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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

6 July 2018

By Johannes Stern
08.07.2018

Billions for war and police-state repression in Germany's grand coalition budget

On Thursday, the German parliament (*Bundestag*) adopted the budget for the current financial year and spending plans that will operate until 2021 with the votes of the grand coalition partners, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Today, the cabinet will agree on the proposed budget of Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (SPD).

The new budget marks a turning point in postwar German history.

Four years after the German government announced the end of military restraint at the Munich Security Conference, the consequences of that policy are now finding expression in budgetary figures. The most significant features of the new budget plan include a major increase in military spending, the strengthening of domestic police state repression and measures to terrorise refugees.

The defence budget will rise by 4 percent this year, from €38.95 billion (\$US45.54 billion) to €42.9 billion (\$US50.2 billion). Further major spending increases are planned for the coming years.

In her government statement on Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated she was “very grateful that we have an increase in defence spending in our budget ... But compared to what others do in relation to their gross domestic product, this is nowhere near enough, and we have therefore committed to spending at least 1.5 percent of GDP on this by 2024.”

The figure of 1.5 percent equals some €53 billion for the military each year. However, it is clear that the ruling elite is pursuing a much more comprehensive rearmament plan. “Protection and security ... cost money, and I want to state here clearly: we stand firmly by NATO’s 2 percent goal,” stated Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen. To reach the NATO target, which the government agreed to at a NATO summit in Wales two years ago, at least €35 billion more would have to be spent on the military annually if economic growth is taken into account.

Von der Leyen made clear that all the parliamentary parties—from the Left Party and Greens to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)—agree on implementing the return of German militarism in the face of mounting opposition from the population. Early in her remarks, on behalf of the Defence Ministry and the “entire army,” she thanked members of all parties “for their constructive cooperation” in the committees.

The entire parliamentary debate underscored that the ruling elite is once again preparing for war to enforce the interests of German imperialism in Europe and around the world. “It’s about our future, Germany’s future, the future of Europe. It’s about Germany and Europe’s future as an actor in the world,” stated Merkel. It is not possible “to act as if defence is not an urgent issue in our current moment. We all hoped that the world would become more peaceful after the end of the Cold War. But wars are raging on our doorstep.”

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) emphasised the government’s goal of welding Europe together under German leadership as a military bloc against the other major powers. “The answer—and this is interchangeable—to ‘America first’, ‘Russia first’, or ‘China first’ can only be ‘Europe united’, my dearest ladies and gentlemen,” Maas declared, to the applause of SPD, Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, Green and Left Party deputies.

CSU politician Reinhard Brandl, a member of the budgetary and defence committees, and president of the Society for Defence and Security Policy, gave an indication of the extent of the rearmament plans being worked out behind the backs of the population. By 2023, Germany must be capable of “once again making [brigades] combat-ready and carrying out emergency responses.” Another “issue” was that of “air defence.”

What use would it be to Germany “if we are surrounded by friends, but a crazy dictator from somewhere around the world sends a missile to Berlin and we’re not able to defend ourselves against it?” asked Brandl. A new missile defence system was “under development, but costs several billion euros.”

As in the 1930s, the German military build-up is being accompanied by the strengthening of authoritarian forms of rule and encourages the most right-wing forces in the government and in opposition.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) boasted in his speech, “Today we are passing a unique plan for my ministry with an unprecedented scope: €14 billion and an additional 6,000 personnel. It is a budget that sets new standards. Roughly one-third of this, around €5.4 billion, is earmarked for internal security.” The federal security agencies alone will add an additional 4,000 staff. The grand coalition is strengthening “the Federal Criminal Office, the federal police, and we also support the federal authorities, without which a classic security system cannot function.”

Seehofer then celebrated the reactionary agreement between the CDU and CSU on refugee policy, which, among other things, includes a provision for virtual concentration camps in Germany.

He was “positive that we will reach an understanding, and a reliable agreement, with our coalition partners in the SPD.” The most important steps now are “a new regime at the German-Austrian border, the immediate rejection of people with travel bans, and the establishment of transit centres, from where asylum seekers can be deported to the countries responsible as soon as possible.”

With the major programme of rearmament, strengthening of domestic state repression and the growing terrorising of refugees, which is directed against the entire working class, the federal government is increasingly adopting the policies of the far-right AfD. “I am pleased that in the budget sitting, the grand coalition is at least moving in the same direction as our motion by increasing the purchasing budget for vehicles for frontline policing by 50 percent,” stated AfD deputy Marcus Bühl. Party leader Alexander Gauland described the “compromise between Mr. Seehofer and Mrs. Merkel” as “a step in the right direction.”

The Left Party and Greens do not merely have nothing to offer in opposition to the ruling elite’s rightward shift, but are in fact part of the process. In his speech, Green parliamentary group leader Anton Hofreiter focused primarily on complaining that the government crisis had undermined German interests: “It was really unprecedented in its irresponsibility. You pushed the government to the brink of the abyss and caused major uncertainty in Germany and Europe.”

Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch spoke along similar lines and warned about mounting social and political opposition to the militarist and anti-social

policies. “You and your governments bear responsibility for the fact that the German Federal Republic is deeply divided socially, culturally, and politically. You bear responsibility for the fact that people are increasingly losing trust in the state and its institutions.”

The Left Party’s answer is also to rearm the capitalist state and strengthen its repressive apparatus. Bartsch even managed to attack Seehofer and the CSU from the right in his speech: “You have been in government constantly since 2005. And now you don’t want to be associated with the policies you supported? In all of these years, you have held the post of Interior Minister most of the time. You have implemented all of the cuts to the police and public services, and even pushed them ahead. You bear joint responsibility.”