

SPD, Greens prepare for coalition in Berlin

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5 October 2011

After the defeat of the coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Left Party in the Berlin state elections, the SPD is now planning to form a new coalition with the Greens, to be headed by the former governing mayor, Klaus Wowereit (SPD).

Despite the loss of more than 10,000 votes, the SPD remains the largest party in the Berlin House of Representatives (Senate). To form a new state government, however, it still needs to find a coalition partner.

The SPD would enjoy a secure majority in a coalition with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), but is looking instead to form the new Senate with the Greens, giving the incoming administration a majority of just one vote. The reasons for this decision mainly involve national political considerations. An alliance with the Green Party in the Berlin Senate would prepare the ground for a future SPD-Green coalition at federal level.

After exploratory talks between the SPD, CDU and Greens, a list of differences and agreements on issues of state policy was published in the press. These included issues of internal security, education, energy and transport policy and the privatisation of the S-Bahn (urban transit system). It would appear that general agreement with the Greens was not much greater than with the CDU.

Differences between the SPD and the Greens were reported in the media regarding somewhat secondary issues such as transport policy. In their election campaign, the Berlin Greens had rejected any further extension of the A100 city autobahn to the east, which they called an outmoded traffic concept. They argued that the money already scheduled for this project

should be invested in the maintenance of existing roads and noise protection measures, rather than building an “appendix” just 3.2-km long to the city autobahn.

As well as using money from its own budget, the Berlin Senate could also call on €420 million in funds from the federal Ministry of Transportation for the extension of the A100 autobahn. SPD state politicians do not want to forgo the earmarked funding. They declare that improvements in the infrastructure would attract investors to the city, and bring an (albeit temporary) creation of jobs in road building. In the state of Berlin, there are currently more than 13 percent unemployed, poverty is growing and there is little prospect of higher tax revenues to offset the budget deficit.

The Greens are known to make environmental election promises the price of their participation in government, so a face-saving compromise has to be found regarding the A100 autobahn extension. The initial compromise foresees asking the federal government to agree on a reallocation of the funding requested, which could then be used for other transport projects. If this proposal does not succeed, the planned motorway extension will be implemented.

Although there has not yet been a decision about the allocation of funds to Berlin, Federal Minister for Transport Minister Peter Ramsauer (CSU) immediately rejected this compromise, which some media commentators regard as the launching of a federal election campaign.

In a debate in the Bundestag (federal parliament) on this topic, party representatives hurled mutual accusations at each other. The debate was largely moot, as there is currently a court action under way against

the extension of the A100, in which a decision is only expected next year. Furthermore, there are some €47 billion in road construction projects currently pending at the Federal Department of Transportation, for which only €1.5 billion funding is available from the federal budget!

The conflict is being hyped up by the media and various politicians to divert attention from issues that have far wider implications. For example, there is no public discussion about how the future coalition partners would finance schools in Berlin, how much-needed social housing will be funded, how many public sector jobs will be destroyed and what further reductions are planned in social spending. The Greens' own election manifesto spoke of additional budget cuts amounting to €500 million. However, there has been no public debate about these proposals.

As expected, despite the failure of the compromise on the A100, the Green Party state convention last Friday voted by an overwhelming majority to take up coalition negotiations with the SPD. Commentators have pointed to the pressures being exerted on the two parties from the federal level to come to an agreement in Berlin. A functioning alliance in the Berlin Senate would help prepare the way for a SPD-Green coalition at federal level.

Despite receiving support in the Bundestag from both the SPD and Greens for the euro rescue package, the Christian Democratic-Free Democratic Party federal coalition is fiercely divided. The social counter-revolution that is proceeding at full tilt in Greece, Spain and Portugal is to be extended to Germany. The rescue measures adopted to secure the European banks require the provision of huge funds from the national budget. Even cutting statutory sick pay is no longer off limits. All the social gains of the working class are up for grabs.

The SPD-Green Party federal coalition under Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Joschka Fischer (Greens) between 1998 and 2005 was particularly successful in enforcing deep welfare cuts. It introduced the Hartz welfare and labour “reforms”, vastly expanding contract work and low-wage jobs. Even those who had previously worked

for decades and paid contributions into the social insurance scheme were not protected from dire poverty. Moreover, the SPD and Greens agreed on the participation of the *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) in wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Some media commentators have pointed to the slim, one-seat majority of a SPD-Green coalition in Berlin as an indication of possible political instability; however, after 10 years of coalition with the Left Party, the SPD leadership in Berlin is well aware that it can rely on its long-time partner when it comes down to critical votes—particularly when the issue is the implementation of fresh spending cuts. During its decade in office (2001-2011), the SPD-Left Party coalition imposed greater spending cuts than any other comparable German administration.

At a federal level, the German bourgeoisie is preparing for explosive class struggles, and the SPD and the Greens are being groomed by influential sections of the ruling elite to play the role of enforcers in the social devastation currently being planned.



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