

Stop the rearmament of Germany! Socialism, not war!

Statement of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International

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“Germany’s ruling class is following a similar path” to the US with fascist President Donald Trump, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) wrote in our election statement for the federal election. “Their answer to ‘Make America Great Again’ is ‘Deutschland über alles.’” It is “responding to Trump by rearming at a pace not seen since Hitler.”

Just a few days after the election, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) decided to launch a gigantic rearmament programme. The aim is to rearm Germany to make it an aggressive military power after losing two world wars and committing terrible crimes in the 20th century. The consequences of this programme mean war, dictatorship and ultimately nuclear annihilation. The official propaganda cannot hide this fact.

The scale of the rearmament programme is enormous. Five hundred billion euros in loans alone are to be taken out for a so-called special fund, which will primarily be used to make social infrastructure “fit for war” and to militarise the whole of society: from the reintroduction of compulsory military service to the subordination of teaching, research and training to the needs of the military, and the suppression and persecution of opponents, as is already happening in the case of the opponents of the genocide in Gaza.

The debt brake is to be completely abolished for spending on the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr), so that unlimited borrowing is possible. A further €500 billion will initially be set aside for defence spending. Even if it is still unclear over what period of time this sum will be spent, these are enormous sums that can only be compared with rearmament before the two world wars.

Calculated over one year, the increase of €500 billion alone would correspond to around 11 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—more than twice as much as during Germany’s remilitarisation after World War II or any other year of the Cold War. Even in the first year of the First World War, war credits “only” amounted to 8.6 percent of the estimated GDP of 1913. Hitler only reached a higher figure in 1938, after five years of massive rearmament.

Then as now, the German Empire ran up massive debts to finance militarisation. The higher the debts rose, the more inevitable the war became because these loans could only be refinanced through the spoils of war. Today’s rearmament follows the same logic. It is not for defence against so-called “Russian aggression,” as politicians of all parties claim—just as on the eve of the First and Second World Wars—but in preparation for brutal wars of aggression.

Leading ideologues of the ruling class openly state this. Political scientist Herfried Münkler, for example, wrote in *Der Spiegel* that the “rules-based order” has been replaced by “a power-based order.” Military power is gaining in importance over economic power.

Münkler concludes that Europe must therefore “rearm as quickly as possible and reorganise itself politically.” It must “produce a political class that is intellectually and mentally equal to the changed global

political constellations.” In order to play a part in the “competition between the great powers,” Europeans would have to “quickly learn and internalise the rules of this power-based order.”

In other words: “Europe” (Münkler always writes Europe when he means Germany) once again needs statesmen and generals like Kaiser Wilhelm II, Erich Ludendorff, Adolf Hitler and Wilhelm Keitel, who do not shy away from criminal wars.

The rearmament programme of the CDU and SPD follows this line. It is aimed directly at the nuclear-armed power Russia. Even before the Bundestag elections, Chancellor Scholz and Defence Minister Pistorius had declared that Germany must be capable of winning a war against Russia within three to five years. The rearmament programme puts this madness into practice. Eighty years after the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, Germany is once again preparing for an all-out war against Russia, which would result in the destruction of the entire continent.

But there is even more at stake. Back in 2018, the then Grand Coalition already spoke out in favour of extensive militarisation and named entire countries, regions and whole continents in its coalition agreement that German imperialism considers to be its zones of influence: from the Western Balkans to Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Afghanistan, the Middle East, North Africa, Africa, Latin America and Asia. The current plans build on this.

When mouthpieces of the ruling class speak of the end of the “rules-based order” and the use of military power to pursue economic interests, they are aware that this also means conflict with American imperialism.

Germany can only implement its war policy if it succeeds in dominating Europe. The gigantic arms expenditure also serves this purpose. Parallel to the plans of the CDU and SPD, former German Defence Minister and current European Union (EU) Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) has presented a programme to arm the EU to the tune of €800 billion. By increasing war spending, Germany is attempting to dominate this process of European rearmament in terms of weapons systems, production capacities and scope.

This will inevitably exacerbate the conflicts between the European powers, which are all arming themselves at a rapid pace. France wants to increase its military spending to 5 percent of GDP and place Europe under its nuclear “umbrella.” Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has announced that all of the country’s men will receive military training in order to increase the number of soldiers and reservists from 200,000 to 500,000. And Britain is prepared to deploy its own soldiers to Ukraine together with France and other countries.

A declaration of war on the working class

The rearmament programme is not only directed against international opponents and rivals, it is also a declaration of war on the working class.

After Germany's debt-to-GDP ratio was reduced from 81 to 59 percent between 2010 and 2019 by destroying schools and hospitals, dismantling social security systems and torpedoing workers' rights, it is now being driven to new heights for rearmament. For the working class, this means further attacks on their social and democratic rights. The money is being recovered in the form of wage cuts, mass redundancies and the destruction of the welfare state.

Fierce class struggles are inevitable. Workers in the public sector, the postal service and in regional transport are already on strike against real wage cuts that the government wants to impose on them. Bitter class struggles are also developing in other European countries. In Greece, millions are demonstrating against the social catastrophe.

But those in power are not prepared to bow to pressure from below. In defence of their wealth, privileges and war policies, they are increasingly resorting to fascist methods. Donald Trump's rise to the top of the most powerful imperialist state is no coincidence or misunderstanding but an expression of the deep crisis of American capitalism, which can only hold on to power with the help of gangsterism and violence. The same development is also taking place in Germany.

This is the reason why the future chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU) sought cooperation with the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) shortly before the election and pushed an anti-immigrant motion through the Bundestag (German parliament) with its support. The SPD and the Greens also placed incitement against refugees at the centre of their election campaign, thereby strengthening the AfD.

The coalition negotiations between the CDU/CSU and SPD are a mockery of the election result and democracy. During the election campaign, neither party declared that it was planning to invest a trillion euros in rearmament. The new government has no mandate for its insane war policy. Now the CDU/CSU and SPD are attempting to change the constitution in blatant disregard of the election results by reconvening the parliament that has already been voted out.

All other parties in the Bundestag also support militarism. The Greens are even calling for the rearmament programme to be imposed more ruthlessly. Larger sums should be raised through cuts; and other areas, such as the intelligence agencies, should be exempted from the debt brake, they argue. The former pacifists have become the worst warmongers.

The AfD may have tactical differences on Russia and Europe, but it is in favour of a defence budget of 5 percent of the GDP and more when it comes to pursuing the national interests of German imperialism and is even calling for a German nuclear bomb. It is becoming more and more directly involved in government work because the fascists are needed to suppress opposition to militarism.

The Left Party is playing a particularly filthy role. It received the votes of 25 percent of young voters because it spoke out against the AfD and militarism during the election campaign. As soon as the polling stations closed, its representatives declared that they were "ready to talk" to the CDU and SPD about implementing joint projects. On March 1, the party executive then called for "debt relief for Ukraine" and "an easing of the debt brake" in order to free up sufficient funds to support Ukraine.

For the international unity of the working class in the struggle against war and capitalism!

The only social force that can prevent the catastrophe of war and fascism is the international working class, which creates all the wealth and bears the burden of wars and crises.

To do so, it must break through the paralysing influence of the trade unions. These bureaucratic apparatuses have long since turned into henchmen of the corporations and the government, sabotaging any industrial action, dividing the international working class and organising redundancies and wage cuts on behalf of the corporations. They cheer on the trade war measures and the military build-up.

Typical is the reaction of the IG Metall union's chairwoman Christiane Benner, who welcomed the CDU/CSU and SPD's rearmament programme with the words: "The announced special funds, the announced measures show: Politicians have understood that action must now be taken quickly and boldly."

The Socialist Equality Party therefore calls for the establishment of rank-and-file committees in workplaces and neighbourhoods that will allow workers to take the fight against mass redundancies and wage cuts into their own hands and combine it with the fight against war.

We counterpose the international unity of the workers to the growth of nationalism, trade war and rearmament. The war can only be stopped and social and democratic rights can only be defended if capitalism itself is abolished and replaced by a socialist society in which people's needs, not profit interests, take centre stage. The big banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control.

We warned of the explosive development of German militarism back in 2014, when the German government announced the "end of Germany's military restraint" and organised the violent coup in Ukraine together with the US. We wrote in a resolution:

History is returning with a vengeance. Almost 70 years after the crimes of the Nazis and its defeat in World War II, the German ruling class is once again adopting the imperialist great power politics of the Kaiser's Empire and Hitler. The speed of the escalation of the war propaganda against Russia recalls the eve of World War I and World War II.

The Grand Coalition's planned war credits show how far this development has progressed. It is time to become politically active and to study the programme of and join the SGP and the International Committee of the Fourth International. Building a united movement of the European and international working class based on a socialist and revolutionary programme is the only way to stop the developing world war.



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