

German Social Democrats grasp at world power

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The Social Democratic Party (SPD)-led German government is aggressively stepping up its war policy. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of the delivery of Leopard-2 battle tanks to Ukraine last week has been followed by calls for the delivery of aircraft. While Scholz still rejects this, at least publicly, SPD Co-Chairwoman Saskia Esken, interviewed on last Sunday's "Report from Berlin" program, did not rule out sending fighter jets to Kiev.

The new Social Democratic defence minister, Boris Pistorius, used his first days in office to promote an even more comprehensive rearmament and militarization of society. "The 100 billion euros won't be enough," he said in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, referring to the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] special fund recently passed in the Bundestag [federal parliament]. He added that it was a "mistake" to "suspend compulsory military service," since "the army is at the center of society."

It is becoming increasingly clear that the ruling class regards the NATO war against Russia as an opportunity to implement its long-cherished plans to become a world power and once again make Germany the leading military force, 90 years after Hitler seized power. A strategy paper recently presented by the SPD's "Commission on International Politics" titled "Social Democratic Responses to a World in Transition" underscores this.

A more appropriate title for the paper, which was prepared under the leadership of SPD Co-Chair Lars Klingbeil, would be "Social Democrats Grasp at World Power." At the heart of the paper is German imperialism's fateful claim to "lead Europe in order to lead the world," which led to two catastrophic world wars and unspeakable crimes in the 20th century.

The Social Democratic great power rhetoric might be somewhat different—at least when it comes to phrases about human rights and democracy—than under the Kaiser or the Nazis. But the goal is the same. The ruling class sees the current struggle to redivide the world as an opportunity for German imperialism to reassert itself as a leading military

power.

Right at the beginning of the SPD paper it is stated, "We live in a world in upheaval. The days of a uni-or bi-polar order are over. New power centres are vying to control the narrative, expand influence and dictate the terms of cooperation. Alongside the US and China, as well as Europe, more and more states of the Global South are laying claim to shaping the future of the world order... While the contours of a new global order are still evolving, it is clear: We stand at the dawn of a multi-polar age."

In this situation, the document says, Germany has a "great responsibility to help shape the new order that will emerge... not least because of its size and economic strength." First and foremost, this requires organizing Europe. For "only from a strong Europe can we stand up for our values and interests globally—on our own we are too small to exert any influence." Therefore, it is in Germany's "very own interest to play a leading role in strengthening Europe."

The paper's summary states, "For Social Democracy, a strong Europe is the most important political task of the coming years. Only as a sovereign, attractive centre can Europe help shape the global order according to its values and interests. Europe must embrace its role as a geopolitical player and invest more in its own security."

The current paper differs from previous foreign policy strategy papers primarily in that it emphasizes even more explicitly the military component of Germany's great power ambitions. "One's own strength is defined... also by military capabilities," it asserts.

It goes on to say that "in addition to diplomacy and an engaged development policy, an effective peace policy also includes the military capabilities of our security and defence alliances. The Bundeswehr makes an essential contribution to the capabilities of the EU and NATO. It must be equipped in such a way that it can fully perform its tasks at all times."

In this context, the SPD paper emphasizes that the 100-billion-euro Bundeswehr special fund serves not only to arm the German army, but also to militarize Europe. "The turn of the times should be the catalyst for a common

European security and defence policy,” it states. Under the heading “Strong Partners in NATO,” the authors write, “We will work to ensure that greater use is made of cooperation among EU member states to strengthen the European pillar in NATO and expand the EU’s military capacities and capabilities.”

The goal is to transform Europe into a powerful war machine. It is “important for the European Union to overcome the inefficient and ineffective fragmentation in its defence policy,” the document asserts. There must be a “self-confident commitment to joint European defence efforts and more cooperation in production and procurement.” This will strengthen “Europe’s security and sovereignty.”

The German initiative “to build a European air and missile defence system” is “a ground-breaking step into the future,” the paper declares. Europe must be able to “defend itself conventionally against attacks... and have corresponding deterrent capabilities.” For this, Europe needs “coordinated defence spending, a rapid reaction force, and a real EU headquarters for a clear command structure.”

It continues in this spirit. In addition to “measures to improve infrastructure and military mobility, including in cyberspace,” the SPD leadership calls for “an independent EU Council of Ministers for Defence” to coordinate and implement the establishment of an independent German-European major power policy. “More autonomy” presupposes a “greater capacity to act,” the paper states.

The document makes no secret of the fact that the German ruling class is preparing to assert its economic and geopolitical goals more independently of the US and, in the future, against it. The US and NATO are “still guarantors of European security,” but “President Donald Trump’s term in office in particular... made it clear that Europe must position itself more independently and invest more in its own security.”

To justify and whitewash the war offensive, the paper spreads the familiar lies. At one point it calls the “Russian war of aggression against Ukraine” the “most brutal break to date with basic principles of the international order that were painstakingly established after World War II.” Of course, the SPD propagandists know full well that the wars in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, which were supported by Germany in violation of international law, have reduced entire countries to rubble and cost millions of lives.

In Ukraine, too, the main aggressor is not Moscow, but the imperialist powers. With its systematic military encirclement of Russia, NATO provoked the reactionary intervention by the Putin regime in the first place. Now, NATO is escalating the conflict further and further in order to subjugate the resource-rich country.

All the phrases about human rights cannot hide the fact

that what is really at stake are predatory imperialist interests. The paper states, “For economic security, we need an uninterrupted supply of critical raw materials. Without rare earths or lithium, [computer] chips and batteries cannot be produced today.” What is required, therefore, is “a German and European raw materials strategy” that “sets economic incentives for Europe’s own raw materials production and strengthens partnerships with resource-rich states worldwide.”

Perhaps the most brazen lie is the authors’ claim that “fairly distributed prosperity and strong social cohesion” form “the basis for the attractiveness of a geopolitically-minded Europe.” In fact, everywhere in Europe, rearmament is accompanied by massive attacks on the living standards of the working class. While energy prices are skyrocketing because of war policies, and inflation is at its highest in decades, the costs of war are being imposed entirely on the general population.

The SPD sees its task as imposing the policy of war and social devastation against growing social and political opposition. This is precisely what is hidden behind the clarion call to the military and for a “self-contained, resilient European Union” in the strategy paper.

The working class must draw the necessary conclusions from all of this. More than a century after the SPD’s historic betrayal on August 4, 1914, when it agreed to the Kaiser’s war credits and supported World War I, social democracy is the leading party of German imperialism. The Left Party and the Greens support it in this, forming coalitions with the SPD at the federal and state level. Like the right-wing parties in the Bundestag, they conduct themselves as rabid militarists.

The only party that opposes the warmongering is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP). As the German section of the Fourth International, it is fighting to build an international mass movement against war and its source, capitalism. The SGP is participating in the Berlin state elections to give voice to the enormous opposition to the war in Ukraine and to the return of German militarism. We call on all opponents of war to come to the central anti-war rally at Potsdamer Platz on February 4 at 11 am and vote SGP on February 12!



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