

Merkel to run for fourth term as German chancellor

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Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Angela Merkel will run for a fourth term as German chancellor. On Sunday, she announced that she would once again stand for the office of CDU chairperson at the party conference in early December. She told a press conference that, in her opinion, the party chairmanship meant she was automatically the party's candidate for chancellor and consequently she would stand in next year's federal election.

Media reports pointed out that Merkel had indicated four years ago that she wanted to use her third chancellorship to prepare a change of leadership in the party and government. However, the growing crisis in Europe has left her little room for manoeuvre. At the press conference on Sunday, Merkel emphasized that she had "thought long and hard" and her decision had not been an easy one.

The fact that she has decided to stand a fourth time is directly related to the Brexit vote and election of Donald Trump as US president. Trump's nationalist policy of "America first" has rocked European politics to the core.

Trump's election success was seen in Europe as a vote of no confidence in the ruling elites, represented by Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party. Many articles have pointed out that a similar development is taking place in Europe and Germany. Opposition to official policy is growing significantly. Brexit was only the beginning of an intensification of the crisis of the European Union. In the coming period, victories for far-right parties are in the cards in Austria, the Netherlands and France.

While the ruling elite in the US is lining up behind Trump, a similar development is taking place in Germany behind Merkel. All of the establishment parties are converging and seeking to form a kind of

political fortress against the population.

A new Merkel chancellorship is an appeal for a continuation of the current "grand coalition" of the "union" parties—the CDU and the Bavarian-based Christian Social Union (CSU)—and the Social Democrats (SPD). It is in addition a call for all parties to close ranks and work together more closely. The recent decision to make Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the SPD the joint presidential candidate of the SPD and the CDU/CSU has the same goal.

Many media commentators have described a reelection of Merkel as a "policy of stagnation" and "business as usual." In fact, the opposite is the case. A Merkel cabinet 4.0 would not be merely a continuation of what has already taken place. Merkel's decision for a renewed candidacy is linked to a political offensive, prepared long in advance, aimed at tackling foreign and domestic policy changes with energy and aggressiveness.

To those critics who warn that continuing the grand coalition will reinforce political disillusionment and extra-parliamentary protest, Merkel supporters reply: "Bring it on!" Her new candidacy is bound up with preparations to intensify the policies of militarism and the expansion of state powers to combat social opposition that already constitute the foundation of the program of the grand coalition. A review of the record of the current grand coalition shows that Merkel's renewed candidacy must be understood as a threat.

Following the federal election of 2013, coalition negotiations lasted an exceptionally long time, until it became clear that the governing parties had agreed on a fundamental change in foreign policy in favour of militarism and war. Foreign Minister Steinmeier, Defence Minister von der Leyen, President Gauck and others declared that Germany was "too big and too

important” to comment on “world politics from the sidelines.”

For the first time since the end of World War II and the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship, leading German politicians stressed that the period of military restraint was over. In future, Germany would intervene more independently in crisis regions and focal points of world politics—expressly by military means.

There followed a process of intensive military rearmament. In close alliance with the US, the German government organized a coup in Kiev and, using fascist forces, brought a pro-Western regime to power that threw Ukraine into civil war and triggered a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

Next came the deployment of the Bundeswehr in Syria in support of NATO. At the same time, the intervention of the Bundeswehr in Africa was put into motion. German Defence Minister Von der Leyen recently announced additional military expenditures totalling €130 billion, and a new white paper from the Defence Ministry envisages the deployment of the Bundeswehr at home and abroad.

In the European Union, Merkel and her finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, have intensified the social crisis with their brutal economic policy. The result is 23 million unemployed in Europe. Millions more work in the low-pay sector and in irregular jobs.

In many countries—Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece—youth unemployment is over 50 percent. Poverty is growing among the unemployed, young people, low-wage workers and pensioners. This social counterrevolution culminated in drastic austerity measures for Greece, devastating the whole country.

In Germany, poverty is increasing rapidly. Over 12 million people are officially registered as poor, and children are particularly affected. Eight million people work in precarious forms of work. In 2030, 50 percent of all pensioners will receive a pension equivalent to minimal Hartz-IV social payments, despite having worked their entire lives. Business associations are already calling for an increase in the retirement age to 73.

At the same time, a small minority lives in the lap of luxury. The government has created conditions in which this minority can enrich itself enormously at the expense of the majority. Income from investment assets and property has risen by more than 30 percent over the

past 15 years.

Preparations for a state of emergency and dictatorship are being pushed forward to suppress resistance to these policies. Based on the anti-terrorism laws, a huge monitoring apparatus is being created. Police and intelligence services work closely together, and the Bundeswehr is active inside the country, despite the fact that both practices violate Germany’s Basic Law.

The attack on basic democratic rights is most evident in the vicious campaign against refugees. The right to asylum has been mutilated to the point of non-existence. Desperate people fleeing wars in the Middle East and Africa are being abused, detained in prison camps, intimidated and deported. Hundreds drown every month in the Mediterranean.

The government and the media are stirring up a hate campaign against Muslims that recalls the Nazi pogroms against Jews. It serves the same purpose, to divide the working class, and plays into the hands of the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The election of Trump in the US has made clear where such a policy leads. Resistance to this development is growing among workers and young people, but the government is determined to pursue its course. With her announced intention to stand for a fourth term, Chancellor Merkel has thrown down the gauntlet on the eve of major class battles.



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