

The German Green Party: New leadership praises conservatives and big business

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Following its miserable result in the general election, the Greens replaced their leadership at a party conference last weekend. In the summer, opinion polls reckoned with a 15 percent share of the vote for the Greens—in fact, the party received just 8.4 percent in the election.

Now, the generation of former 1968'ers in the party, who played a key role in enforcing the reactionary policies of the former Social Democratic Party-Green Party coalition, have stepped down. They have been replaced by a layer of younger Greens who are not committed to any particular ideology. They are usually referred to as “pragmatists” because they are prepared to bend over backwards in order to advance their careers.

As is usual at Green party conferences, certain rituals had to be respected. Delegates voted for a dual leadership on the basis of sexual equality—one man, one woman—and posts were handed out to representatives of the party's alleged feuding wings—the “realists” and the “left”. In fact, this terminology has long since lost any significance.

The former leader of the party “left”, outgoing chairman Jürgen Trittin, was environment minister for seven years in the SPD-Green coalition and backed all of the measures of that government—including the anti-welfare Hartz laws and Agenda 2010 and German army missions in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

The party is now accusing of him of supporting demands during the election campaign, such as minimal tax increases for top earners in order to finance urgently needed expenditure on education. For today's Greens, anything remotely to do with social equality is taboo.

Trittin's “left” successor at the head of the party is the biologist Dr. Anton Hofreiter, a representative of

upwardly mobile middle class layers whose main concern is a low-noise, pollution-free environment for themselves and their families, with an organic food shop on the corner. These layers are utterly indifferent to the growing impoverishment of broad sections of the population. Hofreiter's web site features a plethora of information on environmental and transport issues, but nothing on burning social issues.

The former Saarland environment minister, Simone Peter, has replaced another “left,” Claudia Roth, in the party leadership. Peter's sole qualification to represent the party's so-called left is that she was the first leading Green to participate in a state coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union and the neoliberal Free Democratic Party!

Representing the party's “realo” (realist) wing are two former leading figures. Cem Özdemir remains party chairman but with reduced support. In the leadership election, he received just 71 percent of the votes from the 800 delegates in Berlin. Two years ago, he had polled 83 percent. Replacing Renate Künast in the leadership is the right-winger Katrin Göring-Eckardt, the party's top candidate in the federal election campaign alongside Trittin.

With its rejection of anything that might be misconstrued as “leftist” or socially reformist, the Greens are taking their place in the broad coalition currently being welded together in Berlin. The party has made clear to the CDU and the Social Democratic Party that it will fill the role as faithful opposition partner and oppose any challenge to the government by broad layers of the population, while standing by to take over government responsibility should the grand coalition falter.

The period of the “red-green project”—i.e. coalitions exclusively with the social democrats—is finally over

after both parties received a combined vote of just 35 percent in the election. In future, the Greens are ready to form a coalition with the CDU or to form an alliance involving the Left Party, which is also undergoing a similar process of shifting to the right.

The readiness to coalesce with the conservatives was repeatedly emphasised at the party conference. Several speakers complained that the Greens had linked their fortunes too strongly to the SPD. The main motion put forward by the party executive, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority, states, “Other coalition options must in principle be possible. Coalition preferences may be given in future, but clamoring for one particular party is ruled out.”

In this respect, the Greens are evidently seeking to take over the mantle of the FDP, which failed to gain enough votes to re-enter the Bundestag. Green delegates repeatedly stressed their sympathy with business interests, previously a hallmark of the FDP.

“We have lost the bond between ecology and economy,” lamented Green deputy Kerstin Andreae, who had originally sought to head the party executive. “We have to build bridges to business.” The main motion states: “Companies are our partners on the path to ecological transformation.”

The premier of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, who has earned the trust of Germany’s big car companies based in Stuttgart (Daimler, Porsche and Bosch), was loudest in demanding an opening up to the CDU. He expressed his admiration for German chancellor Angela Merkel, telling *Der Spiegel*, “The woman has really shifted her party into the political centre ground.”

Following two extended rounds of negotiations with the conservative Union parties, the Greens finally decided against pledging their allegiance to a coalition with the CDU. The party’s diffidence, however, had nothing to do with substantive differences. It merely needs a little more time to fully persuade its members and voters of the new course.

The main motion of the congress stated that the Greens had to “overcome blockages” within and around the party in order to ensure “that key allies are not lost when we urgently need them to achieve common goals”.

Should the current coalition negotiations between the Union and SPD fail, the Greens are ready to step into

the breach, party chairman Özdemir affirmed. The rejection of coalition negotiations is not final, he said. “The door is open and will remain open for the foreseeable future.”

Kretschmann also told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper that there would “certainly” be a further round of exploratory talks with the Union in the event of failure to form a grand coalition. “The period of excluding all possibilities is at an end”, he said.



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