system into collapse.

The budgets of the family and education ministries will remain largely unchanged in nominal terms and will thus be cut by the rate of inflation in real terms. The budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is also to be increased

only marginally, by €2 billion, which does not even offset the increased payment obligations for pension insurance of €4 billion. So here, too, massive nominal and real cuts are taking place.

The only two areas where spending will be substantially increased are the economic and defense ministries. €13 billion is budgeted for the economics ministry, instead of the previous €11 billion, with the biggest increase being in economic development, which also receives additional funding from other pots. The largest increase, however, is in the military. Next year, €59 billion will be spent on the Bundeswehr (armed forces) instead of the previous €50 billion.

These figures are now being discussed and amended in the parliamentary committees. Since the government has made commitments to NATO to increase military spending to €64 billion next year, the €59 billion is likely to be boosted even further.

With the three “relief packages,” the government has also launched further billion-euro gifts to the corporations, which are to be financed from the draft budget now presented without additional spending. Thus, the social spending departments face even more severe cuts so that the accounts of the super-rich can continue to expand.

The draft budget shows that the government is reacting with calculated ruthlessness to the social catastrophe it itself triggered with its war policy and the enrichment of the wealthy. It wants to use the crisis to dismantle the remaining social welfare systems, public health care and state education.

Since all parties in the Bundestag agree on these fundamental issues, the general debate on the draft budget resembled a farce.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government statement sounded as if his administration was only handing out goodies. Its mantra, “You never walk alone,” can only seem like sheer mockery to the workers, students, and pensioners who, in addition to inflation and mass layoffs, now have to bear the cuts.

Scholz can only afford such brazen lies because the enormous opposition of the working class against this policy finds no expression in the Bundestag. This is especially true of the horrendous rearmament spending and the proxy war that Germany and NATO are waging against Russia in Ukraine.

Speakers from the various parliamentary factions believed in all seriousness that they could sell Vladimir Putin to the voters as the basic evil of the world, solely responsible for the war, rising gas prices and social devastation that they have been organizing for years.

“Putin’s war on Ukraine is the crisis out of which many other crises are growing,” Green Party leader Britta Haßelmann, for example, declared. In the same breath, she gave assurances that Germany would continue the war and the economic war against Russia “without restrictions.” The chancellor also promised to supply Ukraine with “the most modern weapons” for “as long as it is necessary.”

The leader of the Left Party parliamentary group, Amira Mohamed Ali, echoed this narrative. She stated, “Of course, in all this, we must not forget that the price explosion was caused by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. This war of aggression cannot be accepted; one had to react to it. We as a Left Party support the sanctions against Putin’s power apparatus, against the powerful oligarchs, against the Russian arms industry.”

In fact, the NATO powers systematically provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was the reactionary response of the right-wing, nationalist Putin regime to Russia’s military encirclement. In 2014, Washington and Berlin installed a puppet regime in Kyiv by means of a coup. Since then, they have vastly rearmed the country and crossed every security red line the Kremlin has drawn. Now, they are trying to engage Russia in a war of attrition with tens of thousands of deaths on both sides, hoping to defeat the country militarily and bring its vast resources under their control.

There was no serious opposition to this madness in the Bundestag. When criticism of the government was voiced, it usually came from the right. The leader of the Christian Democrat (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group, Friedrich Merz, called on the government to increase spending on the Bundeswehr even further and supply even more German weapons to Ukraine. Merz quoted right-wing professor Herfried Münkler; “The only way to the negotiating table is through military successes in Ukraine.”

The right-wing extremists of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and sections of the Left Party spoke out against arms deliveries to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia—but did so from a nationalist and militarist standpoint. For example, the director of the AfD parliamentary group, Michael

Espendiller, criticized the fact that the absence of Russian energy supplies made it more difficult to rearm the Bundeswehr.

The rejection of militarism by large parts of the population, which is deeply rooted following the horrors of two world wars and the Holocaust, found no or only a distorted expression in the Bundestag.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) spent a considerable amount of her speaking time defending herself against criticism of her statement that she would intensify the confrontation with Russia “no matter what my German voters think.” A video of the remark had gone viral on social media and was met with fierce outrage.

Baerbock claimed, on the one hand, that the video had been edited to distort its meaning, while at the same time accusing everyone who had shared and criticized it of participating in Russian warfare and endangering cohesion in Germany. She placed herself in the tradition of German militarism, which has always declared opponents of war to be “fouling the nest” and “traitors to the fatherland.”

In fact, the uncut video, as well as Baerbock’s appearance in the Bundestag, prove her willingness to recklessly disregard the opinion of voters, the majority of whose views range from skeptical to opposition to the war and who reject the increase in arms spending.

The entire budget debate reveals the ruthlessness with which all the establishment parties are pushing the war course and are banging the drum for a frontal attack on the working class. There is enormous opposition to this in workplaces, at the job centres and at the universities, but this opposition needs an international and socialist perspective in order to oppose the all-party coalition.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) calls for building rank-and-file action committees to take the fight against wage theft, social cuts, layoffs, and war into their own hands, independent of the capitalist parties and the trade unions, and to unite in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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