Hamburg: First-ever state coalition between Greens and the CDU

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The German Green Party has formed a coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the city-state of Hamburg following state elections two months ago. This is the first such "black-green" coalition at a state level in Germany.

In collaborating with the CDU in a coalition in Hamburg, the Greens are giving an indication of their future plans federally. Both parties have vehemently denied that they have any plans to work together at a federal level, but, according to former German foreign minister and Green leader Joschka Fischer, "Great events in politics are always preceded by denials."

Writing in the weekly *Die Zeit*, Fischer continues, "Of course, the Hamburg coalition will be a crucial model for federal politics—despite all the denials," adding that "a successful black-green coalition in Hamburg would transform the political landscape of the federal republic."

By adding their signature to the coalition contract in Hamburg, the Greens are making clear that they are prepared to back the CDU in a federal government and provide an alternative to the governing grand coalition—CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD)—which is increasingly under attack from business groups because of its incapacity to implement economic and social reforms.

With federal elections due in 2009, a black-green coalition at a national level is regarded by some commentators to be an increasingly likely alternative. Together with the free-market Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens and CDU already have enough seats in the current parliament to form a majority.

The black-green coalition in Hamburg marks a further turn to the right on the part of the Greens. When the party was founded at the end of the 1970s, it was regarded by many as a left-wing alternative to the SPD. When it joined a government led by the SPD in 1998, however, the party assumed a position to the right of its coalition partner—particularly with regard to social and economic policy. While some opposition emerged within the ranks of the SPD to the anti-welfare Agenda 2010 policy implemented by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the Greens gave the measure their unconditional support.

The formation of the black-green coalition in Hamburg means that the Greens have now completed their journey into the camp of right-wing bourgeois politics. The coalition programme reflects the interests of the wealthy middle class of the Hanseatic city and is directed against the broad masses of the population. The Greens have not only ditched their environmental demands—no coal-fired power station in the suburb of Moorburg, and no deepening of the river Elbe—in exchange for government posts, but have agreed to seamlessly continue the right-wing policies of the CDU in the spheres of business, social and interior policy.

There is barely any mention in the coalition contract of such issues as employment, unemployment policy, training and social policy. The existing policy is merely to be continued. The coalition partners commit themselves "in principle only to balanced budgets without new indebtedness,"—i.e., a policy that rules out measures to deal with the developing social crisis in the city.

Restrictions on the rights and working conditions for public service workers decided upon by the old Senate remain in force, as does the growing "one-euro job" sector (employment for one euro per hour) in the city. Even the head of the Verdi public service union in Hamburg, Wolfgang Rose, was prompted to warn of the danger of even sharper "social divisions."

The Greens will take over three key posts in the new senate: education (Christa Goetsch), town planning and environment (Anja Hajduk) and the Justice Ministry (Till Steffen). Ole von Beust (CDU) retains his post as city mayor, despite his notorious past contacts to right-wing populist politicians.

Seven years earlier, von Beust had formed a coalition with the extreme-right Constitutional Offensive Party and appointed its founder, Ronald Barnabas Schill, as his interior minister. Von Beust also appointed his long-time student companion, Roger Kusch, as justice minister. Kusch made the headlines at the time with his reactionary demand for the abolition of juvenile criminal law. After five years in office, Kusch later resigned from the CDU to form his own right-wing extremist party and has recently made a number of bizarre appearances to advertise his "automatic death" machine, which he promises can enable pensioners to painlessly end their lives.

By signing the coalition contract the Hamburg Greens have made a mockery of all their pre-election promises and programmatic demands. Instead, they have agreed to the most hollow symbolic gestures, such as raising a rainbow flag at the town hall to commemorate the annual gay demonstration on Christopher Street Day.

The contract is full of utterly vague and noncommittal formulations obviously drawn from the vocabulary of the Green movement—"security audits will be implemented," "instruments must be adapted or newly identified," the Senate will "strive towards reducing CO2 emissions"—but which in content

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correspond to the right-wing policies of the CDU.

The energy company Vattenfall is currently building a coal-fired power station in Moorburg, which will discharge twice as much CO2 (8.5 million tons) as all vehicle traffic in Hamburg. Prior to the election, the Greens were adamantly opposed to the construction of the power station. They termed the issue a "sticking point" in the negotiations with the CDU and described their current coalition partner von Beust as a "climate killer." But now, the entire issue of the construction of the power station is dealt with in just 12 lines in the coalition contract.

The final decision to go ahead with the construction rests with Environment Senator Hajduk, but Vattenfall is confident the project will be realised. The head of Vattenfall Europe, Hans Jürgen Cramer, commented, "I regard the coalition contract on the whole as a positive signal to finally give us permission to go ahead. In parts it reads like a plea for the power station."

While the coalition contract refers to "disagreement" over the issue of deepening the Elbe, a measure the Greens had ruled out before the election, there are no plans to halt the project. According to the proposals put forward by the CDU, the Elbe is to be deepened by 14.5 meters, thus allowing the biggest types of tankers to reach the port of Hamburg.

According to CDU regional chairman and Hamburg Finance Senator Michael Freytag, "The deepening of the Elbe will be carried out in full."

At the same time, the Greens were awarded a small recompense in the form of an "Institute for the ecological improvement of the deepened Elbe."

Prior to the state election, the Greens—and in particular their leading candidate and leader of their parliamentary group, Christa Goetsch—had pleaded for a uniform school period of nine years to help overcome the existing selective character of the German educational system.

Rather than adopting this demand, the coalition contract opts instead for a "compromise" that will do nothing to overcome the problem of selectivity and only encourage in the long run the differentiation of schools on the basis of income.

A member of the Hamburg trade union Education and Science (GEW) told the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, "It is obvious that parents will assign their children where they think they have the best chance of going directly on to high school." It is a measure that will lead to a primary school system based on a first and second class. "It means the end of the primary school as a school for all children," the GEW spokesperson added.

The Greens had also called in the election campaign for the abolition of student fees introduced by the CDU. Now, these fees will be merely reduced from €500 to €375 per term—to be repaid within 10 years of completing study.

In the course of the contract negotiations, no discernible differences emerged between the CDU and the Greens. This is striking, based on the thoroughly right-wing policies pursued by the CDU Senate. According to the coalition contract, Hamburg will maintain in principle its policy of police powers to be exerted "independent of any indication of a crime"—a formulation that awards the police arbitrary powers. Video monitoring of public areas is also "to be retained in principle."

Also to be continued is the practice of comparing data from central police records with school registers, a practice introduced in 2007 to identify immigrant children without a proper residency permit. So far, not one violation of the residency laws has been recorded through this method.

In May 2005, Hamburg was the first German state to commence the deportation of refugees from Afghanistan. This policy is to be continued. Only the deportation of families with children "is to be temporarily suspended." At the same time, "marriage and family" ties are to be recognised to facilitate the deportation of married couples without children. Deportations carried out in the middle of the night will also continue.

With regard to immigrants found guilty of committing an offence, the coalition contract reeks of the former Schill party, but has dressed up its content with the identity-politics language of the Greens: "Foreign offenders, male and female violent Islamists, and male and female terror suspects will also be consistently deported."

If one believes the press reports on the coalition negotiations, then the union of the CDU and the Greens in Hamburg is a love match. The discussions took place in an "unusually relaxed atmosphere," there was never any chance of the negotiations breaking down, both sides had been able to understand one another quite well, and the talks were "open and fair" (Ole von Beust). The media fulminated in particular over von Beust, who was able to break the ice in the course of difficult negotiations with the Greens with his "easy, sometimes playful style," his Hanseatic charm and "spontaneous foolishness."

For his part the head of the CDU, Frank Schira, praised the Greens: "In the end they are also bourgeois. We are not at so different from one another." Schira was particular impressed by the "enormous authority" of the leading Green politician, Hajduk: " She is very professional and in addition has a sense of humour."

The Greens have now finally completed their journey into the camp of right-wing bourgeois politics. For many members and supporters, the route was bound up with an ascent of the social ladder. Others have left the party, while wealthier, more conservative layers have turned towards it. In any event, one thing is sure after their performance in Hamburg—the party will no longer be able to pose as any sort of alternative to establishment bourgeois politics.

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