

Merz's government statement: War abroad, social counterrevolution at home

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The government statement delivered by Chancellor Friedrich Merz before the Bundestag on Thursday was a declaration of war in two respects. It was a declaration of war against the population, on whom the government intends to impose the costs of its megalomaniacal rearmament policy through massive social cuts. And it was a declaration of war abroad: against Russia, Iran and all countries that stand in the way of the assertion of the geostrategic and economic interests of German and European imperialism.

Ahead of the European Council meeting in Brussels in mid-June, Merz made it unmistakably clear that his government wants to arm Europe under German leadership into an independent military power. He spoke of a “new world order” in which Europe “finds its strong place” and declared that the federal government had decided to make Germany “capable of defence.” For this, the population must be prepared “to accept restrictions in other areas as well.” This formulation sums up the government’s policy: hundreds of billions for war and rearmament; social cuts, wage reductions, pension cuts and the destruction of public services for the working class.

Merz attempted to cloak this reactionary agenda in the hollow phrases of “freedom,” “prosperity,” “justice,” “social security” and “peace.” In reality, the federal government is preparing the whole of society for war. It is making the state, economy, science and infrastructure “war-ready” and demanding that the population accept the sacrifices required for this without resistance.

The very opening of his speech was revealing. Merz began with the International Aerospace Exhibition (ILA), which he had opened in Berlin the previous day. He praised the sector as a “success story”: The aerospace industry had achieved “19 percent more turnover” last year and created “10,000 new jobs.” What Merz presented as an economic success story is in reality the balance sheet of an exploding military-industrial complex.

This year’s ILA is dominated entirely by rearmament. More than 750 exhibitors from 37 countries are presenting new technologies in the fields of aviation, space and “defence.” Alongside traditional arms corporations, start-ups, AI companies, drone producers and software firms are playing an increasingly important role. The boundaries between civilian and military research, between industrial policy and war preparations, between the state and corporations are being systematically torn down.

This development follows a plan. It is part of the federal government’s new military strategy, which aims to build up the Bundeswehr into the “strongest conventional army in Europe” by 2039. The entire state, the economy and the population are to be subordinated to “total defence.” The so-called Operation Plan Germany concretizes these preparations: ports, airports, railway lines, bridges, roads, hospitals, government agencies and companies are to be mobilized for war against Russia.

The ILA is a showcase for this. After the failure of the Franco-German FCAS fighter jet project, Berlin is pushing to develop the next generation of European combat aircraft and networked weapons systems under

German leadership. German arms corporations, such as Airbus, Hensoldt, MBDA Germany, MTU, Diehl and others, are forming new alliances to drive the project forward. At the ILA, Merz made clear that Germany is no longer prepared to subordinate itself to French directives. German imperialism claims the leading role.

This is the real meaning of Merz’s demand for European “sovereignty.” What is meant is not the independence of the population from war, poverty and oppression but the ability of the European powers—under German dominance—to assert their interests militarily independently of, and if necessary also against, the United States. In his government statement, Merz named “sovereignty, competitiveness, defence” as priorities for the future EU budget. These three terms sum up the program of the ruling class: world power politics, attacks on social rights and military rearmament.

At the center stands the escalation of NATO’s war against Russia. Merz declared that the goal of the federal government remained a “just and lasting peace” that “also takes our security interests into account.” This cynical formulation means: Ukraine is to be used as NATO’s military bridgehead against Russia in order to assert the strategic interests of Germany and Europe. “For this and because of this, we support Ukraine,” Merz declared. “We did so yesterday. We are doing so today and we will do so tomorrow, for as long as necessary.”

He then listed the next steps of escalation: The European Union’s €90 billion loan for Ukraine had been released. Pressure on Russia would be increased. There would be “more robust action against the Russian shadow fleet” and “work on a 21st sanctions package” would begin. In response to Russia’s “obvious willingness to escalate,” NATO’s eastern flank would be strengthened.

The facts turn Merz’s propaganda on its head. It is not Russia but NATO that is systematically escalating the war. In recent weeks, Ukraine has massively expanded its attacks on Russian territory. Drones and missiles are hitting oil facilities, airports, arms factories, command centers and military infrastructure hundreds of kilometers behind the front. These attacks would be impossible without direct NATO support—reconnaissance, satellite data, target selection, arms deliveries, training and technical integration.

Germany is playing an increasingly central role in this. The German-Ukrainian government consultations in April, the visit by Defence Minister Boris Pistorius to Kiev, the joint development and production of long-range drones and the close cooperation of German arms companies with Ukrainian units all serve the same goal: to be able to attack Russia deep in its rear. De facto, Germany is once again at war with Russia and is preparing to expand this war massively.

Particularly revealing of the extremely reactionary character of German war policy is the fact that Berlin is cooperating with a regime that openly rehabilitates Nazi collaborators and integrates far-right forces into the military and state. Only a few days ago, the WSWs reported on the reburial of OUN-M leader Andriy Melnyk, a collaborator of German

imperialism and an ideological pioneer of fascist extermination policy. Zelensky linked the reburial to the announcement that further “national heroes” would be brought back to Ukraine and that a kind of pantheon would be established for them.

At the same time, Ukrainian military figures with far-right connections are being courted in Berlin. The “New Age Defence” drone summit, which took place in Berlin on Monday, brought together German and Ukrainian arms companies, Bundeswehr representatives, drone producers, AI firms and Ukrainian front line officers. According to reports, officers of the 12th “Azov” Special Brigade of the 1st Corps of the Ukrainian National Guard also appeared there. This unit openly uses fascist symbolism.

This exposes the lie that Germany is defending “freedom” and “democracy” in Ukraine. As in the First and Second World Wars, Germany’s renewed drive to the East is about raw materials, markets, spheres of influence and geostrategic control. The ruling class is once again taking up its old aims: the subjugation of Russia and control over the Eurasian landmass. That it is relying on forces that venerate Nazi collaborators is no accident but an expression of the reactionary character of this policy.

Merz made clear in his speech that the war offensive of German imperialism is not limited to Russia. Berlin also claims a military role in the Middle East. Referring to the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran, he declared that Germany was prepared “to assume responsibility there after an end to the conflict in the Gulf region.” Concretely, the federal government was prepared “to participate in securing the Strait of Hormuz once the conditions for this are in place.”

This is an open announcement of German war policy in the Persian Gulf. Behind the phrase of a “diplomatic solution” stands support for the central war aims of Washington and Tel Aviv. Merz declared: “Our goal remains that Iran must verifiably and permanently end its nuclear program. Security for Israel and the entire region must be guaranteed.” In other words, Berlin supports the attempt to militarily subjugate Iran and to secure its own position in the oil-rich and strategically decisive region.

Such war appetites consume enormous sums. That is why Merz inseparably links foreign war policy with social counterrevolution at home. He spoke of a “major, comprehensive first healthcare reform,” to be followed by a second in the autumn; of pension decisions that create “incentives for longer working lives”; of the “modernization” of the social security systems; and of the need to consolidate the state budget. “Excessive debt threatens sovereignty and limits room for maneuver,” he declared.

This is the language of the financial oligarchy. The government has suspended the debt brake for military spending and is mobilizing hundreds of billions for tanks, drones, missiles, warships, fighter jets and military infrastructure. To pay for this, pensioners are to work longer, the sick receive worse care, schools and universities are starved of funds, public services smashed and workers squeezed through wage cuts and longer working hours.

Merz knows that this policy is meeting growing resistance. That is why he appealed to the population to accept the attacks as a common national task. Everyone must ask themselves “what they can contribute to the success of the whole.” It was a matter of “not only seeing one’s own interests.” In reality, there is no “common” interest. The Merz government does not speak for the working population but for the interests of the banks, corporations, arms industry and a narrow layer of the super-rich who profit from war and social devastation.

Politically revealing was the fact that on the eve of his government statement, Merz met with the leaders of the trade unions, employers’ associations, the skilled trades and industry in the Chancellery. He praised the meeting as a discussion in an “exceptionally good, very constructive atmosphere.” This is a warning. The trade union bureaucracy is being

directly integrated into the planning and implementation of the social attacks. Its task is to prevent strikes, isolate protests and subordinate the working class to the war policy in the name of “securing Germany as a business location.”

The supposed opposition in the Bundestag is also part of this process. Representatives of the Greens and the Left Party warned Merz against imposing too much, too quickly on the population. Their concern is not for the social rights of workers but for the danger of a social explosion. In substance, they support the government’s course. Both parties have backed the gigantic rearmament packages and implement the same austerity policy wherever they govern or have governed at the state level.

The reactionary character of the government and its political accomplices is also evident in its refugee policy. Merz praised the reform of the Common European Asylum System as the “most significant step toward solving the problem” and thanked the notoriously right-wing Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt for his “great and successful efforts.” He then exulted in the style of the AfD: “The migration turnaround has been initiated, nationally and Europe-wide. We are seeing a clear decline in irregular entries both into Germany and into Europe.” And he threatened: “The trend will continue.”

With this, the federal government is adopting the program of the fascists. Refugees are being stripped of their rights, turned back at the borders, locked up in camps and deported into misery, war and persecution. The agitation against migrants serves to divide social opposition to war and social cuts and to strengthen the AfD as a lever for the further shift to the right.

Merz’s government statement shows that the ruling class is returning to the methods that led Germany twice into catastrophe in the 20th century: militarism, great-power politics, social cuts, authoritarian strengthening of the state and the promotion of fascist forces. The difference is that the danger today is even greater. A war against Russia and Iran threatens to expand into a nuclear world war.

This development can be stopped only through the independent mobilization of the working class. The struggle against war is inseparably bound up with the struggle against social cuts, repression and fascism. It requires a break with all pro-capitalist parties, with the trade union apparatuses and with the entire policy of “national unity.”

The working class must counterpose its own international program to the government’s war policy: the unification of workers in Germany, Europe, Russia, Ukraine, the Middle East and worldwide against their own ruling classes. The enormous social resources now being squandered on war and profits must be placed under democratic control and used to meet social needs.

This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is fighting for in the Berlin state election campaign. It stands for an international socialist program, against war, rearmament, social cuts, anti-refugee agitation and the strengthening of the AfD. The growing opposition in workplaces, schools, universities and neighborhoods must be consciously organized and based on an independent political perspective: the fight for socialism.



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