

German Green Party seeks coalition with conservative CDU in Frankfurt

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6 July 2001

In 1985 Germany's first Red-Green (Social Democratic Party-Green Party) coalition at a state level was formed. At that time, the entry of Joschka Fischer—currently the Green federal foreign minister—into Holger Börner's social democratic government signalled the completion of the transformation of the Greens from a protest movement into a bourgeois establishment party. The banking metropolis of Frankfurt has now become the scene of a further stage in the shift to the right of the former protest party. There the Greens are attempting to form a coalition government with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Negotiations concerning a Black-Green coalition in the *Römer*, the historic Frankfurt town hall, had advanced to the stage of drafting a comprehensive 88-point working paper, expressing unanimity between the CDU and the Greens in relation to key issues of local government politics. It was only in their final stages that talks broke down in the face of fierce opposition from grass-roots Greens and a renegade CDU member of parliament, who assisted in voting a neo-Fascist DVU (German Peoples Union) member into a post in Frankfurt's municipal authority.

But the Greens' drive to reconcile their own members and the general electorate to coalition with the CDU has not been stalled by this temporary setback. They are supported by leading state and federal representatives of the party, who want to have the option of forming a future Black-Green coalition at the highest level.

The horse trading over the composition of Frankfurt's future city administration has been dragging on for three months. Only 46 percent of the electorate participated in the municipal ballot on March 18. The Christian Democrats won most of the votes percentage-wise, while both Social Democrats and Greens lost votes. In purely arithmetic terms therefore, only a coalition between the CDU and the Social Democrats (SPD) or between the CDU and the Greens would result in a majority in the city senate.

When a resolution of the Frankfurt SPD party convention terminated its coalition with the CDU just before the elections, it claimed to be responding to the suggestion that all the major parties-CDU, SPD, FDP (Free Democratic Party) and the Greens-should combine to form "a coalition of reason". This was rejected by the CDU and the Greens. Instead, Rupert von Plottnitz, the leading Green politician and former minister of justice for the state of Hessen, declared, "The obstacle to communication with the CDU has been removed."

When incumbent CDU Lord Mayor Petra Roth had to face the final ballot fourteen days after the local elections, the Greens astonished their supporters by refusing to give their formal recommendation to the SPD candidate, Achim Vandreike. As a consequence, many Green voters stayed home. When Vandreike was subsequently defeated, Udo Corts, the Frankfurt CDU party leader, publicly thanked the Greens.

The federal party leaders of the CDU (Angela Merkel) and the Greens (Joschka Fischer) initially gave the Frankfurt parties free rein in their negotiations. Lutz Sikorski, one of the longest-serving politicians for the Greens in Frankfurt, declared, "If the negotiations lead to satisfactory

agreements, co-operation with the CDU will be the sensible way forward."

Negotiations between CDU and Greens began and, although never officially declared to be coalition negotiations, led to broad agreement, which was also shared by the FDP. Nevertheless, plans for a Black-Green coalition provoked intense opposition at a general meeting of the Greens at the beginning of June, resulting in a temporary postponement of a final decision so as to avoid a split in the party.

The election of the extreme right-wing DVU member, Andreas König, to an honorary post in the municipal authority finally brought the coalition manoeuvres to a standstill on June 19. Contrary to previous arrangements, either a CDU or FDP representative had evidently voted for König, who himself had been a member of the CDU until 1992. After that, the Greens broke off the coalition talks. This was obviously the aim of the "rebels" inside the CDU.

However, postponing something is not the same as bringing it to an end. Thus, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, long-time leader of Frankfurt's "office for multi-cultural affairs", current European Union representative for the French Greens, and vehement advocate of a Black-Green coalition, immediately expressed his point of view to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. He declared that the recent breakdown of negotiations was due to the fact that "the Greens had failed to explain why they of all people want to collaborate with those who were their main political opponents during the election campaign." He went on to add, "The rapprochement between the two parties should have been prepared for quite differently. It should have been promoted in a completely different way."

Petra Roth, the CDU mayor, declared herself in agreement with this position only a day later and again in an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. While Roth now intends to revive talks with the SPD, the leadership of the Greens is determined to co-operate with the CDU more and more in the coming weeks and months. This time "in a completely different manner".

The efforts of the Greens to join forces with the CDU—a move obviously supported by leading sections of the national party—can be seen to some extent as a tactical manoeuvre. The Greens are trying to free themselves from their burdensome ties to the SPD, which now has both the FDP and the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) as possible coalition partners following a change in leadership of the FDP and a change of government in Berlin.

Similar considerations are being entertained by the CDU. Since the FDP severed its close connections with the CDU, a coalition with the Greens has created new opportunities for the conservatives to return to power. Collaboration between the CDU and the Greens has long existed in the smaller municipalities. But it is noteworthy that such a coalition has recently come into being for the first time in Saarbrücken, the capital of a federal state (Saarland). Peter Müller, governor of Saarland and member of the CDU national executive, has been heavily involved in the Frankfurt negotiations and Roland Koch, his fellow CDU associate in the state of

Hesse, has been following them very closely.

More important than these tactical ploys is the way the Greens' political views and concepts are increasingly dovetailing with those of the CDU. For several years, the political aims of the CDU and those of a growing section of the Greens have been converging. "The young service industry workers in both parties feel drawn to one another," comments the *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

A comment by a Green member named Linda in the Frankfurt Greens' internet discussion forum is typical: "As a Green, I'm ashamed. Some of us still don't seem to understand that we really do have to face up to reality! ... It's high time that the eco-freaks went into retirement! They should make way for the young idealists who have options other than Red-Green and the crazy ideals of '68... YES TO BLACK-GREEN! YES TO A MODERN GREEN PARTY!" (Emphasis in the original text.)

An article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper recently commented on how neo-liberal ideas and the interests of small business are increasingly coming to influence leading sections of the Greens. Using three prominent Greens-Oswald Metzger, Christine Scheel and Margareta Wolf-as examples, the paper showed that the party is no longer feared by business associations like the Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

The article, entitled "Neo-Liberal Trio" (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 19, 2001) describes how Margareta Wolf, as parliamentary under-secretary in the federal ministry of trade and commerce and as spokesperson for small business, sees to it that "when drawing up new regulations, officials do not neglect the interests of master butchers and computer technicians". The article goes on to quote Oswald Metzger, the Greens' budgetary expert, as saying: "Unlike the trade unions and the social democrats, we Greens aren't obsessed with the idea of bosses as hard-headed businessmen." Oswald Metzger advocates a Black-Green state coalition in Baden-Württemberg and favours himself as its minister of finance.

Regarding Christine Scheel, the article comments: "Today everyone is knocking at her door: employers, bankers, sales representatives and insurance managers. They know that it is well worth while visiting Mrs. Scheel. 'She knows how to make things move', think the lobbyists in Berlin... She toughened herself in the battle on the taxation front, often on the side of the business community and against Finance Minister Eichel (SPD)."

The programme of the Greens also shows striking parallels to that of the CDU when it comes to immigration policies. While the CDU recommends that immigrants be graded according to their qualifications for employment, Rezzo Schlauch, chairman of the Green faction in the federal parliament, declares: "It would be good if immigration were regulated according to the changing demand for labour. For example, in the fields of caring for the elderly or farming." Schlauch sees in the CDU's immigration concept a "possible basis for cross-party agreement".

The neo-liberal "service industry workers" are setting the tone among the Frankfurt Greens. Ever since Tom Königs, the Greens' head of the Frankfurt finance department, succeeded in improving the party's relations to the banking world in the early 1990s, there have been rapprochements and agreements on a whole range of political aims, such as trimming the city administration, privatising institutions including public utilities, the Frankfurt trade fair, and cultural facilities, and a more hard-line policy toward drug users and foreigners.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit expressed this most succinctly in a guest contribution to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. On April 28, he wrote: "There are ways of achieving things that are more easily effected with the Christian Democrats—namely, in those areas where the state regulatory measures of the Social Democrats are not functioning."

Cohn-Bendit explains how the question of foreigners in Germany can be rationally related to the labour market and economic policy: "Recently, even the CDU realised that the demographic development (of Germany) makes immigration absolutely necessary. Firstly, all asylum-seekers with

jobs should be granted a secure right to remain in the country. Frankfurt should place itself at the forefront of the consensus regarding immigration and economic policies, and set out upon a modern path that the Social Democrats' state power approach is highly unlikely to embrace."

In relation to cultural policy, Cohn-Bendit believes that the Greens, together with the CDU, should bring to an end the constant to-ing and fro-ing witnessed since the days of Hilmar Hoffmann (SPD minister for culture during the 1970s), by giving a boost to "the entrepreneurial independence of cultural enterprises on one hand, while promoting avant-garde and fringe culture on the other. This would amount to meaningful liberalisation with the aim of offering culture at a more reasonable price, with the opportunity of promoting exciting works of the avant-garde."

Cohn-Bendit seems to have forgotten that leading party circles within the CDU in both Frankfurt and Hessen belong to the extreme right wing of the party and are involved up to their ears in the CDU donations scandal. The Greens are attempting to collaborate with the same party whose "Mafia structures" they denounced during the recent local election campaign.

For years the Frankfurt CDU profited enormously from the laundered millions deposited in shady bank accounts in Switzerland and Lichtenstein. It was alleged that this money consisted of "Jewish bequests". When Roland Koch contested and won the state election in February 1999, he had the complete support of the Frankfurt CDU. Koch's main campaign consisted of an xenophobic attack on the Red-Green federal government's plan to introduce dual citizenship rights for some foreigners.

Udo Corts, the CDU's leader in the negotiations with the Greens, is responsible, in his capacity as Roland Koch's undersecretary, for handing over to the press a secret file of the Office for Constitutional Defence dating from the 1970s concerning the "Revolutionary Struggle" group, which was then used to level serious charges against Joschka Fischer, the Green foreign minister, who belonged to the group at the time. But that did not hinder Fischer himself from supporting collaboration with the CDU, albeit very diplomatically.

Political accord in relation to a wide range of questions is also a feature of the 88-point working paper endorsed by the Frankfurt CDU and the Greens. There it is stated that "Security forces will be *significantly* increased" (emphasis in the original), and "Authorities dealing with foreigners should become client-oriented service providers."

Concerning issues of administration, the economy and employment, the position taken by the CDU and the Greens is quite clear: "In coming years, the city administration will have to adapt itself to the challenges of the future and competition between the regions. The public sector will have to accept the responsibility for the creation of synergies, for reduction in public spending, for streamlining administrative processes and for pursuing fundamental reforms"—a circumlocutory formulation to denote job cuts and increasing workloads for those who remain on the public payroll.

The business world is counting on generous financial support from future administrations in Frankfurt. The city's most important source of income, the tax on business, is to be reduced by more than 4 percent. As a result, the city's firms and larger business concerns will reap sums reaching into the tens of millions.

Additionally, the CDU and Greens are planning: "The expansion of business start-up programmes... Relevant: new media, IT, start-ups (initial financing), environment technology, skilled crafts... provision of venture capital. Through participation in the provision of venture capital, the economic structure of the region will be improved and high-level jobs of long-term productive value will be created."

What is being planned for the unemployed and those who rely on social welfare, however, is low-level work and the compulsion to accept such work: "Think about new possibilities. Job-finding agencies receive a fee

for finding proper jobs for the long-term unemployed. Incentives for mediation. Society rewards job-finding. Wage subsidies for the long-term unemployed and those receiving social security payments who are found work in basic service industries.”



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