

Germany: SPD “Peace” Manifesto—an attempt to cover their tracks

Peter Schwarz
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A “manifesto” by former leading members of Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SPD), calling for a “strategy of de-escalation” for Europe instead of “a new arms race,” and advocating a “gradual return to cooperation with Russia,” has made considerable waves.

The paper was signed by several dozen former high-ranking party members—including Rolf Mützenich, who led the SPD parliamentary group until February this year, former executive committee member Ralf Stegner, and former party chairman Norbert Walter-Borjans. It was also endorsed by former Finance Minister Hans Eichel, former Minister of State for Culture Julian Nida-Rümelin, and historian Peter Brandt, son of former Chancellor Willy Brandt.

While the media portrays the manifesto as a challenge to party chairman and Vice-Chancellor Lars Klingbeil and Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, it is nothing of the sort. Published two weeks before the SPD national party conference, the manifesto is aimed at defusing the growing outrage over the party’s militaristic course, which resulted in its worst-ever election result in February.

While the manifesto invokes the détente policies of the 1970s, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, arms control and international understanding, and warns against “alarmist military rhetoric and massive rearmament programs,” it is in agreement with government policy on all essential points and conclusions. “There’s nothing disreputable in the paper, it’s not a ‘Russia paper,’” Mützenich emphasized in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

He knows what he’s talking about. As SPD parliamentary leader, Mützenich secured parliamentary majorities in 2022 for the €100 billion special fund to rearm the German military and in 2025 for war credits

amounting to over €1 trillion. When he now criticizes “forces” that “see the future primarily in a strategy of military confrontation and hundreds of billions for rearmament,” it’s a transparent attempt to cover his own tracks.

The manifesto explicitly supports rearmament. It states, “It is clear: a capable Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] and strengthening Europe’s ability to act in terms of security policy are necessary.”

It also supports the call for “an independent defence capability of European states independent of the USA”—one of the main justifications for the massive increase in military spending. Despite all the talk of “détente” and “cooperation,” Russia is clearly identified as the enemy for its “violation of international law in attacking Ukraine.”

The manifesto does not call for ending the war offensive against Russia. It merely seeks to mask that offensive behind empty phrases about “arms control” and “dialogue.”

All the more revealing is the aggressive response from leading SPD politicians. This demonstrates that there is nothing social or democratic remaining in this party, which once rose to prominence more than 150 years ago under the banner of Marxism. Today it supports the imperialist objectives of German capital and the associated social cuts just as aggressively as the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Liberal Democrats (FDP), Greens, and far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The SPD controls the two key ministries—defence and finance—for advancing these goals.

Defence Minister Pistorius accused the manifesto of “denying reality.” He claimed it abused “the desire of people in this country for peace.” One could only negotiate with Putin “from a position of strength.”

That, he said, was also Willy Brandt's policy—"under whose government the share of defence spending in terms of GDP was significantly higher than today. No submission."

Appropriately, Pistorius visited Kiev on Wednesday and promised another €1.9 billion in military aid to Ukraine. Germany, he announced, at a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, was prepared to co-finance so-called "long-range fire systems"—i.e., missiles capable of striking targets within Russia. Germany would also expand its arms cooperation with Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, former Bundestag (parliamentary) Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Michael Roth denounced the manifesto as a "self-satisfied and selfish feel-good paper." He admitted that he too had once believed in the motto "peace without weapons," but in a world of "dictatorship and imperialism," this no longer applied.

SPD parliamentary group domestic affairs spokesman Sebastian Fiedler said the paper had "irritated, disturbed, and angered" him. It even "talks of cooperation with Russia — that is, with a war criminal." He emphasized his full support for the government's course.

Even the Greens—no longer part of the government but still fully backing rearmament and the war against Russia—attacked the manifesto. Deputy parliamentary group leader Agnieszka Brugger dismissed the call for negotiations with Russia as "wishful thinking," claiming such a course "would not cause a ruthless imperialist to end his violence."

Brugger called the manifesto's signatories the "usual suspects" who had "missed out on party positions" within the SPD. She urged the party leadership not to let these "attacks from within" against the government's course go unchallenged. "Anyone who wants peace must ensure our security is preserved, based on reality," she said.

The pro-war policy of the SPD and Greens also exposes the Left Party, which—much like the Mützenich-Stegner manifesto—occasionally voices mild criticism of rearmament. But when it counts, the Left Party backs the war policy without reservation: in the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament), it voted for the €1 trillion military package; in the Bundestag vote for chancellor, it helped bail out Friedrich Merz (CDU) after he failed

in the first round.

The entire strategy of the Left Party is focused on forming a coalition government with the SPD and Greens—and, if necessary, the CDU. Once in office, as in the states of Berlin, Bremen, and several eastern German states, its left rhetoric vanishes like the morning dew. It slashes social spending, deports refugees, and arms the police like every other party.

There will be no opposition to the rearmament madness and the danger of war from any party in the Bundestag or the trade unions linked to them. This can only come from an independent movement of the international working class that unites the struggle against war, fascism, and social austerity with the fight against their root cause—capitalism.



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