Merz government responds to Gen Z protests with repression, militarist offensive

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The German government is responding to the mass protests by young people against social cuts, rearmament and war with an aggressive intensification of its reactionary policies. While Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt are attempting to intimidate the movement with threats, accusations of extremism and racist agitation, the government is relentlessly pressing ahead with its social attacks and preparations for a direct war against Russia.

The response underscores the political significance of the mass demonstrations on October 31, in which more than 120,000 young people participated across over 30 German cities. The protests against the destruction of education, skyrocketing living costs, militarism and conscription are part of an international movement. They enjoy broad support: According to a Forsa poll published on Tuesday, 83 percent of respondents expressed sympathy for the demonstrations.

Government spokesman Stefan Kornelius made clear on Monday just how brazenly the German government is responding to this social opposition. Asked whether the protests had prompted Merz to reconsider his policies, he declared: “The chancellor feels encouraged to continue his policies.” Kornelius explicitly referred to the planned reforms of the pension and healthcare systems and defended the massive military buildup.

The message is unmistakable: The government has no intention of making concessions to young people. It intends to impose its policies of social devastation, militarization and the expansion of the state apparatus even more aggressively.

Interior Minister Dobrindt (Christian Social Union, CSU) seized on riots on the fringes of the overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations to incite hatred against left-wing and migrant groups. He claimed that the protests had been hijacked in the evening by “violent left-wing groups and migrant troublemakers.” Dobrindt spoke of breaches of the peace and demanded harsh punishments.

Merz backed this campaign. “Violence has no place on our streets, and my government will show no tolerance here,” he declared on Monday. Anyone who attacked police officers or looted shops would feel the “full force of the law.”

Although government representatives emphasized that the vast majority demonstrated peacefully and pretended to share the concerns of young people, they are simultaneously using isolated riots to intimidate the movement and justify intensified repression.

Hesse’s Interior Minister Roman Poseck (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) even questioned whether further youth protests announced for November 20 could “take place at all in their planned form” and did not rule out a ban.

The police unions are lending their support. The German Police Union (DPolG) is demanding that breaches of the peace be reclassified as serious criminal offenses carrying a minimum sentence of one year in prison. Suspects accused of serious rioting should, as a rule, remain in pretrial detention until the conclusion of their proceedings. The union is also demanding systematic deportations. The Police Union (GdP) is pressing for expedited convictions ahead of the next demonstrations.

The riots are thus being used as a pretext to criminalize the protests as a whole and further strengthen the state apparatus of repression. The attacks on democratic rights are inseparably connected to the government’s social and military policies.

The simultaneous escalation of its war policies demonstrates above all that the government is not even remotely prepared to meet the demands of young people.

On Tuesday, Merz received Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Chancellery. He pledged further support and urged European allies to fulfill their financial and military commitments. He announced another meeting of the so-called “Coalition of the Willing” in Berlin on November 19, the day before the planned international youth protests on November 20, to discuss military support for Ukraine in 2027.

At the same time, the two-day Berlin Security Conference began, bringing together representatives of NATO, the

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European Union, European armed forces and the arms industry, to discuss the further militarization of Europe. Participants include NATO generals, Bundeswehr Inspector General Carsten Breuer, EU Defence Commissioner Andrius Kubilius and senior executives of arms corporations. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius is scheduled to open the second day of the conference on Wednesday.

The conference is connected to concrete military measures that have been advanced in recent weeks. On October 26, Pistorius met in Paris with representatives of France, Britain, Italy and Poland. The so-called "Group of Five" is to become increasingly focused on joint military operations. "We will make it more operational," Pistorius declared.

During the planned November exercise "Koalicja 2026" in Poland, Romania and the western Black Sea, the deployment of multinational forces for Ukraine is to be rehearsed for the first time at full troop strength. Officially, the troops are intended for possible deployment following a ceasefire. In other words, should such a ceasefire ever materialize, the European powers would use it above all to prepare the next escalation.

Berlin, which occupied Ukraine during both world wars of the 20th century, is spearheading the war offensive. Germany is providing staff officers, two A400M transport aircraft and logistical support for the exercise. The five countries also agreed with Ukraine to develop a new air defence system called "Freyja" and pursue joint armaments projects.

In parallel, new long-range weapons systems are being developed. Germany and Britain announced cooperation on precision weapons with a range of more than 2,000 kilometers, as well as military space technology and unmanned systems. During visits to Airbus, MBDA, Helsing and Hypersonica in late October, Pistorius called for a massive expansion of arms production.

The Bundeswehr is making increasingly concrete preparations for war against Russia. At the end of October, German and Dutch generals toured Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to assess operational areas, infrastructure and conditions for military operations. Since July 1, the 1st German-Netherlands Corps has been commanding potential NATO land operations in Estonia and Latvia. German Army Inspector General Christian Freuding threatened Russia in his press statement: "If you dare, it will not be a good day for you."

In Lithuania, the Bundeswehr is testing electronic warfare capabilities under the name "Vigilant Owl II" and developing systems for reconnaissance and the disruption of enemy communications. At the same time, nuclear escalation is intensifying. On October 20 and 21, France and Britain conducted a joint exercise in which French fighter aircraft simulated a nuclear strike while British jets provided escort. Germany is also seeking closer cooperation with France on nuclear operations.

Eight decades after the Second World War and Germany's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, German imperialism is once again preparing for a major war against Russia, threatening a devastating nuclear escalation.

The war preparations are directly connected to the social attacks against which young people and workers are increasingly rebelling. While military spending is exploding and the defence budget is set to increase by almost a third in 2027, pensions, healthcare, education and social benefits are being targeted for attack. At the same time, the government is pushing ahead with the reintroduction of conscription. Workers and young people are to pay for rearmament both through the destruction of their living conditions and by sacrificing their lives in war.

The entire development refutes the claim that the government can be pressured into backing down. Even before the demonstrations, Left Party co-chair Luigi Pantisano declared: "Only strong and peaceful protests can force the Merz government to back down." In reality, the government is responding to the mass protests with repression, social attacks and an intensification of its war drive. Its policies do not arise from the stubbornness of individual ministers but from the fundamental interests of German capitalism and imperialism.

That is why the youth movement must be united with the working class and expanded internationally. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) argued for this orientation at the demonstrations and at their online meeting entitled "From the youth protests to the international class struggle: What perspective is necessary?" They advocate building independent rank-and-file action committees in schools, universities and workplaces to unite resistance against war, conscription and social cuts.

The gigantic resources devoted to war and profits must instead be placed under the democratic control of the working class and used to meet social needs. Not appeals to the German government but the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of an international socialist program can stop the drive to war.

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