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German parliament president Schäuble advocates militarism and stepped-up state repression in “Unity Day” speech

Since German reunification 28 years ago, October 3 has become a national holiday and served as a platform for leading state representatives to deliver speeches setting the course for the future.

Five years ago, German President Joachim Gauck announced the return of German militarism on October 3. A reunified Germany was too large and economically too powerful to stay out of the world’s crisis regions, he said. Germany had to pursue its economic and geostrategic interests around the world, including militarily, Gauck added. His speech served as the starting point for a massive programme of military rearmament.

Last year, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party—SPD) delivered the main speech and appealed for cooperation with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which had just entered parliament (*Bundestag*) following the federal election. “We cannot allow our differences to become hostilities—out of divergence, no irreconcilability,” said Steinmeier by way of embracing the right-wing extremists, who have since used the parliament as a platform for their racist agitation while providing the political line followed by the federal government.

On Wednesday, the floor was given over to Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), president of the German parliament. He used the pompous official ceremony in the Berlin State Opera to deliver a speech packed full of cynicism and demagoguery.

He began his remarks with trite phrases about the importance of democracy and the rule of law. Just days after neo-Nazis organised witch-hunts against foreigners in Chemnitz and Dortmund under the noses of the police, a right-wing terrorist group was exposed and the Interior Minister declared immigration to be the mother of all problems, Schäuble lectured his audience on “the country’s great success,” which is based on “freedom of opinion, tolerance, and mutual respect.”

He then spoke about the “godsend of reunification,” which overcame decades of division. However, the years of unity as well as the years of division had left their mark, added Schäuble, who in 1990 as Interior Minister was responsible for negotiating the unity agreement.

The impact of unification included “fulfilled dreams and bitter disappointments, such as those due to job losses.” However, unity has above all ensured “many new life experiences,” and “German unity is composed of all of these stories.” Society has become “more colourful,” more “diverse and difficult to oversee.” As a result, it has become more “conflict prone” and “rules are important,” stated Schäuble, and added that the “enforcement of these rules in particular” now assumes great significance.

If one sets aside the abstract language and euphemisms, this is what is being said: since German reunification, a privileged minority has fulfilled its dreams, gotten rich and risen up into the ruling elite, while the majority lost their jobs, experienced one disappointment after another and live in poverty and misery. Under these conditions, Schäuble is calling for the stepped-up enforcement of state laws. This amounts to a call for police-state measures, the restriction of democratic rights and, ultimately, dictatorship.

Opposition to this is growing continuously. While Schäuble delivered his speech in Berlin, tens of thousands of people again gathered in Munich to protest the new police powers law in Bavaria, which grants the police wide-ranging powers and amounts to a major assault on democratic rights. Organisers said 40,000 people participated.

Schäuble’s talk of the “godsend of reunification” and the “revolution for freedom” in the autumn of 1989 is aimed at diverting attention away from the current social misery, attacks on democratic rights and the rise of the far-right and fascists.

The end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was not a revolution, but a counter-revolution. Alongside capitalism, joblessness and brutal exploitation, rampant social inequality and desperate poverty once again found their way into eastern Germany.

The reason this went ahead without generating major opposition was because the Stalinist SED regime in East Germany was despised by the working class, and it had undermined

the workers' socialist consciousness and backed the reintroduction of capitalism. "In my estimation, the road to unity was unavoidably necessary and had to be pursued decisively," wrote the last SED Minister President Hans Modrow in his autobiography.

The GDR's industry, which guaranteed social security and full employment, was effectively razed to the ground. The *Treuhand* [the agency established to privatize East German enterprises] wound up some 14,000 businesses. Some were sold, while others were shut down. Within three years, 71 percent of the workforce changed or lost their jobs. In the former East German states, only a quarter of those who worked in manufacturing industries in 1989 do so today.

The well-established education and social welfare systems, as well as a broad network of cultural institutions in the GDR, were destroyed. In Saxony alone, where some 4 million people live, around 1,000 such institutions have closed down since reunification.

Almost three decades after reunification, a wide gulf remains between the living standards in the east and west. To the extent that a levelling out has taken place, it has been because incomes in the west have been reduced to the lower levels in the east, not the other way around. The real average wage in Germany is currently less than what it was in 1995. The hourly wage for low-wage earners has actually fallen by 20 percent since 1995.

Wolfgang Schäuble is one of the central figures involved in the social counter-revolution in recent decades. He not only dictated the unity agreement that dissolved the GDR—during his time as Interior Minister from 1981-91 under Helmut Kohl, a position which he also held under Merkel from 2005-09—but also supported a policy of a strong repressive state apparatus.

He wanted to deploy the army domestically and called for a change to the Basic Law to do so; and he called, among other things, for the army to have the power to shoot down civilian planes in the event of an attempted terrorist attack. He rejected parliamentary oversight over the security services and advocated the abolition of basic rights for "terrorists." He advocated, among other things, the use of statements extracted under torture in investigations carried out by the security services.

Professional judicial organisations accused him of sacrificing basic rights on the altar of alleged security interests, waging a "frontal assault on the Basic Law," and spreading fear in the population to "create a social acceptance for the security services' wide-ranging powers."

Schäuble then reached the height of his power when he became Finance Minister in 2009. A year earlier, the banks drove the global economy to the brink of collapse with their

criminal speculation. Schäuble's predecessor, the SPD's Peer Steinbrück, had saved the banks with billions in taxpayers' money. Schäuble's task was to extract these billions from the working class. In Greece, Portugal, Spain, and other indebted countries, he imposed social devastation only experienced in Europe previously during wartime.

Schäuble appeared to derive a certain sadistic pleasure from imposing one austerity pact after another on the Greek government in marathon overnight talks that decimated the living standards of millions, robbed retirees of their pensions and elderly care and destroyed all hope for the future among young people in order to pay back the "bailout loans" to the banks.

In Germany, Schäuble insisted on a balanced budget. While infrastructure fell apart, healthcare and social care were bled dry, the lack of teachers reached unbearable levels and wages and pensions declined, Schäuble bragged for years about his "balanced budget."

This is the true Schäuble, who declared on Wednesday, "We have reasons to be self-confident. And we can shape this world effectively." He then invoked the "nation," which reduces the unpredictability of the world to a manageable framework. It has "emerged historically, we feel at home here." The nation is the "trusted place of refuge" in the face of "dramatic changes" brought about by globalisation. "We cannot abandon" the nation, he added. "And we don't want to either." This nationalist appeal is no different from the rhetoric of the far-right, "I'm proud to be a German!"

There followed a call for more decisive and self-assured military interventions. "With its conflicts and wars," the world is coming ever closer to us, said Schäuble. "We can't hold the world at arm's length under conditions of globalisation. We must assume more responsibility." The formulation "assume more responsibility" is a code phrase for intensified military rearmament and imperialist intervention.

In conclusion, he provided an overview of "ideological ethics and the ethics of responsibility." Schäuble explained, "Humanity demands that we help people." This is part of the "Christian West," and a "principle of the social state." This applies to all people in a desperate situation. However, "our abilities are limited." To "retain the right to asylum," it is necessary to reject "immigrants who come to us for other reasons."

In other words, to protect the right to asylum, deportations are to be drastically expanded, a camp system established across Europe and North Africa and sea rescue operations in the Mediterranean ended. The balance-sheet of Schäuble's ideological ethics amounts to

this: Fortress Europe and at least 1,500 people dead in the Mediterranean in the first six months of 2018.

Schäuble noted that his remarks on refugee policy were “not the encouragement of cynicism and not a license for unmoral acts.” It is just as well he said so, otherwise one might not have noticed.