

Social Democrats position themselves as the leading party of German imperialism

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The Social Democratic Party headed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz plays the central role in implementing the militarist and anti-working-class programme of the coalition government he leads. The last two years under Chancellor Scholz have been characterised by the US-NATO war offensive against Russia in Ukraine and the associated massive attacks on social and democratic rights at home. At its party conference in Berlin at the weekend, the SPD made clear that it will further intensify its right-wing course.

Scholz's frenetically celebrated speech was in every respect a declaration of war on the working class. The chancellor made clear that he and the government are fully behind Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. "We will support the country and we support the right to self-defence," he shouted to thunderous applause from the delegates. "We want there to be a Jewish state in which Jews can live safely."

In reality, the Israeli bombing terror against the Palestinians has nothing to do with "self-defence" or even "security" for the Jewish population. It is now known that the far-right Netanyahu government knew in advance of the Hamas attack on October 7 and allowed it to take place in order to implement its policy of ethnic cleansing and destruction. The extent of this is so massive that even UN human rights experts speak of it being "textbook genocide."

According to the Gaza Health Ministry, more than 18,000 people have been killed in the territory since the beginning of the war and many thousands more are missing. The actual number of dead is therefore likely to be well over 20,000—including many women and children. Over 1.9 million people have been driven from their homes and more than 60 percent of all apartments have been damaged or destroyed. Hospitals and schools have also been targeted. Horrific images and videos of mass graves and Abu Ghraib-like torture methods by the Israeli army are circulating on social media.

Scholz did not limit himself to embracing the imperialist violence in the Middle East. In his speech, he also positioned the SPD as the most aggressive party of rearmament and

executor of the NATO war offensive against Russia.

"We have made sure that we spend more on our defence and created a special fund for the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces]," he boasted, threatening Russia with a long war. "He [Putin] should not and must not expect us to let up. We must be in a position to continue doing what we are doing today—this year, next year and the year after." Especially now, when "others are weakening," Germany must increase its "contribution" and "make decisions that put us in a position to do so."

In other words, the current budget discussions are primarily about imposing further savings in order to make even more billions available for armaments and war. Scholz's claim that "there will be no dismantling of the welfare state in Germany in such a situation" was a bold-faced lie. In fact, the previous draft budget already contains massive attacks. The healthcare budget alone has been cut by three quarters compared to 2022, from €64.4 to €16.2 billion, while the education budget has been cut by 5.4 percent compared to 2023. What Scholz, Economics Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) and Finance Minister Christian Lindner (Liberal Democrats, FDP) are currently plotting behind the scenes will far exceed this orgy of cuts.

Scholz justified all of this as a reaction to the "Russian war of aggression" and "Russian imperialism," which was annexing small countries and threatening "peace". What a mockery! Of course, Scholz knows full well that it is Germany, the US and the other imperialist powers that have reduced entire countries to rubble and killed millions in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia. And they are also the main aggressor in Ukraine. By systematically encircling Russia, NATO provoked Putin's reactionary invasion in the first place. Since then, it has constantly escalated the conflict in order to subjugate the resource-rich country. Berlin in particular sees the war as an opportunity to put long-held militarisation plans into practice.

Here too, the SPD is at the forefront more than a century after its historic betrayal—the Social Democrats' approval of war credits for the First World War on August 4, 1914. At

the centre of the party conference was the adoption of a motion by the Executive Committee entitled “Social Democratic Responses to a World in Transition.” The WSWS already commented on an earlier draft of the paper and wrote that a more appropriate title would be “Social Democrats Grasp at World Power.” The paper pursues the old claim of German imperialism to “lead Europe in order to lead the world,” which had already led to two world wars and fascist barbarism in the 20th century.

The Social Democrats’ great power rhetoric—at least when it comes to a few phrases about human rights and democracy—may appear somewhat different from that of the Kaiser’s Empire or the Nazis, but the goal is the same. The ruling class sees the current struggle for the redivision of the world as an opportunity for German imperialism to re-establish itself as the leading military power.

Right at the beginning of the paper it says: “The times of unipolar or bipolar order are over. New centres of power are vying for sovereignty, influence, and cooperation. Alongside the USA, China and Europe, more and more states from the Global South are laying claim to shaping the future of the world order. This development has been emerging for many years. While the contours of a new global order are still developing, it is clear that we are at the beginning of a multipolar age.”

In this situation, Germany had “a great responsibility to help shape the new things that will emerge”—“not least because of its size and economic strength.” Above all, this required organising Europe. Because “only from a strong Europe can we stand up for our values and interests globally—alone we are too small to exert any influence.” It was therefore in Germany’s “very own interest to play a leading role in strengthening Europe.”

For the Social Democrats, “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 accept its role as a geopolitical player and invest more in its own security.”

Like the defence policy guidelines recently adopted by the German government, the SPD resolution explicitly emphasises the military component of Germany’s great power policy. “Our own strength is ... also defined by military capabilities,” it says in the section “Defining our own strengths.” The Bundeswehr makes “an essential contribution to the capabilities of the EU and NATO” and must be “equipped in such a way that it can fully fulfil its tasks at all times.” This is linked to the “clear message” that Germany is assuming “leadership on an equal footing, including in military matters.”

The aim is to transform Europe into a forceful war power

under German leadership. It was “important that the European Union overcomes the inefficient and ineffective fragmentation in its defence policy.” One should “confidently commit to joint European defence efforts and more cooperation in production and procurement.” Europe needed “coordinated defence spending, a rapid reaction force and a genuine EU headquarters for a clear command structure.” All of this would strengthen “Europe’s security and sovereignty.”

The SPD paper leaves no doubt that the ruling class is preparing to achieve its economic and geopolitical goals more independently of the US in future and, if necessary, against it. The US and NATO were “still guarantors of European security.” However, “President Donald Trump’s term of office in particular” had “made it clear that Europe must position itself more sovereignly and invest more in its own security.”

This is not about “values,” but about predatory imperialist interests. “For economic security, we need an uninterrupted supply of critical raw materials. Without rare earths or lithium, for example, no chips or batteries can be produced.” What was therefore needed was “a German and European raw materials strategy” that also “provides economic incentives for Europe’s own raw materials extraction and strengthens partnerships with resource-rich countries worldwide.”

The return of aggressive German militarism and imperialism may be loudly celebrated at SPD party conferences, but among workers and young people it is as hated as the Social Democrats themselves. According to the latest “Berlin Pulse,” a representative survey on German foreign and security policy conducted by the Körber Foundation, 71 percent of respondents said “No” to the question of whether Germany should take on a leading military role in Europe. A “stronger diplomatic commitment” was also rejected by the vast majority. In the latest Deutschlandtrend survey by broadcaster ARD, the SPD received only at a pitiful 14 percent support and Scholz’s own approval ratings stand at a record low of 20 percent.



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