

“Germany must be strengthened”: Social Democrats prepare new right-wing party programme

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Under the slogan “Writing the future together,” Germany’s Social Democrats (SPD) gave the go-ahead last weekend for the drafting of a new party programme, which is to be adopted at a party conference next year. In light of the keynote speech by SPD chairman, finance minister and vice-chancellor Lars Klingbeil at the Willy Brandt House in Berlin, one thing is already certain: It will be the most right-wing programme in the party’s history.

Klingbeil’s speech was an open declaration of aggressive German-European great power politics. In doing so, he sought to portray the social democratic programme of militarism, rearmament and imperialism as a supposedly progressive response to a world in which “strength and power are returning as the dominant motives of international politics.” He stated:

Russia has brought war back to Europe with its invasion of Ukraine. China is showing what it intends to do with its great power ambitions, threatening gestures and aggressive trade and industrial policy. And the United States is turning its back on a rules-based international system.

This is well-known propaganda. Klingbeil knows full well that it was the German-supported wars in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, carried out in violation of international law, that devastated entire regions, cost millions of lives and systematically exacerbated international tensions.

In Ukraine too, Moscow is not the sole or original aggressor as the official narrative portrays it. NATO’s systematic military encirclement of Russia deliberately provoked the reactionary response of the Putin regime. Now, the European NATO powers in particular are pushing for further escalation in order to assert their own strategic and

economic interests in the resource-rich region. They are pursuing the same course of encirclement and confrontation against China.

When Klingbeil criticises Trump’s aggressive foreign policy and the fascist actions of his ICE henchmen at home, he does so not from a progressive standpoint but to legitimise his own imperialist agenda—a German-European counterpart to “Make America Great Again.” Just how blatantly these ambitions are formulated is evident in a key section of his speech. Klingbeil stated:

We must be careful that we don’t end up being the fools. That is why it is now our task to strengthen Europe internally and to pursue a course externally in which Europe plays a more significant role in international politics than is currently the case. We should strengthen Germany comprehensively so that our society and our economy are resilient.

He continued:

In a world of centres, we must aspire to make Europe the most attractive centre of all. We have too often belittled ourselves. Europe does not often enough display the self-confidence that it should have as the world’s largest economic area. And now is the time to wake Europe from its beauty sleep, to breathe new life into the European idea.

These passages leave no room for interpretation. What is meant is the aggressive pursuit of our own economic and geostrategic interests—not only vis-à-vis Russia and China but increasingly also vis-à-vis the United States. With regard

to Washington, Klingbeil stated:

And I want to say this: it was already a good start this year when we in Europe were all very loud and clear and when we opposed Donald Trump and his plan for Greenland.

Not the US, but Europe—under German leadership—should become the “strongest centre” in a world that the imperialist powers are violently redividing among themselves. To the applause of SPD officials, Klingbeil exclaimed: “It must be our goal to make Europe so strong that we do not have to bow down to any other country in the world.” And he added:

And for Europe to be a strong centre in this new world order, it is essential that we have a strong Germany. A country that leads the way and exploits its potential. Germany must be strengthened. Germany must become more resilient than it is today.

The power politics rhetoric of social democracy differs—at least in its use of catchwords such as human rights and democracy—from that of the German Empire or the Nazi regime. But in its fundamental aspirations, it pursues the same goal. The ruling elites see the current struggle for the redivision of the world as an opportunity to re-establish German imperialism as a leading military power.

Klingbeil made it unmistakably clear what he means by “strength.” He praised the federal government’s gigantic rearmament package and declared:

We have set out on this path. Investments, for example, are crucial to our new economic model, and we have begun the investment offensive in the federal government. €500 billion for infrastructure and another equally large amount for investment in the defence and security of our country.

In total, this amounts to €1 trillion—a historic sum intended to make Germany “fit for war” in terms of military and infrastructure. The so-called infrastructure investments also serve to a considerable extent to mobilise the military, upgrade transport routes—bridges, roads and railways—and build up logistical capacities for future conflicts between major powers.

All the social rhetoric in Klingbeil’s speech cannot hide the fact that the working class is to foot the bill for this rearmament—through job cuts, wage cuts, massive social spending cuts and the reintroduction of conscription. As finance minister, Klingbeil is implementing these attacks in close cooperation with the trade union apparatus itself.

His complaint that the richest ten percent own “more than half of the total wealth,” while the lower half of the population has to make do with a fraction is pure cynicism. It is the SPD that has significantly created and deepened this social polarisation during decades of government responsibility—from the Hartz laws under former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to the austerity programmes imposed in coalitions with the conservative Christian Democrats.

More than a century after its historic betrayal on 4 August 1914, when it approved war credits and supported the First World War, and 67 years after its open renunciation of Marxism at the Bad Godesberg Party Conference in 1959, social democracy is today the central political pillar of German imperialism and its renewed bid for world power.

The Left Party and the Greens are no less aggressive in their support. In federal and state governments they back rearmament, war and social spending cuts. Like the openly right-wing parties in the Bundestag (Federal Parliament), they also support the military strengthening of Germany—especially under conditions in which German imperialism is increasingly positioning itself against the United States. Significantly, the Left Party and the Greens supported the rearmament package praised by Klingbeil with their votes in the Bundestag and Bundesrat (Federal Council).

The only party opposing Germany’s new great power politics is the Socialist Equality Party (SGP). As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, it fights to build an international mass movement of the working class against war and its cause, capitalism. The SGP is contesting the Berlin state election in order to give the growing opposition to rearmament, militarism and social attacks a conscious political leadership and socialist perspective. Read our statement and support the SGP’s participation in the election with your signature.



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