

German parliament debates war budget

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Germany's 2022 federal budget, which was adopted by the cabinet on March 16 and is currently being debated in the Bundestag (federal parliament), is a declaration of war on the population in several respects.

First, with the massive increase of the regular military budget by 7.3 percent to €50.33 billion and the establishment of the "German Army Special Fund" in the amount of €100 billion, the ruling class is launching the largest rearmament of the German military since Hitler. To underscore the true dimension of the plans: There was never previously a tripling of military expenditure within a year, even in the Nazi era.

Second, the cost of rearming will be borne in every respect by the working class. At the presentation of the budget in the Bundestag, Finance Minister Christian Lindner (Free Democrats--FDP) repeatedly called for the "debt brake" and "the necessary consolidation of public finances." In the financial planning accompanying the budget, "the intention is to comply with the debt brake of the Basic Law in 2023 and in the following years until 2026," Lindner said. It is "not a non-binding declaration of intent," he stressed. "it is a requirement of our Constitution."

The implications of this are clear. Every cent that flows into the military via a planned "supplementary budget" is to be squeezed out of the working class. The labour and social affairs budget is falling by 2.9 percent from €164.92 billion in 2021 to €160.12 billion this year. And the education budget will also be cut by 2.5 percent, from €20.82 (2021) to €20.3 billion.

Third, amidst the highest infection and incidence rates since the outbreak of the pandemic, the government is ending the last remaining COVID-19 protective measures. In his government statement on Wednesday, Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats--SPD) said:

"The economy is slowly regaining momentum and can process the full order books... That is a good thing—also in view of the burdens that the war in Ukraine brings and will bring to the economy. In almost all the countries around us, the coronavirus restrictions have now been

relaxed or almost completely lifted. The Bundestag also amended the Infection Protection Act last week. It allows for further relaxations."

This too is unequivocal. The "profits before life" policy, which has already led to almost 130,000 deaths in Germany alone, is now being pursued even more aggressively under conditions of war. Overall, the health budget is rising slightly, but the money for combating the pandemic is being massively cut. While €8.89 billion was earmarked for the central procurement of vaccines in 2021, this year's spending amounts to only €6.3 billion. Subsidies for combating the virus will fall from €4.06 billion to €1.9 billion.

Fourth, the arming directly serves the purpose of waging war. In his speech, Scholz emphasized that Germany is already playing a central role in the NATO war offensive against Russia. "Since the beginning of the war, Germany has been supplying Ukraine with anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, equipment and ammunition," he said. The European Union would provide "an additional €1 billion in military aid," and "together with our international partners... sanctions that are second to none."

Germany is also becoming increasingly involved in the massive NATO military buildup in Eastern Europe, which was further accelerated at the NATO meeting in Brussels on Thursday. In recent weeks, the NATO Battlegroup in Lithuania, led by the German Armed Forces, has been reinforced by a further 350 German soldiers and 100 vehicles and weapons systems. In addition, the air force transferred six Eurofighters to Romania and the Patriot air defense missile system to Slovakia. Germany is now sending 700 more soldiers there and taking over the leadership of another battlegroup.

Fifth, the "new era" invoked in politics and the media is about the full return of German militarism. In the budget debate, Scholz and other representatives of the government and opposition justified the rearmament by citing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In fact, the plans—including the €100 billion "German Army Special

Fund”—have long been prepared behind the backs of the population.

With the systematic military encirclement of Russia, NATO has provoked Putin’s reactionary intervention. German imperialism is now exploiting this to reestablish itself as the dominant military power in Europe and to militarize the continent under its leadership.

“We are currently experiencing the dynamic of the new era at the European level,” Scholz explained. “We will use it. If you want security in Europe, you have to significantly strengthen the EU’s crisis resilience.”

Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said in her speech: “Our goal is clear: We need a German army that is able to perform the classic task of state and alliance defense without restriction.” What she means is the ability of the German military to conduct “very large” and “high intensity” operations “across the entire intensity spectrum,” as the “German Armed Forces doctrine” adopted in 2018 states.

Sixth, the war drive, which was pushed by the SPD, FDP and Greens, is supported in all its essentials by all the parties in the Bundestag and strengthens the most right-wing forces. In his speech, the honorary chairman of the far-right AfD, Alexander Gauland, rejoiced: “Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the government has learned quickly in terms of security, and €100 billion for the German army is already an astonishing learning achievement for politicians who have grown up with a firm belief in a rules-based, multilateral foreign policy.”

When Bundestag deputies criticised the government’s plans, it was to push for an even more aggressive rearmament policy. For example, the chairman of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union parliamentary group, Friedrich Merz, called for the creation of “an appropriate monitoring body to ensure that [the planned rearmament] actually takes place and that this investment in the Bundeswehr actually takes place in the coming years.”

The Left Party supports the war drive against Russia and is closely involved in the rearmament offensive through the Defence and Budget Committee. Significantly, representatives of the Left Party repeatedly applauded Scholz’s speech. Left Party leader Dietmar Bartsch accused the government of remaining silent “after the Ukrainian president’s speech here in parliament.”

“That was unworthy of the government and the German Bundestag,” he added. In his speech on March 17, Volodymyr Zelensky called for a strengthening of German militarism against Russia and the establishment

of a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

Seventh, the foreign policy of war goes hand in hand with the militarisation of society at home. “Strengthening the alliance and defense capability and respect for the Bundeswehr must be measured not only in terms of budget titles and figures,” Finance Minister Lindner demanded. It was also important “to pay the soldiers the respect they deserve for their service to our country.”

The ruling class knows that the vast majority of the population rejects the drive to war. The horrors of two world wars, the Holocaust and the war of extermination in Eastern Europe are too deeply rooted in popular consciousness. In his speech to the Bundestag, the former AfD defense politician and former colonel in the Bundeswehr, Rüdiger Lucassen, was visibly angry. He declared: “An INSA survey revealed that only three out of 10 Germans are willing to defend our country. If that is true, Germany has a problem...”

The only way to stop the dangerous development of war and the return of German militarism is to mobilize the international working class on the basis of a socialist program. Crucial is the construction of an antiwar movement based on the principles formulated by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party--SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International in the 2016 statement “Socialism and the Fight against War”:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.



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