

## Merz government on course for war

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The new German government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democrat, CDU) and Vice-Chancellor Lars Klingbeil (Social Democrat, SPD) has only been in office for three weeks, but it is already clear that the escalation of the war with Russia and military build-up are at the center of their policies and will overshadow all other areas. While Merz is traveling from war summit to war summit, Klingbeil, who is also Finance Minister, is preparing an austerity budget that will pass on the huge costs of militarism to the working class.

Merz's predecessor Olaf Scholz (SPD) had already announced a "new era" in military policy three years ago, providing a €100 billion "special fund" for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and fueling the Ukraine war with military aid of €13 billion. Now, Merz is also throwing aside the last precautionary measures that stood in the way of an unchecked escalation of the war with Russia.

In an interview with broadcaster WDR on Monday, the Chancellor announced that "there are no longer any range restrictions for weapons that have been delivered to Ukraine... Ukraine can now also defend itself by attacking military positions in Russia, for example."

As Germany had not previously supplied any weapons with a range of more than 84 kilometers, this statement was seen as an admission that Berlin is now also providing Ukraine with the controversial Taurus cruise missile with a range of 500 kilometers. While Chancellor Scholz had still rejected this, Moscow considers that the deployment of the highly complex weapon, which requires German personnel to operate, would signify German involvement in the war and is threatening counter-strikes that could also hit German targets.

Merz had already campaigned in favor of the delivery of Taurus during the election campaign. In contrast to his predecessor, his government no longer discloses which weapons it is supplying to Kiev. It justifies this with the so-called "strategic ambiguity": Moscow should not know what NATO is planning. In fact, the secrecy serves to deceive the public. On the other hand, it would not be difficult for the Russian secret services to find out which weapons Germany was supplying.

By escalating the war against the nuclear power Russia, the Merz government is taking a huge risk. An expansion of the war threatens to turn the whole of Europe into a wasteland. Despite this, not one serious voice is being raised against it in official politics and the establishment media.

The Greens, the second-largest opposition party in the Bundestag (parliament), enthusiastically welcomed Merz's announcement. It was "logical and overdue," praised parliamentary group deputy leader Agnieszka Brugger. She called for the Taurus to be made available to Kiev as well. "Vladimir Putin is currently bombing any peace efforts and offers of dialogue into the ground with renewed cruelty. It would be a mistake to accept this without doing anything."

The SPD tried to play it down. There was "no new agreement that goes beyond what the previous government has done," claimed party leader Klingbeil, against his better judgment.

And the Left Party supported the government's war propaganda as usual, only to raise its finger in warning. "The bombing of Ukrainian cities and infrastructure and the continued attack on civilians must be stopped by Russia," wrote parliamentary group leader Sören Pellmann, appealing to those in power to be prepared to make peace. "Peace cannot be bombed into existence," he declared. An end to the war and a just peace could only be achieved "with an internationally coordinated peace initiative."

This is just a pious wish that only serves to lull to sleep the widespread opposition to rearmament and war. The rulers in Berlin, Paris, London and Washington do not want peace, but control over the resource-rich Ukraine and the subjugation of Russia with its vast natural resources.

During a visit to Finland on Tuesday, Merz emphasized that he expected the war to continue for a long time. "Wars usually end through the economic or military exhaustion of one or both sides, and we are obviously still a long way from that in this war," he said.

The German government is responding to the growing conflict with Washington under Trump by returning to the great power politics and militarism that already led to disaster in two world wars. It is trying to become the dominant military power in Europe and extend its influence

to Eastern Europe and Russia.

Back in March, the Bundestag lifted all restrictions on defense spending and made a trillion euros available for armaments and war. In his first government statement, Merz announced the goal of making the Bundeswehr the “strongest conventional army in Europe.”

Immediately after being sworn in, the Chancellor traveled to Kiev accompanied by the French President and the heads of government of Britain and Poland to support President Zelensky—also against efforts by President Trump to reach an agreement with his Russian counterpart Putin. On Wednesday, Merz meets with Zelensky in Berlin to discuss the next steps in the war against Russia.

The European powers are currently finding it difficult to continue the war in Ukraine without US support and are trying to persuade the American president, who is wavering between Putin and Zelensky, to join their side. But all planning and strategy papers assume that Europe will have to act militarily independently of the USA within five years at the latest—and not only in Ukraine, but also in Africa, the Middle East and other regions of the world.

Just as at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, imperialist power blocs are forming again and confront each other on the battlefields of the world. Although the conflict with Trump is currently welding the European powers together, the massive rearmament underway in every country will inevitably cause the old conflicts over supremacy in Europe to flare up again.

In a study, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has analyzed what it would cost Europe to arm itself for a war against Russia in the event of a US withdrawal from NATO. It estimates additional costs of one trillion dollars. The purchase of new military equipment alone would require 226 to 344 billion dollars. Among other things, 400 new combat aircraft, 15 anti-submarine aircraft, 500 helicopters, two aircraft carriers, 20 destroyers, 6 frigates, 10 nuclear-powered submarines, 600 battle tanks, and 800 armored personnel carriers would have to be purchased. Added to this are missiles, drones and reconnaissance systems.

The European armies are eager to realize such plans. On 19 May, the highest-ranking German military brass, Inspector General Carsten Breuer, issued a “directive to increase operational and defense readiness,” which sets out the priorities for rearmament in order to achieve the “establishment of comprehensive operational readiness of the armed forces” by 2029.

This includes fully equipping and digitalizing all troop formations, including reserves and homeland security, strengthening air defense against missiles and swarms of drones, increasing ammunition stocks, procuring AI-

optimized drones and ammunition, expanding electronic warfare capabilities, strengthening combat-capable large formations, expanding modern air attack capabilities, including nuclear sharing, the expansion of future-proof naval warfare capabilities as well as offensive and defensive capabilities in cyberspace, the development of a defense-capable space architecture including offensive/defensive capabilities, ensuring the ability to grow (i.e. the reintroduction of conscription) and the expansion of defense-critical infrastructure.

Under the leadership of former German Defense Minister and now EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), the European Union has adopted the €150 billion SAFE (Security Action for Europe) armaments program. This provides member states with long-term loans for joint armaments projects.

The program serves as a lever to strengthen and consolidate the European defense industry and reduce dependence on the USA. The subsidized weapons must be manufactured predominantly within the EU and be compatible with each other. Only EU members and Ukraine, as well as countries that have agreed to a security and defense partnership with the EU and cooperate with at least one EU member state, have access to the loans. The latter applies primarily to the UK.

Ukraine was also accepted because it has built up a low-cost defense industry whose products can be immediately tested on the battlefield.

This program of massive rearmament and war is only comparable to what preceded the First and Second World Wars. If it is not stopped by the intervention of the working class, it will lead to a nuclear catastrophe. The working class is being made to bear the main burden of rearmament and therefore stands in irreconcilable conflict with the ruling class.

But it needs an independent political perspective—one that combines international unity with the struggle for a socialist society in which human needs and not the profit interests of the super-rich are decisive. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the International Committee of the Fourth International stand for.



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