

No opposition in German parliament to Chancellor Merz's war and austerity policies

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The continuation of the budget debate on Wednesday underscored not only the insane war and brutal austerity policies of the Christian Democrat (CDU/CSU)-Social Democrat (SPD) coalition government, but above all showed that within the Bundestag (federal parliament) there is no serious opposition to them.

Even if he struck a somewhat more restrained tone than in his notorious budget speech before the summer recess, Merz once again made the extreme right-wing agenda of his government crystal clear. Once again, he painted the absurd picture of an imminent Russian attack on Germany in order to justify the deranged rearmament and war preparations against the country. “Putin has long been testing the limits,” he declared.

On the Ukraine war, Merz threatened that for his government, no peace could be considered “at the expense of the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.” In other words, the government intends to continue and escalate the war until NATO itself has seized Crimea—a goal that makes a nuclear confrontation not just possible, but likely.

To implement this insanity, the government is planning the largest rearmament programme since Hitler. For next year alone, military spending of €128 billion is planned, rising to €153 billion by 2029, to be financed entirely from the regular budget. Added to this are numerous infrastructure projects intended to make the entire country “fit for war.”

Alongside these horrendous war expenditures, the rich are once again being showered with tens of billions. Two-thirds of the planned €46 billion in tax cuts are earmarked for individuals earning over €180,000 a year, the top 1 percent of society.

The government intends to claw back these astronomical sums from working people. Amid rising unemployment and mass layoffs in industry, spending

on Bürgergeld (welfare) is to be cut by around €5 billion. “But we want everyone who can work to actually work,” Merz declared, rambling on about “abuse of the system” that had to be curtailed.

On pensions, education and healthcare, Merz limited himself to pointing to commissions of inquiry supposedly working out ways to cut spending, and otherwise resorted to flowery phrases about justice and the welfare state. All the concrete measures his government is already preparing, such as the introduction of co-payments for doctor visits, he deliberately skirted.

This was possible because the opposition parties put up no serious opposition to the sweeping cuts the government is driving forward. For all the theatrics of the debate, government and opposition were united on the essentials. Merz used his speech to call for an alliance of “all constructive forces in our country” to push through the government’s war policies—and the opposition accepted the offer.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) regards itself as the driver of this. The government’s cuts do not go far enough, they argue. The AfD parliamentary faction submitted around a thousand amendments ahead of the debate. In them, it defended the massive spending on the armed forces and the state apparatus, as well as the tax gifts to the rich, but demanded far deeper social cuts to reduce new borrowing. Bürgergeld should not be cut by €5 billion, but by at least €14 billion, according to the AfD.

All the establishment parties have deliberately built up and integrated the AfD into parliamentary work because it is needed to push through this programme against growing resistance.

It is therefore no surprise that AfD leader Alice Weidel opened the debate with an undisguised threat to

all political opponents. She picked up on the Trump administration's campaign in the US following the killing of fascist Charlie Kirk, which terrorises and silences anyone daring to criticise Kirk's positions or Trump. Weidel hailed Kirk as a "conservative, devout Christian" and "staunch advocate of free speech," before demanding a similar approach be applied in Germany. She branded the Left Party and the Greens as "radical left-wing parties" who supposedly wanted to "shoot the rich or put them in labour camps."

While the AfD drives the government before it and the latter implements much of the fascists' programme, the Greens and the Left Party trail behind Merz's government. The Greens had already helped secure a majority for the one trillion euros in war credits and now criticise the government from the right. Green parliamentary group leader Katharina Dröge addressed Merz directly: "You can't help Donald Trump. You can't help a difficult global economy." But what the government was doing for business in this situation, "is not nearly enough," Dröge insisted. In particular, electricity tax must be cut for all companies.

Besides a few empty phrases about social improvements for families, tenants and children—none of which the Greens implemented during their own time in government—Dröge concentrated on criticising the government for not pushing forward the war against Russia with enough aggression. She demanded an additional €10 billion in weapons for Ukraine and more sanctions against Russia.

The Left Party had also voted for the war credits in the Bundesrat (upper chamber of parliament) and paved the way for Merz's rapid election as chancellor. In the budget debate, too, frontwoman Heidi Reichineck avoided directly addressing the war course against Russia and the rearmament plans. After a couple of jokes about rearmament in general, she spoke almost exclusively about social issues, without addressing the government's massive cuts. With her ostentatious lack of seriousness, she essentially presented a social wish list.

Far from mobilising resistance against austerity, she instead appealed to the conscience of former Blackrock manager and current chancellor Merz: "Look people in the face and tell them they're living beyond their means! If you can't bring yourself to say that because you still have a shred of decency left, then maybe we

can still save something in the next budget."

Dröge's entire speech was one long trivialisation of the acute danger of war and the impending social devastation. In the end, Reichineck even stressed her fundamental agreement with the war policy: "I can assure you: My party stands in solidarity with Ukraine, even if our paths may differ." The "different path" consists in cloaking the war course in a little more diplomacy in order to more effectively enforce the interests of NATO and the EU.

Particularly cynical was her call at the end of her speech: "All eyes on Gaza! You must no longer oppose sanctions. No one here may remain silent about what is happening there." Reichineck has previously denied the brutal genocide by Israel and repeatedly stressed the "right of Israel to self-defence." At a time when the far-right Netanyahu government is driving forward the genocide of Palestinians, the ruling class as a whole is seeking to cover its tracks. Merz himself recently tried to provide himself with an alibi with the purely symbolic announcement of a "partial stop" to arms exports to Israel. In reality, German support for Israel continues unabated.

The debate made it abundantly clear: Workers and young people who want to fight against genocide and war, against rearmament and conscription, and against social devastation, cannot rely on any Bundestag party. The only way to stop the drive to war and avert catastrophe is the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme.



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