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German Chancellor Merkel backs police state measures and militarism

By Johannes Stern

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“Last week’s terrorist attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo in Paris is being cynically exploited not only by France, but also by the United States and its allies, to advance an utterly reactionary agenda. Attacks on basic democratic rights, already evident in the mass deployment of French police and now troops, go hand in hand with the preparations to escalate war abroad, in the first instance in the Middle East and North Africa.” (Cited from the WSWS 13 January 2015.)

“The conduct of the ‘war on terror’ is acquiring ever more openly a racist character.” (Cited from the WSWS 15 January 2015.)

German chancellor Angela Merkel’s government statement in parliament last Thursday fully confirms the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Like the French government, the German ruling elite is exploiting the *Charlie Hebdo* attack to advance an agenda that it has long been preparing: the build-up of state power domestically and the waging of imperialist war abroad.

The core of Merkel’s statement included nine points on the so-called “struggle against terrorism.” Upon closer examination, these points represent further moves in the direction of a police state. In right-wing, law-and-order style, Merkel began by calling for “hate-preachers and violent individuals acting in the name of Islam, their behind the scenes backers and the spiritual agitators of international terrorism” be combated “with full force and by all methods...that we have at our disposal as a constitutional state.”

The remainder of the chancellor's speech makes clear that the measures planned go far beyond the traditional limits of a "constitutional state." Merkel pressed for the reintroduction of the temporary storage of internet data, urging the EU commission to present "reworked guidelines." Last year, the European Court of Justice ruled that the comprehensive storage of data from phones, email, and internet usage of the entire population was illegal.

The ECJ judges demanded exceptions to the storage of data, including those who were not suspects, and those whose communications are covered by professional confidentiality, such as doctors, lawyers and journalists.

Unusually for a German chancellor in the post-war era, Merkel explicitly thanked the security forces and reassured them that "as a whole the personnel and financial resources" would be provided "that they require to ensure our security to their best ability." Under the "challenges of a changed situation and the changed technological environment," the security forces must be capable of carrying out their work to the best possible standards.

Merkel insisted that Germany's intelligence agencies have to cooperate closely with allies' intelligence agencies. "The exchange of information, including beyond national borders," she said, is "absolutely essential." Among other things, "travel movements at the EU's external borders" had to be monitored and flight passenger data belonging to so-called "threats" had to be checked.

Merkel's support for the intelligence agencies and her call for closer international cooperation must be seen in the context of the illegal practices and torture reports that have recently been made public. Thanks to Edward Snowden, it was revealed that the American National Security Agency spies on the entire population in alliance with its European partners. Just a few weeks ago, the torture report from the US Senate provided a shocking insight in to the sadistic and brutal methods of the CIA. Both Germany's foreign intelligence agency (BND) and its domestic intelligence agency are already collaborating closely with the American agencies. Merkel's statement makes clear that in the future, this cooperation is to be deepened.

At the same time, Merkel praised the adoption last Wednesday by the government of a reform of the passport law, which makes possible the withdrawal of personal identity cards as well as passports. The introduction of a replacement personal ID card not valid for travel outside of Germany is to "prevent German citizens from travelling to conflict regions and terrorist camps," Merkel said in justifying the measure.

In reality, the reform of the law permits the state to assume arbitrary powers. Solely on the basis of suspicion, a German citizen can be called upon to relinquish their personal ID card. The replacement ID card that will not only mark that individual as a suspected terrorist, but also rob them of fundamental democratic rights.

Such measures recall the darkest period of German history. Based on the Nuremberg laws of 1935, the National Socialists condemned Jewish citizens to second class citizens, and subjected them to intensifying arbitrary legal regulations.

In the summer of 1938, the Nazis introduced the “general domestic police pass,” with which all men capable of bearing arms had to identify themselves with. Those determined by the state to be Jews were at the same time obliged to carry a special ID card. The requirement for Jews to carry a pass served as the means to intensify discrimination. Finally on 1 September 1941, Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, directly assisting with their immediate deportation and subsequent extermination.

The cabinet decision from last Wednesday connects the restriction of democratic rights for a group of people defined by the state with discrimination and exclusion in a very similar way. Anyone deemed by the security forces to be a terrorist suspect is to lose their ID card and be obliged to carry a special document that significantly limits that individual’s fundamental rights.

In a further move, Merkel announced the expansion of Germany’s militarist policy in the Middle East. Germany would “continue as part of the international community to participate undiminished in the struggle against the terrorist militia IS in Iraq or Syria politically, with humanitarian and military equipment and training,” she stated. Just last weekend, Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen promised further weapons shipments to the Kurds during a visit to Iraq.

Merkel’s speech together with the developments in Germany since the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo expose the reactionary character of German imperialism, which was forced for a time to pose as peaceful, democratic and cosmopolitan following its defeat in World War I and the horrific crimes of the Nazis. A year after German President Gauck and the government announced the return of Germany to an aggressive foreign policy at the Munich Security Conference 2014, it is clear that as in the past, German militarism is directly connected with police state measures and the promotion of nationalism and racism.

It was noteworthy that Merkel’s speech, in common with the entire political establishment, drew ever more openly from the extreme right-wing Pegida movement, which Merkel had criticised as recently as her New Year’s address. Although she opposed putting Muslims under “universal suspicion,” it was justified to ask why “terrorists put so little value on a human life, and always link their crimes with their belief” and “murderers, who base their deeds on Islam, ought to have nothing to do with Islam.” An “explanation of these questions” by Islamic spirituality could “no longer be avoided.”

In an interview on Friday with the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which has been leading the media campaign in support of Pegida for weeks, Merkel went even further and signalled her understanding for the right-wing extremist positions of the participants in the demonstrations. “I understand many of the problems that are driving people, such as the undeniable questions raised by immigration, which is otherwise a bonus for our country and actually essential, or the criminality in big cities and certain border regions.”

While the organisers of the Pegida demonstrations are calling for a struggle against the “Islamisation” of the Christian west, Merkel called on Christians in Germany to “strengthen their identity.” They should “speak even more and with self-confidence about their Christian values, and deepen their own knowledge about their religion.”

