

German Greens to continue their coalition with the conservative CDU in Hamburg

Dietmar Henning
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The German Green Party has confirmed its coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union in the city state of Hamburg, thereby signaling its readiness to enter a coalition with the CDU at a federal level. The Greens are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths in order to finalize a pact with the conservatives --including supporting the latter's right wing policies on welfare cuts, strengthening of the state apparatus and restrictive immigration policies, while at the same time largely ditching the Greens' own ecological demands.

In 2008 the Greens in Hamburg formed their first ever coalition with the CDU at a state level. At that time Ole von Beust headed the CDU. Von Beust made substantial concessions to the Greens on issues of education and allowed the Greens to take charge of the education and environmental departments.

Since then the Greens have broken all of the promises they made in their election campaign in 2008. For environmental reasons the Greens had demanded a stop to plans to deepen the river Elbe and allow its navigation by huge container ships. This demand had already been dropped in the 2008 coalition agreement. The Greens had also called for an end to the project for a coal powered electricity project in Hamburg Moorburg, due to its high CO2 emissions. The plant is now due to commence operations in 2012. In the sphere of education the Greens had demanded the abolition of study fees in the state. Instead such fees are to be reduced somewhat from 500 to 375 euros per term (plus an additional 50 euros for administrative charges).

Then in July the core project of the Greens, a reform of state schools aimed at making the educational system less selective, also collapsed following a referendum. The referendum was heavily influenced by influential bourgeois layers in Hamburg and was

carried out without any real opposition from the Greens or any other parties. At the same time mayor Ole von Beust announced his retirement from politics and nominated Christoph Ahlhaus, a figure from the right wing of the CDU, as his successor.

Despite all of this the Greens have decided to continue their coalition with the CDU. On 22 August a meeting of the membership of the Hamburg Greens voted by an overwhelming majority to maintain the coalition. This meeting was preceded by a separate one with Ahlhaus, who was the Hamburg Senator for Home Affairs and had gained a reputation for his law and order politics, combined with a rigid deportation policy for foreigners.

Following the meeting with Ahlhaus the *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported that Green members were not just happy but jubilant. They found "the way in which Ahlhaus addressed questions to be admirable". He had joked about his times as a member of an extreme right wing student organization as "if it was not really serious", and was even prepared to contemplate attending the city's annual Gay Pride celebration on Christopher Street Day. The Greens declared it was excellent that Ahlhaus was prepared to stick to the coalition agreement and had described himself as "someone who bothered".

Green chairperson Katharina Fegebank described Ahlhaus's performance as "impressive" and failed to see "any indication that the CDU was shifting to the right". The Green party school senator and deputy mayor Christa Goetsch affirmed: "Ahlhaus made a clear commitment to the linkage of ecology and economics"—i.e. the essence of Green politics.

The Greens also had no objections to Ahlhaus's nomination of the millionaire entrepreneur Ian Karan (independent) as economic senator and well-known

CDU “hardliner” Heino Vahldieck as senator for home affairs. “From our point of view it would be irresponsible to steal away now bearing in mind we have no policy disagreements with the CDU”, the party executive declared. “We want to advance the links between economics and ecology for which the CDU-Green coalition stands.” There are “no policy disagreements with the CDU”.

These comments speak volumes because the major task of the coalition—as was already agreed under the leadership of Ole von Beust—is to consolidate the city’s budget. The Greens and CDU have agreed to implement cuts amounting to half a billion euros per year. The city council also intends to resume the deportation of foreigners and increase fees for the city’s nursery schools.

According to Ahlhaus, what was at stake was no less than a “test of the maturity” of the CDU-Green administration. On 25 August the Greens, whose membership has the highest proportion of civil servants and highest average income of all parties, passed their test of maturity with flying colors. On that day the Green senate parliamentary group voted unanimously to elect Ahlhaus as the city’s new mayor.

As was the case in 2008 the federal leadership of the Greens stands foursquare behind its compatriots in Hamburg and supports the coalition with the CDU, which represents one further step in the rightward drift of the Greens. Federal party leader Cem Özdemir, a long time advocate of alliances with the conservatives, commented approvingly: “Christoph Ahlhaus used the opportunity to clearly address issues which are important for our people.”

The Greens have their base in the upper middle class in urban areas and are closing ranks with the conservative CDU as social polarization intensifies. The party has already formed many coalitions with the CDU at a local level.

In 2008 Joschka Fischer, the long time leader of the German Greens, had already described the first CDU-Green coalition in Hamburg as a model for future federal politics. He wrote at the time: “Naturally the Hamburg coalition—despite all claims to the contrary—will be a crucial role model for federal politics.” A successful CDU-Green coalition in Hamburg, Fischer claimed, would thereby “fundamentally change the political landscape of the

Federal Republic.”

In October of last year the Greens formed a so-called Jamaica three party coalition with the CDU and free market FDP in the state of Saarland. The party turned down a possible coalition with the SPD and Left Party when it was offered more ministerial positions by the CDU.

In North Rhine-Westphalia the Greens recently formed a minority government with the SPD, which has the support of the Left Party. But also in this case the party has committed itself to drastic budget and spending cuts. In the wake of the international economic crisis and the turn towards austerity measures all of the main parties—the CDU, the conservative Christian Social Union, the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party—have closed ranks and moved to the right.

There is also considerable support within the CDU for a possible coalition with the Greens at a federal level. The next national parliamentary elections are due in 2013 and with the continuation of the coalition in Hamburg the Greens have made clear they have no qualms about forming the next federal government with the conservatives.



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