

Tensions over the formation of new German government

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Tensions have arisen in ruling circles before the start of official exploratory talks to form a new German government. Leading figures from the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) parties are to meet with leading representatives of the Social Democrats (SPD). Discussions with the Greens are to follow at the end of next week.

It appears unlikely that a quick agreement on a new government will be found. The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote on Wednesday of a “protracted three-way affair” that was marked by increasing mistrust among the parties. SPD general secretary Andrea Nahles suggested earlier in the week that the formation of the government could remain “in doubt” until December or January.

Conflicts over the formation of the government exist not only among the parties, but also within them. In each party, there are voices speaking out in favour of a CDU/CSU/Green government or a grand coalition of the conservative parties and the SPD, while vehemently rejecting the alternative option.

Behind the media’s emphasis on disputes over government posts and positioning for future elections, there are political questions involved.

The aim of the ruling class is to install a government that is stable enough to impose unpopular measures in the face of widespread resistance. All the factions share the same aims: massive social attacks similar to those carried out in southern Europe and a more aggressive German foreign policy. The only dispute is over which coalition will be most effective in achieving these ends.

Following the forcing through of devastating social cuts on southern Europe by the government of the CDU/CSU and the free market Free Democratic Party (FDP), the financial and business elites are now

demanding the same social attacks in Germany.

The latest edition of the British magazine *the Economist* warned that “Germany’s last bout of reforms was ten years ago,” and demanded the new government “must do more to deregulate labour and product markets and energy, and to raise investment in infrastructure.”

In foreign policy, the new government will be called on to enforce the interests of German imperialism much more aggressively. During the election campaign, the media acted as cheerleaders for a US attack on Syria with German participation, making clear in the process what is expected from the new government by the ruling elite.

Shortly after the election, the German Society for Foreign Affairs (DGAP), which is close to the government, published a foreign policy paper that pushed for a more active German foreign policy. Under the title, “And they are moving after all,” Almut Möller wrote that Germany “is ready for more alterations in its foreign policy than is often thought.” She criticised “the German reluctance to consider military options,” which made Germany “an unpredictable partner.” As examples, she mentioned Libya, Mali, and Syria.

Möller attacked the outgoing CDU/CSU/FDP government for a supposed insufficient use of militarist propaganda. “With all of the appreciation for German history and the sensitivities of many Germans,” leaders had forgotten to make use of “the reform of the army as a starting point for a wider debate about Germany’s role in European and international security policy,” which could have paved the way for “a necessary change in attitudes among the German population.”

Möller hopes that the new government under Merkel, with the “addition” of “a little red (SPD) or green,” would “in the coming months place new emphasis on

policies on Europe and security.”

The Greens as well as the SPD have proven that they can implement such an “emphasis.” During the SPD/Green coalition under Gerhard Schröder, the government not only propagated the necessity for war and social attacks, but imposed them in practice with the Agenda 2010 reforms and its support for the war in Kosovo.

The SPD and Greens regularly criticised Merkel during the election campaign for her reluctance to act. Since the elections, all of the parties, from the CSU to the Left Party, have shifted the political axis to the right and indicated their willingness to accelerate the social attacks on the working class and support a militarist foreign policy based on the interests of German big business.

The Greens have responded to their dismal election result by dropping all of their social phraseology and demanding a stronger orientation towards big business. They view their loss of votes as due to the party’s election campaign being too “left.”

The sharpest shift to the right has been made by the Left Party. Its election campaign was wholly directed towards the forming of a coalition with the Greens and SPD. It is now reassuring the Greens and SPD that the Left Party is ready to back their policies.

Although the Left Party attempted to cover up its support for German militarism during the election campaign, leading figures like Gregor Gysi and Paul Schäfer now demand, in a pamphlet entitled “A left foreign policy: perspectives for reform,” an open discussion on “humanitarian” military interventions.

In spite of the offers of support on the part of the Left Party, the SPD and Greens have ruled out a coalition with it on the federal level. This has less to do with political differences than with tactical considerations. Broad sections of the ruling class are of the opinion that the Left Party will have to play a decisive role as a “loyal opposition,” due to the scale of planned social cuts.

In the exploratory talks and the subsequent coalition negotiations, the main question will be how the ruling elite is going to impose its programme of social attacks and war against the mounting social opposition.

Sections of the bourgeoisie see a grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD as being best suited to this task, since due to their overwhelming majority they

could impose their programme in both chambers of parliament without any parliamentary debate. Under a grand coalition, the Greens and Left Party would not be in a position to obtain important minority rights in parliament such as the establishment of an investigatory committee.

Others view the grand coalition, which would have an even larger majority than the one formed eight years ago, as a risk. They fear that the Left Party and Greens could prove incapable of defusing opposition to such a government, and that the coalition could quickly break apart at the first sign of social resistance.

Thomas Strobel, the state chairman of the CDU for Baden-Württemberg, spoke out most clearly in favour of this view, and advocated a coalition with the Greens. He told the *Berliner Zeitung* that a grand coalition could prove to be unwieldy and then warned: “There is a deficit of democracy because of the shrunken opposition, and the CDU and SPD will develop (dangerous) centrifugal forces.”



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