

German Greens negotiate coalition state government with conservatives

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Last Saturday, the Green Party in the state of Hesse voted by a large majority to enter into coalition negotiations with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Following two months of exploratory talks, Hesse state premier Volker Bouffier (CDU) decided on the Greens and not, as many had expected, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) as a coalition partner.

According to media reports, Bouffier paid tribute to the SPD but had finally decided in favor of the Greens because they were a better partner to impose strict budget cuts and mass sackings in public services across the state. While pledging its support for Bouffier's anti-social program, the Green Party was also prepared to accept fewer leading posts in the new administration than the social democrats.

The Greens' state party council debated the CDU's offer for about three hours. Then 51 leading Green members voted on a proposal of the so-called exploratory group, which is led by state and parliamentary faction chairman Tarek Al-Wazir. Only six members voted against it.

For the first time in the party's history, the Greens are conducting coalition negotiations with the CDU aimed at forming a joint government in a full-sized German state. Apart from a number of CDU-Green Party alliances at a local level, up to now there has only been a CDU-Green state government in the city-state of Hamburg (2008-2010).

The decision reached by the Greens was discussed at the highest level of the party. National chairman Cem Özdemir said on Monday that he regarded a possible CDU-Green coalition in Hesse as a very positive step. "I think it's always good when the Greens are in the government", Özdemir said on Bavarian Radio.

The Sunday edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*

Zeitung reported at the weekend that Green Party state leader Al-Wazir not only had close connections with the national leadership, but was also assured of the backing of former Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer. "Have courage! Grab it [the offer]!" wrote Fischer in an SMS to Al-Wazir after a telephone conversation.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had earlier advocated collaboration between Greens and the CDU, applauded the move. Writing in the supposedly left-leaning *taz* daily newspaper, he declared that the Greens were now in a position to prove "what significance they have for this republic". Cohn-Bendit said he considered the CDU a better coalition partner than the SPD, adding: "My experience is that negotiations with the CDU are difficult, but it then sticks to the contract. Bargaining with the SPD is easier, but then begins the interpretation of the contract". He argued that the arrangement in Hesse is to be welcomed because it clearly demonstrates "that there are alternatives to the (CDU/CSU-SPD) grand coalition".

The decision to enter into coalition talks with the CDU is a deliberate move to strengthen Chancellor Angela Merkel in her coalition negotiations with the SPD at a federal level. Two weeks ago, the SPD announced its willingness to work with the Left Party, thus signaling to the CDU that the SPD could form an alternative alliance with the Left Party and the Greens if the Union remained stubborn in the coalition negotiations. Now the Greens are responding by strengthening the bargaining position of the CDU/CSU and thus making clear their willingness to cooperate with the Union.

Apart from these tactical considerations, the Hesse CDU-Green Party coalition negotiations demonstrate one thing in particular: all the parties agree on the basic

issues and are ready to cooperate with each other. There are no fundamental differences among them. The CDU/CSU seeks an alliance with the social democrats at a federal level and with the Greens in Hesse; the Greens fill the post of state premier in a coalition with the SPD in Baden-Württemberg, enabling the passage of policies that are no different from those in neighbouring Bavaria, which is led by a notoriously conservative CSU single-party government.

The Left Party is part of the same process, forming an additional flank in an unofficial and unelected grand coalition of all parties aimed at implementing policies dictated by the banks and business associations.

The Greens' decision to seek coalition with the CDU in Hesse refutes the Left Party's propaganda claim that an SPD-Left Party-Green government would amount to some sort of left-wing alternative to the grand coalition. Instead, the Left Party's declared aim of cooperating with the SPD and the Greens to form a governing alliance—while both of these parties are negotiating a coalition with the CDU—underlines the fact that there are no fundamental differences between the conservatives and the Left Party.

The Hessian CDU has always constituted the far-right, German-nationalist wing of the Union. For 35 years, Volker Bouffier has made his career in the state organization that is notorious for its past associations with former Nazis. He became state secretary in the Hesse justice ministry in 1987 and was thereafter appointed interior minister in three state governments under Roland Koch.

During this time, he introduced dragnet investigation procedures and intensive telecommunications monitoring to upgrade the state's surveillance system to a level higher than in any other state. This earned him the nickname of the "Black (CDU) Sheriff". When the Frankfurt chief of police threatened to torture the kidnapper in the case of Jakob von Metzler in 2002, Bouffier publicly pledged the former his full support.

Both Volker Bouffier and his predecessor, Roland Koch, have openly acknowledged Alfred Dregger and Manfred Kanther as their political mentors. Dregger was a figurehead of the national conservatives for decades. He commanded a German army battalion in World War II and, after 1945, relentlessly continued to campaign against the Soviet Union as a fanatical Cold War warrior. A passionate anti-communist, he tirelessly

opposed the Stalinist German Democratic Republic and advocated an honourable reinstatement of Hitler's wartime army.

Recent studies show that the number of former NSDAP (Nazi party) members in the Hesse CDU state parliamentary faction increased rather than decreased in the first two post-war decades. During the first Hesse state parliament after the war (1946-50), there were only two proven former NSDAP members; the number had risen to ten by the fifth legislature (1962-1966).

The Hesse CDU has also always stood on the right wing of the Union with respect to social policy, and turned against employee co-management and workers' rights in the 1970s. Manfred Kanther was known nationwide as the epitome of the law-and-order politician.

This is the tradition and the nature of the party with which the Hesse Greens have now begun coalition negotiations.

It is not that the CDU has changed; it is the Greens who are revealing their true political colours. The Greens constitute a right-wing party that is doing all it can to defend the capitalist system against the growing opposition of the population. This includes striving for a governing alliance with the most reactionary political forces.



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