

German imperialism's new drive for world power

Johannes Stern
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For weeks, the media and establishment politicians in Germany have been denouncing criticism of right-wing extremists as an attack on freedom of expression. While right-wing terrorist networks are murdering and threatening Jews, Muslims and even Green Party politicians with death, the world of politics and the media are protecting the intellectual arsonists who have sown the seeds of right-wing terror.

The hysterical campaign reached its climax when students in Hamburg protested at the end of October against the founder of the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD), Bernd Lucke, returning to his chair at their university.

AfD deputies such as the Islamic scholar Hans-Thomas Tillschneider and the AfD's chief ideologist Marc Jongen, as well as the racist agitator Thilo Sarrazin and the right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski—notorious for declaring that “Hitler was not cruel”—are also being portrayed as victims of an alleged dictatorship of opinion.

Now, Wolfgang Schäuble, president of the Bundestag (federal parliament), has delivered a speech making clear why the leading representatives of the ruling class defend the AfD and its ideologues. They need the right-wing extremist party to intimidate and break the popular resistance, deeply rooted in broad sections of the German population, to militarism, war and great power politics.

Schäuble, a member of the Christian Democratic Union, spoke on October 29 at the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn on the subject of “Germany's role in the globalised world.” The lecture can be read on the official website of the Bundestag.

Schäuble's message could not be clearer: Five years after then-German President Joachim Gauck announced the end of military restraint at the 2014 Munich

Security Conference, the foreign policy turn is now to be implemented with brute force.

“German politics” anticipates “uncomfortable debates and unpopular decisions,” Schäuble said. The issue now is “about defining strategic interests, explaining foreign policy connections again and again and convincing the Germans of the necessity to move further in defence policy, even against resistance.”

He continued: “In other words, political leadership is needed... to impose what has been recognised as right and necessary even in the face of resistance.”

Schäuble is the longest-serving member of the Bundestag, a former interior and finance minister, architect of German reunification and instigator of the European Union's austerity policy. Perhaps more than anyone else, he epitomises the reactionary policies of recent decades. Now he clearly states that the ruling class is returning to its most odious historical traditions.

“After the catastrophe of 1945, we almost internalised a culture of restraint,” he complained. He added that “the pacifist attitude of most Germans” was “historically understandable,” but “our history cannot be a fig leaf. It must not serve as an excuse for irresponsibility.”

The mere fact that Schäuble describes 1945—not 1933 or 1939—as a “catastrophe” is extraordinary. The year 1945 marked Germany's defeat in World War II and the downfall of Hitler's Third Reich. The year 1933 was the beginning of the National Socialist reign of terror and 1939 marked the onset of the war.

Schäuble's formulation is not an oversight. The central themes of his speech evoke memories of the Nazis' methods. These include agitation against pacifism and anti-militarism, the emphasis on one's own imperialist interests, the call for the use of military force and the assertion that this exacts a “moral price,”

i.e., the dropping all moral inhibitions and commission of crimes.

“Standing aside is not an option, at least not a viable foreign policy strategy,” Schäuble said. “We Europeans have to do more for our own security—and that also means for the security of the world around us.” He stressed that this included “ultimately, the willingness to use military force,” adding, “At the very least, we must be able to threaten this.”

This also has “a moral price,” the burden of which posed “great challenges for the Germans in particular.”

When Germany last carried this “burden,” grabbing for world power and asserting its interests with military force, the “moral price” was six million Jews industrially annihilated, 27 million victims of the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, and several dozen million more dead throughout Europe and in Germany.

The demand that the German people pay a “moral price” runs throughout Schäuble’s speech like a leitmotif. “Let us begin by seeing the world as it is—and not as we would like it to be,” he demands, referring to Humboldt Professor Herfried Münkler, who has now retired. Münkler pleads “rightly for a ‘new modesty’ in our ethical demands for a global order,” Schäuble proclaims. He insists that if we want to help shape the “globalised world” and “make progress in solving global problems,” we must “also negotiate with states and regimes that do not share our values.”

In particular, close cooperation with dictatorships and criminal militias is necessary to ward off migrants: “We can cope with global migration only in cooperation with states and forces in the regions of origin and transit,” he argues, “where we have, for good reason, much to criticise.”

In reality, Schäuble’s speech underscores the fact that the German ruling class not only shares the “values” of dictators and tyrants, but puts them in the shade when it comes to asserting its own imperialist interests.

“We should also be honest about our economic interests,” he lectures. “Because we depend on raw materials that we do not possess ourselves, on secure trade routes, on an international division of labour and on markets. And that, of course, influences our policies. Anything else would be irresponsible.”

In this context, Schäuble said he supported the “proposal of the federal minister of defence for an

international safe zone in Northern Syria,” because it was “beyond question that the aggravated situation in our immediate neighbouring region massively affects European and thus German security interests.”

One cannot “confine oneself to issuing warnings to the parties to the conflict from the side-lines, or merely watching Turkey and Russia jointly expand their sphere of power,” he continued. Germans have to be “prepared to make their own contribution on the ground. Material and moral costs must be borne.”

Five years ago, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) placed the fight against war and militarism at the centre of its work. It has systematically fought against the rise of the AfD and the transformation of universities into centres of war propaganda.

In September 2014, it declared in a conference resolution: “The same factors that drive the ruling class to war also create the objective conditions for socialist revolution... Theoretically, politically and organizationally, the [SGP] bases its struggle against militarism and war on the working class. It is the only international class and the only force that can prevent a third world war.”

Schäuble’s war speech vindicates this perspective. The ruling class is reacting to the escalation of international conflicts and the worldwide growth of the class struggle by returning to the militarist and fascist traditions of its past. Only a socialist movement of the international working class can stop it.



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