

Berlin's new Senate agrees on security buildup

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Negotiations are progressing rapidly between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) about the formation of a joint governing body in the Berlin Senate. The process is expected to be completed by mid-November.

Late last week, the future coalition partners agreed on issues of internal security. The SPD supported the CDU's extreme right-wing agenda in all essential respects. The agreements reached entail a systematic strengthening of the police and surveillance state, and an attack on democratic rights.

The CDU and SPD agreed to create an additional 250 jobs in the police force, and retain the video recordings of subway train stations for 48 instead of 24 hours. Uniformed police officers will in future travel more frequently on public transport. "This is a signal internally and to the outside world that there will be more police on the streets", explained Frank Henkel, the CDU leader and likely future interior minister.

So-called "preventive detention" will be extended from 2 to 4 days. This measure will make it possible for innocent people to be taken into police custody solely on the basis of suspicion of a crime. Furthermore, public order agencies are to receive more power.

A basis in law will be created for the legally controversial systematic scanning of licence plates. Licence plate scanning will be used to perform automated search operations without any concrete justification.

The monitoring of organisations deemed politically suspect will also be increased. The work of the intelligence service and police in combating "left-wing extremism" is to be expanded, and a judicial ban on the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) will be pursued. Forums of experts will develop new strategies for tackling "left-wing extremism".

Animosity against alleged "left-wing extremists" had already been provoked during the campaign. The CDU exploited a series of arson attacks on cars as an excuse to engage in a major campaign to upgrade the police force and

advance the call for a strong state.

A few days previously, Berlin police had arrested a 27-year-old unemployed man, who admitted to single-handedly setting fire to 67 cars in June and August. The police said he had acted out of pure frustration, and "definitely does not belong to the left-wing milieu".

During the coalition negotiations, a furore was then caused by a number of arson attacks on railway cable ducts, for which an obscure and previously unknown group called the Hekla Reception Committee claimed responsibility on the Internet. Hekla is an Icelandic volcano.

The attacks resulted in train delays, but no lives were endangered. A letter from the perpetrators later claimed they had wanted to cause an "interruption to data and signal communications". This did not prevent Andreas Gram of the Berlin CDU from describing the attacks as a "precursor to left-wing terrorism", and declaring "penetration of the left-wing autonomous scene" a major issue in the coalition negotiations.

The political parties base their constant warnings about "left-wing extremists" on unverifiable statistics, stemming from the police or the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution. Unlike in most other German federal states, the classification of a violent crime as "extreme left-wing" is determined in Berlin by the police.

The CDU in Berlin has a long tradition of right-wing law-and-order politics. Heinrich Lummer and Joerg Schönbohm, CDU senators for the interior, became well-known nationwide for their notoriously right-wing politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

The SPD is largely in agreement with the CDU regarding these matters. It is thus continuing the course set in cooperation with the Left Party over the past 10 years. As incumbent Mayor Klaus Wowereit said: "The work done in recent years will be continued, and also expanded in the one or two areas".

During its rule, the SPD-Left Party Senate increased the number of surveillance cameras in subways and on train stations, and authorised the police to randomly access the

video recordings. It restricted the right to demonstrate and increasingly involved private security firms in police work.

Shortly before ending his term in office, SPD Interior Minister Erhart Korting—having consulted the governing Mayor Wowereit—appointed Udo Hansen as Berlin’s president of the police force. Hansen has a long career with the Federal Border Guard and the Federal Police behind him: among other involvements, he was a member of the GSG 9 special forces (elite counter-terrorism and special operations unit). Due to his harsh treatment of asylum seekers, he has earned himself a reputation as a hardliner. He had the transit area of Frankfurt Airport barricaded with NATO military barbed wire to deprive asylum seekers of any chance of avoiding their processing or deportation. In 2008, Hansen left the Federal Police to work as a consultant for the EADS defence group in Saudi Arabia.

Even the CDU initially opposed Hansen’s appointment to the post of Berlin police president—not least because he is a member of the SPD. However, his position has since been accepted by the conservatives.

The SPD and CDU are also pursuing an extremely right-wing agenda in matters of foreign policy. Although the draft of the coalition agreement defines Berlin as a city open to immigration, it also contains the sentence: “We expect from all people living here the adoption of our common values”. This amounts to an unequivocal alignment with those who preach intolerance by advocating a so-called “German defining culture”.

Some issues relating to the coalition’s migrant policy are still to be negotiated. The CDU is against allowing foreigners the right to vote in municipal elections. It demands a policy of zero-tolerance for “troublesome” migrants, and is against the granting of dual citizenship. It wants to force the children of immigrants to decide at the age of 18 to adopt either German citizenship or that of their parents.

The former SPD-Left Party Senate has also prepared the way for its successor in this area of policy-making. It deported thousands of refugees. This led to hunger strikes and numerous suicides in the Köpenick deportation prison in 2002, 2003 and 2005. Thilo Sarrazin—the SPD politician who used his post as Berlin’s finance minister for years to impose savage spending cuts—formulated the SPD’s inhuman right-wing policies in his book *Germany Abolishes Itself*.

Domestic issues have played an important role in the Berlin SPD’s decision to cancel coalition negotiations with the Greens and form a coalition with the CDU instead. The year 2011 has been marked by fierce working-class struggles throughout the world, and an acute intensification of the global economic crisis. Sharp social conflicts are also

breaking out in Berlin, a city with a high unemployment rate and thousands of recipients of the miserly Hartz welfare benefits.

The SPD and CDU have agreed on numerous cuts, affecting mainly the poor. The former SPD-Left Party Senate’s public sector employment project, through which the long term unemployed received subsidised earnings of €1,200 a month, will not be continued. Instead, only much more poorly paid work—like the notorious one-euro-jobs—will be financed by federal government programmes.

A proposed “efficient controlling of social spending” is one of the main innovations of the future grand coalition. This will involve the expansion of an allegedly transparent database. Administrative departments will also supervise much more closely the accommodation costs of Hartz welfare recipients. In other words, Hartz benefits recipients can expect to be subjected to constant surveillance and harassment.

Services such as social workers, integration guides and community interpreters—who help migrants and whose posts often provide migrants with employment—are to be maintained for the time being. Despite the wishes of those who need them, however, these services will not be provided on a regular basis; they will be funded only for temporary periods, and subject to termination at any time.

Experts are already predicting a dramatic downturn of the German economy in the coming year. This will mean even further restrictions on the provision of welfare support in Berlin.

By systematically upgrading the police and administrative apparatus, the new Berlin Senate is preparing for the coming protests of the city’s population, which has already been considerably radicalised by the social devastation wrought by the previous SPD-Left Party Senate. In doing so, the SPD has decided on a collaboration with the CDU, which has more experience in these matters than the Greens.



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