

Fascism and militarism characterise debate in the German Bundestag

By Johannes Stern
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In recent days, two cases have come to notice in which representatives of the establishment parties have supported neo-Nazis. In Altenstadt in the state of Hesse, Christian Democrats (CDU), Free Democrats (FDP) and Social Democrats (SPD) voted unanimously for Stefan Jagsch, a member of the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD), as local mayor. In Hanau, SPD Mayor Claus Kaminsky awarded Bert-Rüdiger Förster, a member of the far-right Republikaner, who had formed a faction with the NPD, with the Ehrenbrief (honorary letter of recognition) of the state of Hesse.

In both cases, local representatives of the establishment parties justified their actions and praised the fascist politicians.

The CDU representative Norbert Szilasko who had voted for Jagsch in the local advisory council described the self-confessed Nazi as “absolutely collegial and calm.” Kaminsky, who had personally honoured Förster, said, “Even though we are fundamentally divided politically in our basic orientation, we can admit that the Hanau city council would be poorer without his humour, his many years of experience in local politics and his stubbornness in dealing with things.”

That such manifestations of sympathy for fascists at local level are not a lapse but part of a far more comprehensive and dangerous development was seen by the debate in the Bundestag (federal parliament) on Wednesday. While opposition to war and fascism is enormous among workers and youth, even 80 years after the German invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II, the ruling class is returning to its authoritarian, militaristic and racist traditions.

At the beginning of the debate, far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) parliamentary leader Alice Weidel gave one of her notorious fascist hate speeches. She railed against an “essentially green-socialist ideology that is ruining and depriving our country of its future” and

promulgated racist agitation against refugees and immigrants. In the meantime, “every second Hartz IV [welfare] beneficiary has an immigration background” and “asylum migrants” were “disproportionately involved in crime.” “Serious crimes involving sex, robbery and homicide by immigrants” had “scarily increased.”

No one in the Bundestag opposed Weidel. On the contrary, if there were interjections, they came from the right. Several members of the Greens, CDU/CSU and SPD accused Weidel of not living in Germany. “But you live in Switzerland! Why are you talking about our country here?” exclaimed Britta Hasselmann, senior director of the Greens parliamentary group.

In fact, all parties in the Bundestag have largely adopted the refugee policy of the AfD, participate in the campaign against immigrants and, wherever they are in power in the federal and state governments, carry out brutal deportations.

The speeches in the Bundestag made it clear why the ruling class is once again relying on racism, militarism and fascism. It concerns similar questions to those that led to disaster in the 1930s. The German bourgeoisie is reacting to the deep crisis of European and international capitalism and the growing tensions between the major powers by returning to an aggressive foreign and great-power policy.

In her government statement, Chancellor Angela Merkel outlined a militaristic programme whose implementation ultimately requires the establishment of a fascist dictatorship. “Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, there are completely new paradigms in the distribution of power globally,” the chancellor said, underlining to the parliamentary deputies that Germany and Europe would need to massively upgrade their military capacity in order to defy the other powers and secure a place in the sun.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the growing rivalry between the United States and China, and at the same time the geostrategic resurgence of Russia, will of course have far-reaching consequences for us in Europe,” Merkel declared. “We Europeans are, on the one hand, weakened by the exit of Britain...but on the other hand, it is exactly the hour to develop new strength.” The new European Commission of former German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen pointed “exactly in this direction: a globally oriented commission that wants to consolidate Europe’s role in the world,” she said.

Germany must “play a prominent role in this” and “keep its promises” also in the military sphere. The chancellor said it was about “moving towards the goal of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on the military—like all other NATO members of the European Union.” At the same time, Germany wants to “build its own pillar of defence with PESCO’s [Permanent Structured Cooperation] common defence policy, working together to develop arms projects and pooling our efforts.” Europe must “leave a footprint, as one might say today, in conflict resolution in the world.”

Merkel named a whole series of conflicts in which German imperialism wants to become involved in order to assert its economic and geostrategic interests. Among other things, Germany and Europe would have to “become more visible in resolving the situation in Syria” and also “take responsibility” to “resolve the tensions between Russia and Ukraine.” In Libya too, Germany will “make its contribution.” It was necessary to “restore statehood in Libya, however difficult that is; because the entire region of Africa will be destabilised if Libya is not stabilised. And that’s why it’s our task.”

In other words, Berlin, which had not participated in the NATO bombing of Libya in 2011, is now pushing for an even more comprehensive intervention in the region and beyond. Germany always wanted to “resolve international conflicts” with a “networked approach,” including “development policy,” “security policy” and, “if necessary, readiness for military action,” Merkel threatened. It was expected of Germany “that we are not only a strong economic nation, but that we also contribute to the security and peace in the world, in all areas”.

Merkel left no doubt in her speech that the new great-power policy will be accompanied by a new round of massive social attacks. The grand coalition’s budget presented by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (SPD) gave “answers to the challenges we face,” she said. At the same time, it shows “that our foreign, defence and

development policies are equipped with growing budgets.”

The anti-working-class and militaristic course of the grand coalition is shared in its basic features by all parties in the Bundestag. Significantly, in addition to the government parties, Merkel was applauded several times by deputies from the FDP, the Greens and the Left Party. If there was criticism, then it came from the right. “There are more funds for the Bundeswehr [armed forces], that’s nice,” said Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann of the FDP. “But as long as the Defence Ministry is not in a position to use these funds purposefully and so the materiel really arrives at the troops,” the “joy is manageable.”

For the Left Party, Michael Leutert criticised the Bundeswehr’s lack of operational readiness. “We still have the problem that the equipment does not fly, does not float, or does not drive,” he complained. Moreover, “a madman [sits] in the White House who does not solve problems on a global level but always incites new ones.” Under these conditions,” he said, “to allow the budget of the foreign ministry budget to stagnate, and even to cut it from 2021, was fatal. That is not how we contribute to problem solving at the international level.”

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