

Germany's Chancellor Scholz visits Argentina, Chile and Brazil

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Argentina, Chile and Brazil at the end of January accompanied by a high-ranking business delegation. The four-day trip was dominated by the intensification of the NATO war against Russia and the efforts to suppress the escalating class struggle worldwide.

Scholz's trip had several objectives—to incorporate South America into the NATO war front against Russia, to open up new markets for energy and raw material sources for the German economy to offset the consequences of Russian sanctions and push back China's influence, and to support Latin American governments against massive working class resistance.

In all three countries, Scholz made demonstrative visits to memorials to the victims of right-wing tyranny—in Argentina, the memorial park for the victims of General Videla's bloody military dictatorship; in Chile, the museum for the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship. In Chile, he also agreed to build a memorial to Colonia Dignidad, where a German-expat sect tortured opponents of Pinochet. In Brazil, the presidential palace where Scholz met with President Lula da Silva still bore the marks of the recent coup attempt by supporters of his fascist predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

Scholz's nod to the victims of military dictatorships, regimes with whom Germany maintained the best relations, was not directed against the fascist threat. On the one hand, he wanted to conceal the character of his own government, which pursues an extreme right-wing course in domestic and foreign policy. And he wanted to strengthen the nominally left-wing governments in South America, whose social attacks are paving the way for the right to return to power, in their confrontation with the working class.

In Argentina, where elections are due this year,

Scholz met with President Alberto Fernández, whose Peronist movement had already suffered a devastating defeat in the midterm elections at the end of 2021. The country, with its 47 million inhabitants, is facing a catastrophic economic crisis. The inflation rate is 95 percent, and 43 percent of the population lives in poverty.

While Fernández, with the help of the unions and pseudo-left parties, suppresses the class struggle and is cutting social spending in order to repay a \$45 billion IMF loan, the extreme right senses a change is in the air. Last September, for example, a right-wing extremist attempted to assassinate Vice President Cristina Kirchner. The following day, half a million people demonstrated in front of the presidential palace against the assassination attempt.

Scholz and Fernández signed memoranda of understanding on closer cooperation in expanding renewable energy and promoting start-ups. Germany also wants to purchase larger quantities of fracked gas from Argentina. Scholz advocated for the rapid adoption of the trade agreement between the European Union and the Mercosur trade bloc countries, which has been under negotiation for 20 years. Argentina recently applied to join the BRICS alliance, which includes China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa.

Chilean President Gabriel Boric, with whom Scholz met on the second leg of his trip, also faces fierce opposition from the working class. Boric had been elected at the end of 2021 as the candidate of an ostensibly left-wing electoral alliance. His own party, Convergencia Social, is based on the model of Spain's Podemos.

But since then, Boric has shown himself to be a reliable representative of capitalist interests in the socially polarized country. When right-wing extremists

fired on journalists and participants at a May Day rally last year with the connivance of the police, his government backed the police. In the summer, 50,000 miners went on strike to protest Boric's decision to shut down a copper mine. In October, Boric ordered the brutal crackdown on events commemorating the 2019 mass protests, to which he owed his election victory.

Scholz and Boric agreed to cooperate closely on mining, raw materials and renewable energy. Chile is to use wind and hydroelectric power to produce hydrogen, which will then be exported to Germany. A first joint pilot project, "Haru Oni" in Patagonia, was inaugurated a few weeks ago.

Chile is also the world's most important suppliers of copper and has large deposits of lithium, which is needed to produce car batteries. It is currently the second-largest producer of lithium behind Australia and supplies two-thirds of the EU's needs.

"The mining of copper and lithium is considered particularly dirty," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* writes. "Germany is trying to offer itself as a partner for the modernization of mining and thus get into the business." The Chancellor's Office was aware that mining has been left to the Chinese for too long. Germany now wanted to become an attractive partner by having the raw materials processed in the country of origin, unlike China.

Scholz spent the longest time in Brazil, where he met with newly elected President Lula da Silva, whom he invited to Germany for government consultations. The former union leader, founder of the Workers' Party (PT) and president has long been a favourite of Brazilian and international capital. He fears the independent mobilization of the working class far more than the threat of fascism and dictatorship.

To regain power, Lula had allied himself with right-wing elements from his predecessor Bolsonaro's governing coalition, some of whom collaborated with the coup plotters who devastated the government quarter on January 8.

Scholz also agreed with Lula—in addition to protecting the Amazon rainforest—to work closely on expanding renewable energy and producing green hydrogen. "Our economic relations are already very close," the chancellor stressed. "There are around 1,000 German-Brazilian companies in your country. That's already an impressive number, but we want to increase

it even more in the future."

While Scholz negotiated numerous economic agreements, he was given the cold shoulder on the war issue. The representatives of the Latin American bourgeoisie show little inclination to become completely dependent on the NATO powers. They expect to benefit more from manoeuvring between Europe, the US, China and Russia. While they all condemned Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine, they were unwilling to participate directly in the war by supplying weapons or other materiel.

The differences were clear at the final press conference between Scholz and Lula. Under the chancellor's petrified gaze, Lula explained that he did not know exactly why this war had started in the first place. He ascribed a share of the responsibility to Ukraine and proposed the creation of a "peace club" in which Brazil would play the role of mediator and in which China would also participate. Saying that Brazil was "a country committed to peace," Lula rejected the supply of arms and ammunition to Ukraine.

Scholz's trip to Latin America shows what the "turn of the times" announced by the chancellor at the beginning of the Ukraine war means. The German government is using the war with Russia, which NATO itself provoked by its aggressive advance to the east, not only for the largest military build-up since Hitler, to become Europe's leading military power once again. It also wants to expand its influence in Latin America, Africa and large parts of Asia.

The struggle to redivide the world among the great imperialist powers was the cause of World War I and World War II. Now Germany and the other imperialist powers are preparing a much wider catastrophe.

The price is being paid by the international working class in the form of inflation, social cuts and repression, and as cannon fodder. Only the independent political intervention of the working class can stop this madness. In this, the struggle against war is inseparable from the struggle against its cause, capitalism.



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