

German grand coalition: A government of social austerity and militarism

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More than two months after the federal elections, the leaders of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) have settled on a coalition agreement. The agreement paves the way for violent social attacks throughout Europe, the militarization of German foreign policy and attacks on democratic rights.

Before the agreement can be finally signed, the CDU executive and the SPD membership must agree in a ballot. The outcome of the vote in the SPD is uncertain, because many mid- or lower-ranking party functionaries fear involvement in a grand coalition may mean a loss of votes in subsequent elections.

Those who negotiated the coalition have sought to somewhat disguise the reactionary thrust of the agreement. The flowery prose and convoluted terms are an attempt to present wars, social attacks and state surveillance as stability, growth and security.

This is supported by numerous media outlets, who have described the agreement as a “shift to the left” (*Die Zeit*), or credit the coalition with “a big heart” (*FAZ*). SPD chair Sigmar Gabriel even claimed the coalition agreement was written “for the small and hardworking people.”

The opposite is the case. At the press conference of party leaders, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that there would be no tax increases for the rich or big business. Moreover, the coalition agreement excludes taking on any new debt after 2015 and is committed to the “strict” observance of the debt ceiling, as well as the European fiscal pact. By the end of the next legislative period, the government wants to decrease state debt from 81 percent of GDP to below 70 percent.

The SPD and CDU/CSU have made it clear that they will continue and intensify brutal austerity measures, not only in Germany but throughout Europe. All euro

zone countries must ensure “competitiveness through structural reforms,” “sustainable fiscal consolidation,” or “financial stability,” it says again and again in the agreement.

To this end, “a better and more binding coordination of their economic policies” is necessary to ensure that “the euro zone countries agree binding and enforceable, democratically legitimate contractual reforms at the European level.” The “oversight of national budgetary planning by the EU Commission” is to be expanded into an “effective instrument.”

Joint liability for debts, which would make it easier for ailing countries to obtain loans from the financial markets, is expressly and repeatedly excluded, however. In the past, the SPD had called for such measures. Now it is said that a “pooling of debt” would be incompatible with “taking responsibility.”

Instead, the grand coalition will only provide emergency loans to indebted countries if they agree to implement social attacks of historic proportions. Emergency loans are only possible “in return for meeting strict conditions or implementing reforms and budget consolidation measures,” it states.

At the same time, the CDU/CSU and SPD want to expand the EU as a military alliance under German leadership. The EU needs, “more than ever, a strategic discussion” about what it wants to achieve with civilian and military means. It could play a role in “third countries” to establish and influence the justice system and police.

In addition, the new federal government wants to strengthen Germany’s importance in NATO. “Defence cooperation” must be extended, and Germany must participate in procuring and maintaining weapons systems. In particular, the coalition agreement supports the establishment of a joint NATO missile defence

system.

The agreement calls for the “strengthening of interagency cooperation” to support an “effective foreign and security policy, for the success of which, civilian and military instruments must complement each other.”

The report states that Germany has to “help shape the global order” and be guided in this by the “interests of our country.” An entire chapter of the agreement is devoted to “securing raw materials...Specific action is necessary in order to avoid possible negative impact on the value added in Germany.”

Such big power interests have never been formulated so clearly before in any coalition agreement.

This resurgence of German militarism, and the comprehensive social attacks planned by the coalition, cannot be implemented over popular opposition with democratic methods. Therefore, the CDU/CSU and SPD plan a massive extension of the state apparatus and the further restriction on democratic rights.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the Secret Service is called) is to take over “central office function” in relation to the state branches. Its “technical analysis ability” is to be improved. In addition, the capacity of the federal police is to be upgraded and given new powers for “telecommunications surveillance.” The Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), which already operates as an unofficial intelligence agency, is to be expanded, as is the Cyber Defence Centre.

The SPD and CDU also agreed to reintroduce a requirement for ISPs to retain data, which had been overruled by the Supreme Court in 2010. ISPs will be required to retain connection data of all their customers, regardless of whether there are any suspicions against them, store these data for three months, and if necessary pass it on to various state bodies. This law “will be one of the first we bring in,” Merkel said at the press conference.

The grand coalition also plans to limit the rights of unincorporated associations. It will be easier to ban clubs and similar organisations, and bans will have a wider impact.

The coalition partners have sought to hide this reactionary programme behind a few social fig leaves. For example, the CDU proposed the introduction of a “Mothers’ Pension.” This would be limited to a small

rise of €26 per child for parents who brought up their children born prior to 1992. This still means that those affected still receive €26 less than younger mothers and fathers. In addition, the measure will be subject to funding availability.

The legal minimum wage called for by the SPD was from the beginning so low that it will have little impact for most, but will only save some money for the social insurance providers. It will be possible for employers to pay less than the minimum wage of €8.50 an hour up to 2017, through making collective agreements to that effect with the unions. Thereafter, only so-called “mini-jobs” will be able to be paid at a lower rate. The minimum wage is to be used to push down the level of wages generally.

The trade unions and opposition parties have largely lined up behind the coalition agreement. At the press conference, SPD leader Gabriel stressed that the entire contract was agreed with the unions.

The Greens criticized the coalition agreement from the right, complaining about overspending on Mothers’ Pensions. “In order to protect the so-called priority projects, a discussion about additional debt or taxes is pre-programmed,” said Green Party parliamentary leader Anton Hofreiter.

The chair of the Left Party, Katja Kipping, downplayed the brutal character of what is to come, calling the grand coalition only “a block on social justice and reforms.”

The party’s parliamentary group chair, Dietmar Bartsch, said: “I was hoping that the grand coalition would deal with grand problems. This is just administrating and does not look to the future.”

In recent weeks, the Left Party has repeatedly offered to form a coalition government with the SPD and the Greens.



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