

# Germany: SPD right wing sabotages change of government in Hesse

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A right-wing faction inside the Social Democratic Party (SPD) dashed hopes that SPD state chairperson Andrea Ypsilanti would form a new government just one day before her planned election as prime minister of the state of Hesse. On Monday, four members of Ypsilanti's own state parliamentary group publicly announced that they would not support her.

The setback for Ypsilanti delivers a deathblow to the SPD's attempts to form an SPD-Green Party coalition in the state based on the tacit support—or toleration—of the Left Party. A previous attempt in March to form such a coalition to replace conservative standing state Prime Minister Roland Koch (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) failed when one SPD deputy, Dagmar Metzger, refused to back Ypsilanti. Yesterday Metzger received backing for her stance from three more deputies.

On Monday at noon, the four "right-wing deviationists" held a joint press conference and gave two main reasons for their opposition to an Ypsilanti-led SPD-Green coalition. Firstly, they all rejected any sort of cooperation with the Left Party; secondly, they were committed to a policy that is oriented to the interests of both small and big business circles. All four made no secret of their vehement anti-communism.

The leader of the opposition group is the SPD state deputy chairman, Jürgen Walter. The 40-year-old lawyer is a well-known advocate of business interests and for a number of years has fought for an extension of Frankfurt airport, a project that has met with considerable resistance from the local population.

Walter stood as a candidate against Ypsilanti in 2006 for the post of the party's leading candidate for the state elections. Walter vehemently opposed Ypsilanti's proposal for a political orientation towards the Greens

and argued instead for cooperation with the CDU in a "grand coalition." He was defeated. Following the state election this year, Walter continued to argue for a coalition with the CDU.

On a personal level, he had already sealed such a coalition this summer, when he married Hesse CDU spokeswoman, Ester Petry.

Two other SPD deputies—Carmen Everts and Silke Tesch—lined up alongside Walter and Metzger at the press conference on Monday to explain their opposition to Ypsilanti.

Carmen Everts, like Walter, is a lawyer. She justified her rejection of any sort of cooperation with the Left Party on the grounds that she had written a doctoral thesis on political extremism.

Silke Tesch is a speaker for the SPD parliamentary group on behalf of small businesses, services and handicraft, as well as deputy chairmen of its legal committee. At the press conference, Tesch justified her opposition as follows: "I said again and again in the election campaign: not with the Left." She said she had been continually challenged in her constituency, because before the state election Ypsilanti had ruled out any collaboration with the Left Party. She could not reconcile her conscience with this "broken promise," Tesch argued.

Walter, Everts and Tesch have discovered their "consciences" very late in the game. In recent weeks, all three had repeatedly confirmed they would vote in favour of Ypsilanti on November 4. Walter had even worked out the details of the coalition contract with the Greens, whom he is now loudly condemning. Walter was obviously taken aback by Ypsilanti's choice to bypass him and choose Hermann Scheer as her favoured economics minister. When Ypsilanti offered Walter the department of Transport and European

Affairs, he turned down the post.

According to press reports, the SPD national leadership in Berlin was taken by complete surprise by the development in Hesse. Members of the executive were struck with "incredible astonishment"; nobody in the party had anticipated that their four colleagues in Hesse would do such a thing. According to the executive, the behaviour of the quartet was "strange and disloyal."

SPD Chairman Franz Müntefering described the events as a "severe blow" for the SPD in Hesse. When the news broke on Monday morning, the initial reaction was a "mixture of shock and indignation," according to Müntefering.

An interview with the SPD chairman had appeared on Monday in the *Bild* tabloid, in which Müntefering declared his support for the election of Ypsilanti on the basis of votes from the Left Party. The paper quotes him as giving her election a "thumbs up." The dependence on the Left Party is "naturally a problem," Müntefering said, but the issue was to ensure that Hesse was once again governed "reasonably." However, he would have preferred a solution that did not involve the Left Party.

Some commentators have speculated whether statements of support from an avowed right-wing leader of the party were a political kiss of death for Ypsilanti, or whether the SPD leadership was genuinely taken aback by events. Such speculation has little significance.

In the summer, Franz Müntefering and SPD chancellor candidate Frank-Walter Steinmeier organized a political putsch in the SPD leadership, aimed at preventing any adaptation by the party to growing popular discontent with its austerity policies embodied in the Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV legislation. Their aim has clearly been to create the best conditions for the SPD to press ahead with and intensify the party's intensely unpopular Agenda policies.

In view of the crisis in the conservative camp, which was revealed by the recent election debacle of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria, the SPD is offering its services to the German ruling elite as the most reliable instrument to implement fresh social cuts, under conditions of a rapidly worsening economic and financial crisis.

For their part, the faction of the so-called left in the

SPD fear that such a course could drive even greater numbers of workers and young people from the party and in the long-run lead to the emergence of a more radical left alternative than the Left Party. This faction in the SPD is prepared to work with the Left Party, well aware that when in power—in the states of Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Berlin—the Left Party functions as a reliable prop of the bourgeois order.

The recent events in Hesse are the prelude to a further shift to the right by the SPD and at the same time will intensify inner-party feuding, to the point of a possible split.



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