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After German elections establishment parties call for further military build-up

By Johannes Stern

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The German ruling class has responded to the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany's (AfD) electoral success by turning sharply to the right, with intensified calls for a military build-up and the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus.

Spiegel Online reported Thursday on plans from the grand coalition, which is still in office, to extend the German army's interventions in Afghanistan, Mali and the Middle East by three months without a parliamentary vote.

If the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) get their way, "the incoming government and parliament (Bundestag) would only take a new decision on the missions in April 2018." As a result, the government intends "to extend both parliamentary mandates for the Afghanistan mission and the fight against ISIS without any changes until the end of March."

Such a decision would mark an open break with the parliamentary prerogative guaranteed in Germany's Basic Law and would throw the door wide open to the deployment of additional German soldiers in foreign military interventions. Already in the "White Paper 2016 on security policy and the future of the armed forces," it was stated that "in light of Germany's increased

security policy responsibilities,” the government had to be in a position to “take short-term responsibility” for the deployment of “armed German military forces.”

The government wants to ensure with its action that the military interventions, which must be extended in the coming months, can continue and even be expanded during talks on the formation of a new government.

On Wednesday, Germany’s air force concluded the redeployment of its Tornado jets from the Incirlik base in Turkey to Jordan, from where it will continue its military intervention against the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. At the same time, the Defence Ministry is pushing for the number of German soldiers in Afghanistan to be increased to 1,400.

In a report entitled “Stress test for the armed forces,” which was featured by public broadcaster ARD on primetime television on Monday and Thursday, current Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) summarized the government’s goals by stating, “A country like Germany, with its major political relevance and enormous economic strength, has to be ready to assume responsibility, even in areas where there will be no applause.”

The ruling class is well aware that it can only impose its program of militarism, rearmament and social cutbacks with an authoritarian regime for which it is laying the groundwork. Significantly, the CDU nominated Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble for the position of president of the Bundestag. Schäuble, more than any other, embodies the austerity policies dictated by Brussels and Berlin, which laid waste to entire countries like Greece and threw millions into poverty.

A possible coalition between the CDU/CSU, Greens and Free Democrats (FDP), a so-called Jamaica coalition, would intensify the austerity drive in Germany and throughout Europe. *Handelsblatt* reported in a piece entitled “The mission for Jamaica” how German big business is preparing “for the most likely government coalition at present.”

“I see good prospects for Jamaica,” said Arndt Kirchhoff, head of the Kirchhoff Group. The Greens in particular “without doubt [have] business competence.”

A lead article in *Handelsblatt* advised its readers to have “no fear of Jamaica.” Whatever reasons speak “against the continuation of a worn-out alliance between the CDU/CSU and SPD...do not apply to a Jamaica coalition.” With regard to the necessary “reforms,” the paper continued, one wants to urge the CDU/CSU, FDP and Greens to “have courage! And get on with it.”

The Greens in particular are making clear that they are ready, especially on refugee and domestic policy, to implement the CDU/CSU and FDP’s program.

In an interview with the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Green chairman Cem Özdemir portrayed himself as a Green sheriff and his party as the most strident law-and-order party. “With regard to the strengthening of the police, the Greens are the party of law and order,” he said. “In the states where the Greens are in government, more police jobs have been created than in the states where the CDU/CSU jointly govern.” It is necessary to ask self-critically, he added, “If it would not have been wiser for the Greens to have nominated the interior minister.”

Regardless of this, there are “worthwhile measures for internal security” which could “be immediately implemented” with the Greens. These include “the appropriate equipping of the police, appropriate cooperation between the security authorities, a Europe-wide fingerprint database, and the effective securing of Europe’s external borders.” It is unacceptable “for people to enter European territory without us knowing who they are.”

The Left Party, which like the Greens represents privileged sections of the middle class, is also playing a key role in the political establishment’s rightward shift. In a post on his Facebook page, the Left Party’s founding father, Oskar Lafontaine, railed against the “‘refugee policy’ of the justifiably punished ‘refugee chancellor,’” and claimed that the main reason the AfD won support among workers was because the other parties were not right-wing enough. The “key” to “the lack of support from those on the lower end of the income scale is the misguided ‘refugee policy’”. This criticism does not only apply to the Left Party, but to all parties represented to date in the Bundestag.”

Lafontaine’s claim is a lie. In fact, most AfD voters did not vote for the party because of its right-wing extremist program. According to a poll from Infratest Dimap, 60 percent of AfD voters said they voted for the party out of “disappointment with other parties.” As many as 85 percent declared that the AfD was “the only party with which I can express my protest.”

The Left Party bears primary responsibility for this development. It has created the social misery which, particularly in eastern Germany, drove many workers into the arms of the AfD. The Left Party’s predecessor supported the reintroduction of capitalism in 1990 in the former East Germany and has pursued, as a nominally “left” party, a right-wing, pro-capitalist policy ever since. This created the political frustration exploited by the AfD.

Following the election, the Left Party’s biggest fear is the growth of opposition to the anti-social and militarist policies of all the parties. Under the cover of a handful of left phrases, it is therefore striving to establish close cooperation with the Social Democrats in the new Bundestag. “We want to be the social opposition in the German parliament,” Left Party parliamentary group chairman Dietmar Bartsch declared yesterday in an interview with N-TV. He went on to add, “It is also clear that we want there to be centre-left alliances in the states and municipalities. Our main partner for this is the SPD, that is absolutely clear. We govern successfully with them.”

After its electoral debacle, the SPD has decided to go into opposition above all because it intends to ensure, in cooperation with the Left Party and trade unions, that a genuine left-wing opposition in the working class does not emerge. Within the SPD, nobody personifies this orientation more than Andrea Nahles, who from now on will lead the SPD’s parliamentary group. In the grand coalition, Nahles as Labor Minister was responsible for the so-called contract unity law, which sought to suppress opposition in the factories with the help of trade unions associated with the German Trade Union Alliance (DGB).