

1 year of the Merz government: War, militarism and social devastation

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One year after the Merz-Klingbeil government took office, one thing is clear: It is the most right-wing and hated government in the history of the Federal Republic. It is implementing a rearmament programme comparable only to the military build-up of the Nazi regime on the eve of the Second World War. It is destroying social rights, inciting attacks on refugees, strengthening the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and preparing the whole of society for war.

For this, it is hated. According to a recent poll by the Forsa Institute, satisfaction with the federal government has reached a historic low. According to the RTL/n-tv Trend Barometer, only 13 percent of the population are still satisfied with Merz's work, while 85 percent express dissatisfaction. The assessment of the federal government as a whole is even worse: Only 11 percent rate its work positively, while 87 percent rate it negatively. Rejection is especially high among young people between 18 and 29 and among workers and the self-employed. In each of these groups, 95 percent express dissatisfaction.

Merz was elected chancellor on May 6, 2025 in the second round of voting—an unprecedented historical event that underscored from the very beginning the instability and extreme right-wing character of the new government. This weakness did not make it more cautious but more aggressive. Its central task is to enforce the programme of the ruling class: war abroad, class war at home.

Even before taking office, the governing coalition, with the support of the Greens, lifted the debt brake for defence spending and passed a so-called infrastructure package of €500 billion. This is not primarily intended for schools, hospitals or public transport but for preparation for war. Roads, bridges, railways, ports and energy supplies are to be rebuilt so that Germany becomes fit for war again. The *World Socialist Web Site* warned as early as March 2025 that the special infrastructure fund served preparations for war “directly and indirectly.”

With its new military strategy, the federal government has elevated preparations for war into a state programme. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Inspector General Carsten Breuer presented a document in April according to which the Bundeswehr (German military) is to be expanded by 2039 into the “conventionally strongest army in Europe.” The Defence Ministry declares that Germany must assume a military leadership role in NATO, defines Russia as the central threat, and asserts that the state, economy and society are to be oriented towards war within the framework of “comprehensive defence.”

Breuer unmistakably formulated Germany's claim to leadership: “The military strategy follows the idea that Germany, as Europe's largest economy, must and will assume a leadership role in NATO in an increasingly complex and acute threat situation—including militarily.” He said this was a “paradigm shift” and a “claim to shape

events.”

The “claim to shape events” of German imperialism is global, but it is once again concentrated on the East. It must be stated openly: 85 years after the Nazi regime's invasion of the Soviet Union, Germany is de facto once again waging war against Russia. This has nothing to do with the defence of “freedom” and “democracy” against a “Russian aggressor” but is the result of the long-term strategy of the ruling class, which is ever more aggressively pursuing its imperialist interests.

As early as the beginning of 2014, Berlin, in close alliance with Washington, supported the coup in Kiev, which relied on fascist forces and brought a pro-Western regime to power. This regime intensified the confrontation with Russia and worked closely with NATO. Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, the NATO powers have systematically escalated the war. They are not seeking a diplomatic solution but the military subjugation of Moscow and control over Ukraine and the entire Eastern European and Eurasian region.

With this renewed “drive to the East,” German imperialism is returning to its historic great-power plans. Already in the First World War, control over resource-rich and geostrategically central Ukraine was among the declared war aims of the German Empire. In the Second World War, the Nazi regime took up these goals and radicalised them in the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which claimed the lives of more than 27 million people.

That German imperialism is prepared to commit similarly monstrous crimes is shown by its complicity in the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians and its support for the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran. Berlin is pursuing its own aims in this. It does not want to be a spectator in the redivision of the Middle East but an active player. The federal government has therefore moved the mine-hunter Fulda and the tender Mosel towards the Mediterranean in order to prepare for a possible deployment around the Strait of Hormuz.

When Merz voices criticism of US warfare, it is not because he opposes the war. Rather, the transatlantic postwar alliance is objectively breaking apart, and the German ruling class fears that Washington could escalate the situation strategically and economically in ways that would undermine central German interests. Above all, Berlin fears that an expanding war in the Middle East could undermine the most important front of its own imperialist ambitions: the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, in which Germany and the European powers are increasingly assuming the leading role.

To implement Germany's war and great-power plans, enormous financial resources are being made available. At the end of April, the federal cabinet adopted the benchmarks for the 2027 federal budget

and financial planning up to 2030. The defence budget is to rise to €105.8 billion in 2027; by 2030, almost €180 billion is planned in the core budget. Added to this are special funds and Ukraine aid, meaning the total war budget will exceed the €200 billion mark in the coming years.

This comprehensive militarisation is being financed through massive cuts, cynically sold as “reforms.” This is the social logic of militarism: billions for war, cuts for workers, young people, the sick and pensioners. Of the social gains historically won by the working class, nothing will remain at the end of this rearmament orgy unless the working class intervenes.

The WSWS has shown in numerous articles that the attacks on citizens’ allowance, pensions, healthcare, the public sector and jobs are inseparably linked to the war budget. The Merz-Klingbeil government is preparing the most comprehensive attack on public healthcare since the introduction of statutory health insurance. At the same time, citizens’ allowance is being effectively abolished and the entire welfare state placed under a funding proviso.

It speaks volumes about the extremely reactionary aims of the ruling class that the media criticise Merz from the right despite this record. Their mantra is: Rearmament and the attacks on the working class are not proceeding quickly or far enough. This campaign permits only one conclusion: The government is to act even more ruthlessly and, if necessary, bring the fascists directly on board.

By the middle of the election campaign Merz had already organised a majority in the Bundestag together with the AfD in order to further tighten asylum policy. In so doing, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) underscored that it was prepared to cooperate with the fascists. This did not prevent the Social Democratic Party (SPD) from forming a coalition government with Merz, which, with the refugee policy of the notoriously right-wing Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (Christian Social Union—CSU), rearmament and the associated orgy of cuts, is implementing core elements of the AfD’s programme.

The SPD is not a brake on this process, as the media portray it. In close cooperation with the trade unions, it is an important driving force behind the offensive against the working class. With Boris Pistorius in the Defence Ministry, Vice Chancellor Lars Klingbeil in the Finance Ministry and Bärbel Bas in the Labour Ministry, it controls the central levers of the war course and the social counterrevolution.

As in the 1930s, the bourgeois parties are not standing in the way of a transfer of power to the fascists. Unlike Hitler’s NSDAP, however, the AfD does not have a fascist mass base. Many workers vote for it out of hatred for the established parties and revulsion at their anti-working class policies. With their policies, the governing parties are creating the conditions under which the AfD can exploit anger and frustration. It is being deliberately positioned by the ruling class as a future party of government.

This development shatters a myth of German postwar history: that fascism was a historical aberration under the extreme conditions of the Great Depression. Reality shows that in turning to fascism, the ruling class is responding to the deep crisis of capitalism. Just as it relies on Trump in the United States, it is once again relying on fascist forces in Germany to enforce rearmament, social devastation and dictatorship against the resistance of the population.

The Left Party plays a key role in this. It deliberately subordinates the strong opposition to war and social devastation to the Merz regime and German capitalism. It voted for the war credits in the Bundesrat and enabled Merz’s rapid election as chancellor in the Bundestag.

Since then, it has functioned as an extended arm of the government. On central issues, its line does not differ fundamentally from that of the government. It merely pushes for an even faster independence of German imperialism from Washington.

The Socialist Equality Party has always stressed that the same capitalist crisis that drives the ruling class towards war, fascism and dictatorship also drives the working class into struggle. One year after the installation of the Merz government, a growing strike wave and protest movement is developing internationally. In Germany, resistance is growing in auto and supplier plants against mass layoffs, wage cuts and the sellouts by the trade union bureaucracy. Across Europe and worldwide, social opposition is increasing—intensified by the economic consequences of the Iran war, exploding prices and the squandering of social resources on the war machine.

It is especially significant that the class struggle is also developing in the United States, the very centre of world imperialism. Internationally, the ruling elites are responding to the crisis of capitalism with war, dictatorship and social cuts. The working class must respond with its own international strategy. The decisive question is that of political leadership.

The resistance of the working class must be made conscious, united internationally and oriented towards socialism. It must not be subordinated to the trade union bureaucracies, the pseudo-left organisations or the established parties. It must be based on a revolutionary programme. This is what the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is fighting for. In its election appeal for the Berlin election, the SGP states:

The decisive task is to give the class struggle, which is international in its very essence, an international form and a socialist perspective that does not accept the logic of capitalist exploitation. This requires a political struggle against the defenders of capitalism—It requires the building of a new workers’ party. Just as the ruling class is reviving its reactionary traditions of imperialism, war and fascism, the working class must revive its revolutionary, socialist and internationalist traditions.

This struggle is now assuming decisive importance. The development towards fascism and world war must be stopped. The Merz regime and the ruling class in Germany can no more be pressured and forced into better policies than Trump and the fascist oligarchy in the United States. They must be overthrown by the working class and replaced by workers’ governments.

We call on all readers: Register as active supporters of the SGP. Read the *World Socialist Web Site*, study our historical and political material and become a member of the SGP. Only on the basis of an international socialist programme can the working class stop war, fascism and capitalism.



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