

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz: Make Bundeswehr “the strongest conventional army in Europe”

Johannes Stern
16 May 2025

Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) delivered his first government statement on Wednesday. It was an open declaration of war on the population. Merz’s remarks make it unmistakably clear that his coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) is the most right-wing federal government since the fall of the Third Reich 80 years ago.

Merz’s government is pushing ahead with massive military rearmament to make Germany “fit for war” again, in the words of Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. Domestically, it is adopting the anti-refugee policies of the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), planning historic social cuts and establishing an authoritarian police state to enforce these policies against broad opposition among the population.

Significantly, Merz began his speech by praising the pro-war and rearmament policies of his predecessor, Olaf Scholz (SPD). He claimed that the coalition he led with the Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP) had “guided Germany through times of extraordinary crisis” and that its response to the war in Ukraine was “groundbreaking” and “historic.”

Merz made it clear that his government would deepen the “new era” proclaimed by Scholz. At the centre of this is the escalation of the war against Russia, the rearmament of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and the militarisation of Europe under German leadership—with the aim of enforcing the geopolitical and economic interests of German imperialism worldwide.

To justify the war course, Merz resorted to vile anti-Russian war propaganda in the style of the Nazis. Russia, he claimed, had “broken all the rules” that had applied in Europe since the Second World War. Russian troops were “raging,” killing “women and children, civilians and soldiers every day.”

The outcome of the war, according to Merz, will decide “not only the fate of Ukraine,” but also “whether law and order will continue to prevail in Europe and the world—or tyranny, military force and the naked right of the strongest.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is reactionary, but it is the imperialist powers that provoked and escalated this war. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, NATO has encircled Russia militarily. Now, the leading EU

states—above all Germany—are pushing the escalation ever further in order to assert their predatory interests.

This is not about peace or international law but about building a new imperialist war order. The goal is to completely control Ukraine, reduce Russia to the status of a semi-colony and establish rule over the resource-rich and geostrategically central Eurasian landmass.

The ambitions of German imperialism extend far beyond Eastern Europe. Merz stated that China’s policies contained “elements of systemic rivalry” and that “the growing closeness between Beijing and Moscow is viewed with concern.” The Indo-Pacific region was “of great importance,” especially with regard to “free shipping and secure trade routes.” Germany will be “strongly engaged” there in the future.

As in the past, German world power politics goes hand in hand with genocide. In his speech, Merz declared the “security and existence of Israel” to be a “matter of state” for Germany and pledged support for the genocide of the Palestinians. “We stand unwaveringly by Israel’s side,” he assured, while the Netanyahu regime pushes ahead with the systematic destruction and expulsion of the population of Gaza.

To achieve these imperialist goals, Germany is massively rearming. The war credits approved in March by the CDU/CSU and SPD—supported by the Greens and the Left Party—are comparable only to the rearmament programmes before the First and Second World Wars. An amendment to the constitution now allows all military spending above 1 percent of GDP to be exempted from the debt brake—meaning that war spending can rise without limit.

Merz announced that the Bundeswehr would be made “the strongest conventional army in Europe.” If one excludes the Turkish army, with 355,000 active soldiers and 379,000 reservists, this would mean increasing the Bundeswehr from its current 181,000 to at least 300,000 troops. According to current plans, this is how large the Polish army is to be in 10 years. This is not possible in Germany without the reintroduction of compulsory military service.

At the NATO meeting in Turkey on Thursday, Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul (CDU) stated that he shared

Trump's assessment that defence spending amounting to 5 percent of economic output was necessary. For Germany, that would correspond to €225 billion annually; the current defence budget is just under €53 billion.

Merz made no secret of the purpose of this rearmament: under German leadership, Europe should be shaped into a global power that participates in the imperialist redivision of the world.

The federal government, he said, would "focus our energy on taking Europe a big step forward at a time when we as a continent must redefine and defend our position in the world." Europe was "looking to Germany today" and the new federal government accepted this responsibility. A National Security Council would be created to enable "rapid action" in crises.

In other words: war. Merz made it clear that entire generations of young people are to be sacrificed once again as cannon fodder for German imperialism. "Freedom"—i.e., imperialist interests—must also be defended with one's life. The "operational readiness" of the Bundeswehr must be improved, and therefore "a new, attractive voluntary military service will be created as a first step." There were "many young people who want to take responsibility for Germany, its defence and security," Merz claimed.

In reality, however, the rejection of militarism and war is enormous, especially among young people. That is why the government has long been preparing measures for compulsory recruitment. Defence Minister Pistorius stated unequivocally in the Bundestag (federal parliament): "The emphasis is on 'initially,' in case we cannot recruit enough volunteers." The service would be "meaningful" and contribute to the creation of a "ready reserve."

These great power politics are to be financed by massive attacks on the working class. "Germany's security and creative power" depends upon "economic strength," according to Merz. "Everything would be done to put Germany's economy back on track for growth." He named only a few concrete measures—including the abolition of the "citizen's income" (welfare payments) and "incentives" for longer working hours—but the direction is clear: the model is the United States, where the Trump administration is cutting social spending and destroying all remaining social achievements in the interests of the financial oligarchy.

As in the past, the implementation of these policies requires the establishment of an authoritarian state. Merz praised the police and security agencies, announced their expansion and used repressive rhetoric against all opponents of the genocide in Gaza. What was happening "on German streets and in the German public sphere, even in the arts and sciences" was "shameful," he ranted, with reference to the majority rejection of the mass murder in Gaza, which Merz defames as "antisemitism."

Merz's belligerent stance is due not only to the unconditional support of the Greens as the most aggressive warmongers, but

above all to the role of the Left Party. It voted in the Bundesrat (upper chamber of parliament) for war credits amounting to €1 trillion and then helped Merz to a quick election as chancellor in the Bundestag. Now it is confining itself to empty phrases to obscure and secure the government's course and suppress the enormous opposition to it.

Significantly, the Left Party's lead candidate in February's federal election, Heidi Reichinnek, did not say a single word in her speech in the Bundestag about rearmament or war policy, with which she actually agrees in substance. Instead, she appealed to Merz to cooperate with the Left Party on social policy—where the Left Party has for years represented the same class position as the banker chancellor himself. She concluded her speech with the flippant and stupid announcement: "We are going to have a lot of fun together here over the next four years."

The support of all the establishment parties—including the Left Party—and the trade unions for the Merz government makes clear that the struggle against war, rearmament and social cuts requires the independent mobilisation of the working class.

In its initial statement on the formation of the government, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) therefore called for "the establishment of rank-and-file action committees in workplaces and neighbourhoods to take the fight against mass layoffs and wage cuts into their own hands and link it to the struggle against war."

And it declared:

We oppose growing nationalism, trade wars and rearmament with the international unity of the working class. War can only be stopped and social and democratic rights defended if capitalism itself is abolished and replaced by a socialist society in which the needs of people, not profit interests, are central. The big banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact