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By Johannes Stern
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German government preparing major domestic military deployment

According to a new report, the German government is preparing a major domestic deployment of the military. The report, based on an internal document from the Interior Ministry, was published Friday by *Der Spiegel*.

“The Bundeswehr (German Army) will mobilise 15,000 soldiers over the coming days to help manage the Coronavirus crisis,” said the news magazine. It will involve men and women “who are not deployed in foreign interventions or in NATO commitments.” By 3 April at the latest, “full operational capability will be reached.”

The plan is being “kept under wraps militarily” and “secret.” Over the course of three pages, the topics “Area security and force projection,” “command structure” and “force categories and possible tasks” are discussed. It is “an operational plan that is unprecedented in the history of the Republic.”

The number of troops to be mobilised for specific tasks is “listed in detail.” The plan includes 5,500 soldiers for “security and protection,” 6,000 soldiers to “support the population,” 600 military police officers for “security and traffic services,” 250 soldiers from the ABC Division for disinfection, and 2,500 logistics soldiers for “storage, transportation and handling.”

According to the authors, the tasks include “mass accommodation (i.e., containers), quarantine”; regional support; preparing areas for care and military airfields; disinfecting materiel, surfaces and spaces; protection of spaces, objects and critical infrastructure; and supporting security and traffic services.

Four regional command centres under the direction of Gen. Martin Schelleis, lieutenant general of the Air Force and general inspector of the armed forces, will lead the deployment. The Naval command in Rostock is responsible for Mecklenburg-Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg; the Air Force command in Berlin for Berlin and Brandenburg; the 1st Armoured Division in Oldenburg for Bremen, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and North-Rhine Westphalia; and the 10th Armoured Division in Feitshöchheim, Bavaria for the rest of the country.

The extensive deployment of the Army domestically sheds light on the disastrous state of the civilian health care system. After decades of privatisation and austerity, it is not even close to being prepared for a pandemic like COVID-19. Overwhelmed civilian authorities filed 200 requests for assistance from the military by Friday morning, reported *Der Spiegel*. They included requests for personnel and materiel assistance, such as the provision of protective materials, disinfectant and beds from military stockpiles.

Regardless of how much medical assistance the military ends up providing, its deployment must be taken as a warning. *Der Spiegel* reported that there have been “controversial follow-up questions” from various German federal states about soldiers “who will ultimately be assisting while armed.”

The Green/Christian Democratic coalition government in Baden-Württemberg, for example, is considering “officially declaring a state of emergency due to the catastrophic state of police personnel and requesting help from the military.” Interior Minister Thomas Strobl has reportedly already contacted federal Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer about this.

With the domestic deployment of the Army, the ruling elite is setting into motion long-developing plans for rearmament and militarisation. The “**2016 White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Army**,” Germany’s official security policy doctrine, stated in the section “Domestic deployment and support from the Army” the following: “To support the police in the effective combating of a disaster situation, the armed forces can under narrow restrictions carry out official responsibilities and assume powers of intervention and compulsion.”

The assumption of “powers of intervention and compulsion” and the carrying out of “official responsibilities” have nothing to do with medical assistance and disaster aid. The Army would, in fact, become a domestic tool of suppression, which has a long and bloody history in Germany. Under the Kaiser, during the Weimar Republic, and under the Nazis,

military and paramilitary units were deployed to crush social and political protests and revolutionary struggles by the working class.

This is what the ruling elite is preparing for today. A document from the European Union's Institute for Security Studies titled "What ambitions for European Defence 2020?" sees one task of future military interventions as "shielding the global rich from the tensions and problems of the poor."

"As the proportion of the world population living in misery and frustration will remain massive," the report states, "the tensions and spillover between their world and that of the rich will continue to grow. Technology is shrinking the world into a global village, but it is a village on the verge of revolution. While we have an increasingly integrated elite community, we also face increasingly explosive tensions from the poorer strata below."

Since this document was first published in English in 2009 (a German translation with a foreword by EU Foreign Policy High Representative Catherine Ashton appeared in 2011), social inequality in Germany and across Europe has exploded. While austerity policies have thrown millions into social misery—some 13 million people in Germany are now considered poor—and gutted the continent's health care and social services, a tiny layer at the top of society has enriched itself obscenely. In Germany, the richest 1,000 individuals and families control wealth totalling close to €1.2 trillion, more than three times the annual federal budget.

The Coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the political and moral bankruptcy of the entire capitalist system. Like the financial crisis of 2008-2009, the ruling elite views this far greater catastrophe as a chance to transfer billions to the coffers of the large corporations and investors. It is not only willing to sacrifice the health, but also the lives of millions of workers to achieve this. Although the pandemic continues to spread—there were more than 6,933 new cases and 84 deaths in Germany on Friday—the calls to send millions of people back to work are growing ever louder.

In the March 27 *World Socialist Web Site* **Perspective** column on the ruling elite's demand that workers get back to work without any serious protection from the virus, we wrote that for the ruling elite, "'winning the war" against the pandemic means, above all, establishing the best conditions for the intensified exploitation of the working class. But for the working class, the success of the fight to contain the spread of the coronavirus is measured in "lives saved, not profits made."

The commentary continued: “This is an irreconcilable conflict. The determination of the ruling elite to deal with the pandemic without undermining the capitalist profit system leads to authoritarianism and war. The efforts of the working class to combat the pandemic lead to socialism.”

The planned domestic deployment of the military must be viewed in this context.

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