

Chancellor Merz demands German imperialism must ‘learn to speak the language of power politics’

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The first month of 2026 has witnessed the explosion of American imperialism. It began with the Trump administration’s invasion of Venezuela and abduction of President Nicolas Maduro, continued with Trump’s demand to own Greenland and control its natural resources and Arctic shipping routes, and is now culminating in the mobilisation of an American “armada” of warships in the Middle East poised to strike Iran.

The extent of the brutality and criminality of American imperialism with Trump at its head often obscures the aggressive intent of the European imperialist powers, or fuels the misguided belief that Germany, France and Britain—the old colonial powers—are more “humanitarian” than their transatlantic rival. The remarks this week by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, which in content were redolent of Nazi Führer Adolf Hitler, should put to rest any such illusions.

Addressing the German parliament, Merz placed his remarks in the context of a new era of “great power rivalry.” He declared, “For several weeks now, we have been seeing more and more clearly that a world of great powers is beginning to emerge. A harsh wind is blowing in this world, and we will feel it for the foreseeable future.” This rhetoric serves to enforce the officially proclaimed “new epoch” in foreign policy, which has seen all parties in parliament unite to spend €1 trillion on preparing for war and impose social spending cuts to pay for it.

Merz’s response to the new world situation he described could just as well have come from one of Hitler’s programmatic speeches in the early 1930s. “We will only be able to implement our ideas in the world, at least in part, if we ourselves learn to speak the language of power politics, if we ourselves become a European power,” he told the deputies. What he means is nothing less than the transformation of Europe into an independent military superpower under German leadership.

Merz continued: “Firstly, we must take our security into our own hands. This requires measures to reduce dependencies ... It requires us to invest heavily in our own European defence capabilities.” The invocation of “sovereignty” and “independence” is the ideological cover for a historic rearmament offensive whose scale is comparable only to German militarisation prior to the two world wars.

“Together with the majority of this House, we decided last year to increase our national defence spending to up to five percent of gross domestic product,” Merz boasted. In absolute terms, this means a German war budget of well over €200 billion annually—more than is spent on education, health and social benefits combined. Merz explicitly presented this path as a model: “We have led the way, and

others in Europe have followed us.”

This rearmament is inextricably linked to comprehensive social spending cuts. The attacks on jobs, wages, pensions and public services not only serve to directly finance the military, but are also intended to make German and European capitalism “competitive” on the global stage. “Secondly, we must make our economy competitive again,” Merz stated openly, referring to the growing “growth gap” with the US and China. According to the chancellor, Germany’s ability to shape world politics depends “above all on economic power”—that is, on the ability to increase profits and open up markets and raw materials, including by military means.

What Merz and the ruling class have in mind is an authoritarian “Fortress Europe”—akin to the dictatorship Trump is seeking to establish in the US—that enforces its imperialist interests worldwide under German leadership. “Thirdly, we must stand united in Europe on these issues,” Merz demanded, stating bluntly: “Unity is a factor of power in the world.” What he means is the united enforcement of European imperialist interests with economic and military coercion—against Russia and China, but increasingly also against the United States.

As examples of European “power,” Merz cited the leading role of Europeans in NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine and the joint action against the punitive tariffs US President Trump threatened to impose on the European powers who resisted his push to seize Greenland. “Anyone who believes they can make policy against Europe with tariffs must know that we are ready and able to defend ourselves against them,” the Chancellor declared. At the same time, he emphasised that “we do not want to recklessly jeopardise established alliances.”

As long as Europe needs time for massive rearmament and, above all, continues to depend on Washington’s support in NATO’s war offensive against Russia, Merz is keen to avoid an open confrontation with the US. This tactical restraint does not alter the fact that German imperialism is ever more explicitly striving for an independent role as a world power.

“The current global realignment also presents an opportunity for all players who prefer rules to arbitrariness and who see more advantages in free and fair trade than in the unilateral pursuit of their own interests,” Merz explained. He described Germany as “part of a dynamic, agile network of sovereign states” and, in this context, praised in particular the European Union’s planned trade agreements with India and the Latin American Mercosur states.

Merz’s attempt to portray his bid for world power as a defence of a

“rules-based international order” is particularly cynical. In reality, Germany and Europe have supported every war of aggression led by the United States over the past three decades—from Kosovo to Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya. Merz himself boasted in his speech that German soldiers had fought “alongside our American partners” in Afghanistan “after 11 September 2001,” and declared that he would not allow this mission to be “disparaged.”

The German government continues to support US operations and wars that violate international law, as long as they serve its own interests. At the beginning of the year, Merz openly backed US aggression against Venezuela, supports preparations for war against Iran and defends Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

Against this backdrop, the official Holocaust memorial ceremony in the Bundestag the day before Merz’s speech was pure hypocrisy. With its ritualised “never again,” the ruling class is trying to conceal that it is doing exactly the same again: great power politics, militarism and genocide abroad, and authoritarian politics at home. Significantly, Merz did not say a word about the openly fascist developments in the US, where Trump’s ICE militias hunt migrants and murder counter-demonstrators in cold blood. The reason is obvious: militarism abroad and authoritarian rule at home are also the programme of the German bourgeoisie.

Merz’s statements on European nuclear weapons show how far advanced this development already is. Just hours after his speech, the chancellor confirmed during a press conference with Lithuanian Prime Minister Inga Ruginiene that “strategic talks” on European nuclear weapons are being held. These talks are “in their infancy,” he said, but “we know that we have to make some decisions here, both strategically and in terms of military policy.”

Brigadier General Frank Pieper, Director of Strategy at the German Armed Forces Command and Staff College, goes even further. In an interview with *Stern* magazine, he called for Germany to have its own nuclear weapons and for politicians to make “a real change.” “Germany needs its own tactical nuclear weapons,” he demanded, adding provocatively: “Get out of bed and get to work.” The demand for a German nuclear bomb is not only illegal, it would be a step that brings humanity even closer to the brink of a nuclear world war.

This madness is supported not only by Merz’s right-wing Christian Democratic Union, the Social Democrats and far-right Alternative for Germany, but also by parties that claim to be “left-wing” or “progressive.” Representatives of the Left Party and the Greens, who already approved the government’s horrendous war credits in the spring, attacked Merz not because of his war policy, but because, in their view, he was not aggressive enough towards the US and Russia.

The Left Party’s parliamentary group leader, Sören Pellmann, called on the federal government to now draw “conclusions.” This applies “both to economic policy and security policy.” He then exclaimed, “Where is the export ban on German weapons to the US? Stop kowtowing! Take action!”

The Green Party warmongers are particularly impatient with the pace of preparations for war against Russia. Referring to the government’s stated goal of being ready for war against Russia by 2029, the Green Party’s security policy spokesperson, Sara Nanni, ranted hysterically, “We have 35 months left. Thirty-five months! ... 35 months to go until 2029. I ask you: What are you doing until then? What is being arranged? When will the shadow fleet be stopped? When will the Taurus [missiles] be delivered [to Ukraine]? When will investments be made in comprehensive defence, and when will the population be prepared for the possibility of an emergency?”

The madness of war has objective causes that the Trotskyist movement has long analysed. As early as 2014, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) examined in a resolution the historical and political forces behind the war policies of all capitalist parties and warned of the consequences of the return of German militarism:

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 propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learnt from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had “arrived at the West,” had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours as it emerged historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad.

But the same contradictions of the capitalist system that are driving society inexorably toward war—the contradiction between the global economy and the nation-state system, and between the social character of production and its private appropriation—also create the objective basis for social revolution. In the United States, resistance to Trump’s fascist policies is growing, with workers and young people protesting against ICE murders, going on strike and discussing the preparation of a general strike. Workers and young people in Germany and Europe must orient themselves towards this powerful social force—the international working class.

The answer to Trump’s policy of “might makes right” is not the German or European “language of power politics,” but the international mobilisation of the working class against all imperialist warmongers. The only progressive perspective lies in the overthrow of the capitalist system and the building of an international socialist society. The Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting for this programme.



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