

Germany's early federal election: Social Democrats want to be "ready for war"

Peter Schwarz
21 November 2024

Three months before Germany's early federal election, pressure is growing within the ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) to choose Defence Minister Boris Pistorius as the party's lead candidate instead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

The SPD's miserable poll numbers are ostensibly the reason for this. In a recent survey, only 13 percent favoured Scholz as chancellor. This puts him well behind Christian Democrat (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz (34 percent) and the Green Party's Robert Habeck (21 percent). Some 32 percent of respondents did not want any of the three as chancellor.

The SPD as a whole is polling at 15 percent, more than 10 percent less than in their election victory in 2021. This means that almost half of the 206 SPD parliamentary deputies are at risk of losing their seat.

Pistorius, who took over the Ministry of Defence almost two years ago, has enjoyed high popularity ratings ever since. This is not so much to his own credit but as the result of a systematic media campaign. Before he took up his post, the ministry's top management had been replaced three times in just four years and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) had been systematically portrayed as underfunded, dilapidated and unfit for war. Pistorius was then presented as a people-oriented, hands-on minister who would stay out of the squabbles of the coalition government of the SPD with the Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP).

After the collapse of the coalition, reports began to accumulate that there was unrest in the SPD grassroots and that members were refusing to campaign for Scholz. In the meantime, leading members of the party have come out of hiding. For example, members of the Bundestag, Dirk Wiese and Wiebke Esdar, expressed strong doubts about Scholz. "The key question is what the best political line is for this federal election. We are

hearing a lot of support for Boris Pistorius," they said.

Both come from the party's North Rhine-Westphalia state association, which has a large number of members, and lead powerful currents in the SPD parliamentary group. Esdar is the spokeswoman for the "Parliamentary Left," Wiese is the spokesman for the conservative "Seeheim Circle."

Georg Maier, the head of the SPD in Thuringia, has also distanced himself from Scholz. "The public blames him for the failure of the coalition talks, even though it wasn't his fault," he told *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland*. "In light of this, the question naturally arises as to whether the party would be better off with a different candidate for chancellor." Adding to that the good of the party must always come first.

Former SPD leader and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, now chairman of the elitist Atlantic Bridge network, also spoke out. "At the grassroots of the SPD, resistance to a 'business as usual' with Chancellor Scholz is growing every day," he wrote on X. "And the SPD leadership can only offer appeasements and devotional addresses."

The growing support for Pistorius underlines what the SPD's real policy is. Like the Greens at their recent party conference, the Social Democrats are responding to the imminent return of Donald Trump to the White House with an offensive for militarism and war.

There are no major political differences between Scholz and Pistorius. Both work closely together and fully support the escalation of the war against Russia and the Israeli genocide in Gaza. As chancellor, Scholz bears the main responsibility for the gigantic increase in military spending and the military support for Ukraine, which has so far cost €28 billion. Only the USA has spent more on war.

But while Scholz is trying to cover up his unpopular

pro-war policy with a few phrases about peace and warnings of an incalculable escalation, Pistorius is openly formulating the SPD's militarist programme. He is calling for an arms build-up far beyond NATO's two-percent of GDP target and is publicly advocating the reintroduction of compulsory military conscription. A year ago, he had already called for "a change of mentality" in the armed forces and in society as a whole. "We must get used to the idea again that there could be a danger of war in Europe, and that means we must become war-ready, we must be well-fortified and prepare the Bundeswehr and society for it."

Pistorius also bluntly embraces German great power interests. He regards the Indo-Pacific as a German sphere of interest—as "a region of the world that is becoming an increasing challenge for our American friends as well as for us in the face of an increasingly self-confident China that is sometimes questioning the rules-based order," as he wrote in a guest article for *Die Welt*. Germany must also "become more present there."

The fact that more and more SPD members want to go into the election campaign with this outspoken militarist at the top is a measure of the decline and corruption of this party. Even the SPD-affiliated weekly *Die Zeit* notes:

It's hard to imagine a social-democratic messiah clattering along on a tank and proclaiming that he wants to get the Bundeswehr in fighting form. That the self-proclaimed peace party SPD places all its hopes in a man who calls for a drastic increase in the defence budget and celebrates the deployment of US medium-range missiles in Germany as a step towards greater security was unthinkable until recently.

The war frenzy is not limited to the SPD. It has taken hold of all the establishment parties and all official media. They not only propagate war, they long for it. The self-satisfied functionaries who populate the SPD's Willy-Brandt-Haus and the other party headquarters, the writers in the editorial offices and their well-to-do voters and readers are reacting to the growing social and international tensions by

mothballing peace symbols and diplomacy and starting a war cry. Their answer to "Make America Great Again" is "Deutschland Uber Alles."

When Green Party Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was asked about President Biden's go ahead for far-reaching missile attacks on Russia and what she thought of Russia's intensified nuclear weapons doctrine, she replied: "We will not be intimidated, no matter what is trumpeted around again and again."

This is not recklessness, but madness. In order to "defend Germany's strategic interests," as stated in a resolution at the Green Party congress, Baerbock is willing to provoke a nuclear war.

The SPD and the Greens are hated, no matter which candidates they put forward at their head. But with their open enthusiasm for war and rearmament, they are signalling they are prepared to provide unconditional support to any chancellor, no matter how right-wing, and that there is no limit to what they will do.

Preventing a devastating war and the attacks on working people this would call for requires the building of an independent movement directed against all the established parties. This movement must be based on the working class, it must be international and fight for a socialist programme. It must expropriate the wealth of the oligarchs who dominate economic and political life and transform society so that it meets human needs and not private profit.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is standing in the federal election to gain support for this perspective.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact