

Despite rising poverty

German government slashes support for children to fund its war drive

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Two decisions taken in the last few days highlight the political direction in which the German government is marching. Germany is permanently stationing 5,000 heavily armed soldiers and their families on the Russian border in Lithuania. At the same time, it has declared that the creation of 5,000 jobs to combat child poverty would be too costly.

The funds would go to the *Kindergrundsicherung* (Basic Child Protection program), i.e., government support to protect children in Germany's poorest families. According to Federal Minister for Family Affairs Lisa Paus (Greens), administering the program would require the hiring of some 5,000 people to staff a "family service." Although the plan had been approved as part of the coalition agreement between the Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Greens, the FDP and to some extent the SPD and sections of the Greens are now up in arms against it.

In the most recent budget, Paus had already agreed to reduce the 12 billion euros originally budgeted for *Kindergrundsicherung* to two billion. When she raised the need to create 5,000 new jobs, which would cost an estimated 250 million euros a year, the proposal sparked a storm of indignation.

Politicians who have never had to suffer a day's hardship in their lives are raising a hue and cry. "Monster bureaucracy!" rants the FDP. The plan is "absurd," says Johannes Vogel, parliamentary secretary of the FDP. In response to the uproar, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) convened the cabinet for an internal discussion on Wednesday.

The majority of the Christian Democratic (CDU-CSU) opposition parliamentary group opposes *Kindergrundsicherung*, and CDU (Christian Democratic Union) leader Friedrich Merz wants to abolish the Citizen's Allowance, another form of support for the poor.

"We can no longer afford 40 billion euros for the so-called Citizen's Allowance at a time like this," Merz said in the Bundestag (parliament).

Nor is Lisa Paus insisting on the additional jobs. She and the Greens have once again retreated. "There won't be 5,000 new jobs," the co-chair of the Greens, Ricarda Lang, told

broadcaster ARD.

Meanwhile, child poverty is rampant. It is a consequence of social cuts to finance the government's pro-war policies.

The war offensive against Russia stands at the centre of the coalition government's policies. After the US, Germany is the next largest funder of both the war in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Over the past two years, Berlin has provided Ukraine with 32 billion euros in financial and military aid, according to the German government's own figures. The total value of authorised German arms exports to Israel has increased tenfold in the past year, making Germany responsible for 47 percent of all Israeli arms imports.

The working class pays the bill in the form of social cuts, wage-cutting, increased exploitation, unemployment and poverty. The rise in child poverty is the inevitable consequence of this.

This is confirmed by the annual Joint Poverty Report 2024, which was published on March 26. It does not include the more recent figures from last year, which reflect war-related inflation. However, the statistics for 2022 already paint a devastating picture.

In 2022, 16.8 percent of Germany's population—14.2 million people—were income poor. One fifth of the poor are children, and of all children living in Germany significantly more than one in five (21.8 percent) are now affected by poverty.

The poverty report defines a household as poor if its income is below 60 percent of median income. In 2022, this poverty threshold was €1,186 per month for a single person, €1,779 for a couple without children and €1,540 for single parents with a child under the age of 14. As the figures for 2022 show, single parents are disproportionately affected (43 percent of all single parents are poor), while large families, the unemployed and people without a German passport are also often poor.

In such households, it is the children, in particular, who suffer—from new-borns to adolescents. They are disadvantaged by poverty in many ways.

This ranges from health problems caused by malnutrition to developmental lags and psychological problems, to educational deficits, social exclusion and a lack of future prospects. Child

poverty often sets in motion a cycle from which the victims can no longer escape in adulthood. According to the poverty report, this potentially affects 2.9 million children who are poor or at risk of poverty in Germany.

This vicious cycle was supposed to be counteracted by the Kindergrundsicherung, as the parties that formed the coalition government agreed before taking office. The project originally envisaged bundling together all benefits for children from January 1, 2025 and proactively allocating them to the families concerned.

“We want to turn the citizens’ obligation to pay taxes into a service obligation on the part of the state,” Minister Paus grandly announced on her ministry’s website.

Of course, the entire project was inadequate from the outset, as only existing benefits—the child benefit and supplement, the child support element of the Citizen’s Allowance, the child allowance, etc.—were to be combined. Today, these benefits comprise pitifully small sums on which no child can realistically live. For example, the support rate for a child in the Citizen’s Allowance is €350 per month. This is linked to the claim that one can feed a child on €4 a day.

According to Ulrich Schneider, head of the charity umbrella organisation Der Paritätische, which publishes the poverty report, much more money would be needed to seriously tackle child poverty. At least 4 to 5 billion euros would be needed just to fund the Citizen’s Allowance in a reasonable manner.

“The truth lies in the parents’ wallets,” Schneider told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. He emphasised that parental poverty was responsible for child poverty: unemployment as a result of job cuts, low wages, a minimum wage that is far too low—these are all poverty factors.

In 2022, an additional 100,000 people were considered poor compared to the previous year. Compared to 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic, there were almost one million more people in poverty. Almost two thirds of the adult poor were either working or retired, a clear indication of the precarious situation of the working class as a whole.

The handouts provided so far do not reach all the families who are entitled to them. As a result, several million children should already be receiving significantly more money than they are today. According to the minister for family affairs, up to 70 percent of all those entitled to benefits do not actually manage to claim them.

This is because applications for the child benefit and the child supplement have to be made at the Family Benefits Office, applications for the Citizen’s Allowance are made at the job centre, applications for social assistance at the Social Welfare Office, and for the child tax allowance—at the tax office. Not everyone can do all this straight away, and where can help be found? Originally, the proposal that is now being vilified as a “bureaucratic monster” was intended to provide a way out of this jungle of bureaucracy.

However, the coalition government designed its project for a

basic child protection scheme primarily as a public relations manoeuvre rather than a substantive social reform. It is concentrating its efforts on arming the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and its planned war against Russia. Since an overwhelming majority of the population does not want this, war policy abroad inevitably goes hand in hand with intensified class war at home.

This political tendency can be seen in the government’s Kindergrundsicherung project. From the outset it excluded refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee children are already more disadvantaged than everyone else in almost every respect, and do not even receive the child benefit. This is in line with the government’s attempt to divide and thus weaken the working class.

Meanwhile, the heated dispute over 5,000 new jobs shows that the government is prepared to ditch the entire Kindergrundsicherung scheme, as meagre as it is.

On this point, too, the coalition is increasingly adopting the policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which rejects the Kindergrundsicherung scheme because it fosters a “social parasite mentality.”

The “large group of people who benefit are those who make use of our social system without ever having paid a cent into it,” rails Martin Reichardt, family policy spokesperson for the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag.

The fate of the Kindergrundsicherung shows that it is impossible to overcome poverty and social inequality by appealing to governments and the establishment parties. The interests of working people cannot be reconciled with the profit lust and warmongering of the capitalist politicians.

As Sozialistische Gleichheit (Socialist Equality) declares in its European election campaign:

To end war and inequality, the masses must intervene independently in the political process, break the power of the banks and corporations, and place them under democratic control.



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