

German government decides on war budget for 2024

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The 2024 federal budget, passed in the Bundestag (parliament) on Friday with the votes of the three coalition parties—Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FPD) and Greens—is a declaration of war on working people. It includes the highest military expenditure since the end of the Second World War. On the other hand, it includes compliance with the debt brake and massive cuts in the areas of healthcare, education, and social welfare.

Officially, Germany will spend around €72 billion on defence this year. Of this, €51.95 billion is accounted for by the regular defence budget. A further €20 billion or so will come from the €100 billion ‘Bundeswehr Special Fund’ for the Armed Forces, which was approved by the Bundestag and Bundesrat (upper chamber) in June 2022. Considering additional military expenditure hidden in other budget items and funds, defence spending for 2024 will amount to a total of €85.5 billion. This means it has more than doubled since 2017.

In the Bundestag, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) boasted about the record spending. “The time has come!” he shouted to the assembled deputies. Ten years ago, “we promised to finally halt the decline in defence spending and try to get closer to 2 percent of gross domestic product within a decade.” With the 2024 budget, a NATO quota of 2.1 percent will now be achieved for the first time in decades. The “around €72 billion for our armed forces” budgeted in Section 14 and the “Bundeswehr Special Fund” combine to make the “highest figure since the Bundeswehr was founded.”

At the same time, Pistorius made it clear that this is just the beginning. “We must prepare ourselves for the fact that the Bundeswehr’s financial requirements will increase permanently,” he explained. Security “does not come for free—not today and certainly not in a few years’ time.” The Special Fund was therefore only an “important first step,” but a “reliable, sustainable and increasing budget” was necessary.

The increase that is being prepared behind the scenes is gigantic. According to a report in newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, the planners at the Ministry of Defence assume that “in 2028, two percent of economic output will correspond to around €97 billion.” The Bundeswehr will need this sum “in any case, for example, for operating expenses, maintenance and new acquisitions.” In addition, the planners have estimated “a

further €10.8 billion for foreseeable further requirements of the troops.” This means that the Bundeswehr was heading for a “€56 billion hole” with the expiry of the Special Fund.

These massive amounts serve a single purpose: to re-equip Germany as a major military power. In the Bundestag, Pistorius boasted about the “major armaments projects” that the coalition government has already launched “in this legislative period:” F-35 fighter jets, new-generation snowmobile vehicles, equipment for the “infantryman of the future,” Puma infantry fighting vehicles, CH-47 heavy transport helicopters and further maritime reconnaissance aircraft. In addition, a government purchase agreement had been concluded with Israel for the procurement of the Arrow air defence system and guided missiles, Pistorius said.

To drive forward and accelerate the necessary armament, it was now important that “all elements of the procurement chain work together: from the troops to industry.” It was also clear that the security and defence industry needs to ramp up its production capacities, he continued. Because one thing was certain: “The ‘new era’ will be with us for a long time to come. And we can only take this path together: politically, socially and economically.” The budget was “a clear sign that we are taking shaping the turnaround very, very seriously.”

Workers and young people must take such statements as a warning. The German ruling class, which already fought two world wars in the 20th century and committed terrible crimes, is preparing for a potentially all-destroying third world war. Just a few days before his appearance in the Bundestag, Pistorius had declared that Germany and Europe would have to prepare for a war with the nuclear power Russia in “a period of five to eight years.”

In the budget debate, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) made it unmistakably clear that Berlin would not abandon its declared NATO goal of defeating Russia militarily in Ukraine. “We will make our major contribution for this year, and we will do everything we can to ensure that Europe’s joint contribution is so great that Ukraine can build on it and that Putin cannot expect our support to diminish at any time,” he declared on Wednesday.

Just one day later, at a special summit in Brussels, the EU decided to continue financing and fuelling the war against

Russia with an additional €50 billion for Kiev. This is in addition to the support provided by individual EU member states. German military aid for Ukraine alone is expected to total around €7.4 billion this year, more than doubling the amount.

In his speech, Pistorius made clear that German imperialism was not just concerned with Ukraine and Russia, but with a global war offensive. “We are currently confronted with a multitude of security upheavals and conflicts worldwide, whether in Israel, Yemen, Syria, the Balkans, the Caucasus or the Indo-Pacific,” said the defence minister. “We must therefore also be able to take a stand in other parts of the world with our tried and tested measures consisting of diplomacy and development cooperation, but also militarily if necessary.”

To make Germany “fit for war” again (Pistorius), the ruling class is preparing to reintroduce compulsory military service. Ensuring “operational readiness” involved “reviewing our personnel requirements and, of course, the question of whether or not general compulsory service or conscription makes sense,” Pistorius said. From a societal viewpoint, “we have to ask ourselves who should defend this country when things get serious.”

The budget aims to pass on the costs of this monstrous pro-war policy to the working class. The **healthcare budget** alone will fall from €24.48 billion in 2023 to €16.71 billion. In 2022, it still stood at €64.4 billion. The massive cuts are the result of the government’s “profits before lives” policy in the coronavirus pandemic. Almost all the funds that have since been made available to fight the pandemic have been cancelled again—even though COVID is still raging through the population.

And the cuts go far beyond the expenditure associated with COVID-19. For example, the federal subsidy for **long-term-care insurance**, which previously amounted to one billion euros, has been cancelled. In future, it will have to be financed by higher employee contributions, which will hit low-income earners particularly hard.

The cuts are also huge in other areas: €1.5 billion will be saved directly in **social spending**, including €600 million in the subsidy for statutory pension insurance.

The coalition’s only new social policy promise, **basic child protection**, had already been de facto cancelled by the government at its cabinet retreat in Meseberg last summer. The €12 billion originally promised by Green Family Minister Lisa Paus was cut to €2.4 billion.

Following the **Supreme Court ruling overturning the climate fund** in November, the coalition government massively tightened the cuts once again with the so-called “package for future-proof finances, social security and future investments.” These are just some of the key figures:

- Spending on the Climate and Transformation Fund will be cut by €12.7 billion for 2024.
- The budget of the Ministry of Transport will be cut by

€380 million.

- The budget of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research will be reduced by €200 million.

- Subsidies for motor vehicle tax for forestry and agriculture totalling €480 million and for agricultural diesel (€440 million) will be gradually abolished.

- The citizens’ income bonus of €250 million will be cancelled and the amount for citizens’ income will be reduced. Among other things, this is intended to force alleged “total refuseniks” to accept any job, no matter how nasty, for a pittance.

- Refugees who cannot be deported are to be forced into low-paid work through “sanctions for breaches of duty,” with the aim of saving social benefits totalling €500 million.

The government’s pro-war policy and the associated massive attacks on social and democratic rights will further fuel the class struggle. The year has already begun with massive farmers’ protests, strikes by train drivers, airport workers and public transit employees. Added to this are demonstrations against Israel’s genocide in Gaza, which is fully supported by the government and opposition parties, and the mass protests against the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The far-right party is being deliberately built up by the ruling class to push through its programme of world war and social austerity.

The crucial task is to develop the resistance that is growing throughout Europe and worldwide against the war and class war policies of the ruling class into a politically conscious movement of the working class against capitalism and to arm it with a socialist programme. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is fighting for together with its sister parties in the Fourth International in the European elections. Some of our central demands are:

- Stop the NATO war in Ukraine! No sanctions and arms deliveries!
- Two world wars are enough! Stop the warmongers!
- 100 billion euros for daycare centres, schools, and hospitals instead of armaments and war!



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