

All parties back war and cuts as German Chancellor Scholz loses confidence vote

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On Monday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz asked the Bundestag for a vote of confidence and, as expected, lost. Only the 207 Social Democratic Party (SPD) deputies expressed confidence in him, while the 116 from the Greens abstained and the 394 remaining members voted against Scholz.

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier can thus dissolve the Bundestag prematurely and set new elections for February 23. This schedule was previously agreed to between Steinmeier, Scholz and the established parties. Scholz will remain in office until his successor is elected by the new Bundestag.

In the debate before the vote, Scholz explained that with the early election, voters could determine the course of future politics: “In the election, you decide how we answer the big questions that lie ahead.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. The early election does not serve to let voters decide on the big issues of the future, but to bring a government into power that is stable enough to enforce highly unpopular measures—social cuts, mass layoffs, lower wages and longer working hours, the deportation of migrants, more rearmament and a further escalation of war.

All established parties agree on these issues. The heat of the debate was in inverse proportion to the differences in content. The speakers heaped accusations on each other, but agreed to continue supporting Ukraine in the war against Russia, to arm the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) more, to deport more migrants and to offload the consequences of the economic crisis onto the working class.

While berating each other, they simultaneously invoked “respect” and “compromise” because they all know they will continue to work closely together even after the election. Meanwhile, they are so hated by the population that they will be satisfied if the result is

enough for a coalition capable of achieving a majority.

Especially in the SPD and the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), many are hoping for a new edition of the Grand Coalition. To achieve this, however, other parties would have to miss the 5 percent hurdle for parliamentary representation. The CDU/CSU currently stands at 32 percent in the polls and the SPD at 16 percent. A coalition of the two would no longer be “grand,” but could at best count on half of the MPs. Among the Greens, many are hoping for a government alliance with the CDU. And the Free Democratic Party (FDP) is already acting as a junior partner of the CDU/CSU.

Robert Habeck, Minister of Economic Affairs and lead candidate of the Greens, called on all parties to join forces in the name of Germany’s geopolitical interests. “The world continues to turn, and it often turns against Germany,” he said. That is why the Greens have done everything to ensure that the government coalition remains in place and have made compromises “for three years up to and including self-denial.” Germany cannot afford self-reflection, he added.

The agreement of all parties on the war course was clearest of all. “Germany is Ukraine’s biggest supporter in Europe. I want it to stay that way,” Scholz explained to the applause of the SPD and the Greens. During his trip to Kiev, he therefore told President Zelensky: “You can rely on Germany.”

CDU lead candidate Friedrich Merz demanded even more. He wanted to supply Ukraine with Taurus missiles and reminded Scholz that in February 2022, he announced a “new era” and decided on a €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr, which the CDU/CSU supported. But nothing remained of the new era, he

continued. Instead of investing at least 2 percent in the Bundeswehr at the same time, he financed the Bundeswehr's ongoing operation from the special fund.

Both Merz and FDP leader Christian Lindner, the finance minister fired in November, called for massive social cuts to finance war spending.

"We oppose the stagnation and redistribution of social democratic and green economic policy with an economic policy committed to performance and competitiveness," said Merz. This path will not be easy. Working hours in Germany are far too low, he asserted. As a positive example, he cited Switzerland, where 200 more hours are worked per year. "We all have to work more, we all have to try harder," he added. Merz wants to abolish the Citizen's Benefit, because "incentives to return to the labour market" are needed.

Lindner accused Scholz of rejecting the "necessary reorientation of economic and fiscal policy." He does not want to make billions in investments, but spend it on a policy of redistribution, Lindner claimed. He wanted to lift the debt brake so that he could redistribute more.

Like Merz, Lindner also called for a reform of Citizen's Benefit in order to "mobilise the labour market." By lowering the standard rate and flat-rate accommodation costs, a lot of money can be gained to reduce taxes. On the other hand, he described the "debate about higher taxes for the upper so many percent or the billionaires" as an "attempt to campaign with envy."

According to Lindner, the decisive decision in the Bundestag election was: "Does this country want a redistribution policy on request? Or do the citizens realize that an upswing must be worked for by all of us."

The attempt to portray the SPD as a party of social redistribution is absurd. There is no other party that has contributed as much to the spread of poverty as the SPD—first with the Hartz laws of the Schröder government, then with the raising of the retirement age to 67 and numerous other "reforms" for which social democratic labour ministers were responsible.

Social inequality has also grown under Chancellor Scholz. The DAX stock exchange has broken through the 20,000-point threshold for the first time and is thus

around 5,000 points higher than when Scholz took office. There are now 249 billionaires and 3,000 people living in Germany who own over \$100 million. On the other hand, more than one in five is at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

For workers, young people and pensioners, there is no alternative and no lesser evil among the established parties in the upcoming federal election. The Left Party also supports the war course and organizes social attacks at the state level. Only months after its foundation in Thuringia and Brandenburg, the BSW (Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance) also entered into coalitions of austerity with the pro-war parties.

In the state of Saxony, a state government could work with the right-wing extremist AfD (Alternative for Germany) for the first time on individual projects to enforce the policy of war and cuts against the enormous opposition in the population. In the Bundestag debate, representatives of the government and opposition already adopted the AfD's refugee policy wholesale and drummed up support for mass deportations.

Regardless of which of the parties form a coalition with each other after February 23, the new government will impose an extreme right-wing policy. Just as Donald Trump heralds the direct rule of the financial oligarchy in the US, here too the last remnants of the welfare state are to be smashed and Germany geared towards war and trade war. The reason for this is the deep, international crisis of the capitalist system.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is taking part in the elections to oppose this all-party coalition for war and social cuts. We are building an international movement against war and its root, capitalism. Sign the petition now to support our participation in the election and become a member of the SGP!



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