

German ruling class closes ranks in grand coalition government

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With the grand coalition government, which began its work on Tuesday, the ruling class in Germany is closing ranks. Chancellor Angela Merkel's third governing coalition controls more parliamentary votes than any preceding government.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) together control 504 of the Bundestag's 631 seats, and the government can also rely on the support of the two "opposition" parties, as well as the trade unions.

On the day the federal government was sworn in, the Greens agreed to a coalition with the CDU in the state of Hesse. It is the first CDU-Green coalition at the state level, and an unmistakable signal that Merkel can count on the Greens. The same goes for the Left Party, which rules in Brandenburg in an alliance with the SPD. The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) has also explicitly backed the grand coalition.

The convergence within the ruling class as it prepares to meet rising social resistance stands in inverse relation to the widening of divisions within German society.

According to recent surveys conducted by the Federal Statistics Bureau, one in five inhabitants of Germany—some 16 million people in all—is affected by poverty or social marginalization. There are millions more who live in constant fear of slipping into poverty.

The social divide in Europe as a whole is even deeper. In southern and eastern Europe, the austerity programmes carried out under pressure from Berlin have created a social catastrophe unprecedented in peacetime. Millions have lost their jobs and incomes. Education, health care and infrastructure have collapsed. In Greece, the average wage has fallen by 40 percent. One in three adults and three in five young

people are unemployed.

The grand coalition will continue such attacks on the working class both in Europe and in Germany. This can be seen not only from the coalition agreement, which commits the government to a course of "strict, sustained fiscal consolidation", but also from the selection of ministers. The 71-year-old Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) remains finance minister, and thus Merkel's right hand in the implementation of a relentless programme of austerity.

In her first official postelection statement on Wednesday, Merkel insisted that European policy is one of the grand coalition's most important tasks. She praised the fiscal pact, which commits EU members to strict austerity measures, and called for binding EU rules to "ensure that the necessary structural reforms" are carried out. Many states had for too long delayed implementing "necessary reforms," she said.

In preparation for future social confrontations, the new government will strengthen the state security apparatus. This end is served both by the return of former Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU), a close confidante of Merkel, to the Interior Ministry, and by the establishment of a state secretary in the Chancellery responsible for the intelligence services.

With this move, the secret services are not to be subjected to greater control, but rather to be strengthened. The new post will be filled by an intelligence insider—the former vice president of the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called), Klaus-Dieter Fritzsche (CSU). Fritzsche was in the headlines last year because he played down the threat posed by the far-right terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU). His arrogant demeanor before the NSU parliamentary committee of investigation caused a scandal.

The grand coalition is also preparing to act more aggressively abroad. The surprise move of Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) from the Ministry of Labour to Defence shows that the government will be increasingly involved in military operations abroad. In her new office, von der Leyen will oversee “international security policy”, Merkel stressed, thus complementing the new foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD).

As with previous governments, policy will be determined not so much by the guidelines of the coalition agreement as by worsening economic, social and international crises. Neither German participation in the war in Afghanistan, nor the antisocial measures of Agenda 2010, nor the multibillion-euro bailouts of the banks that marked the Gerhard Schröder (SPD) government and the first Merkel government were agreed on in a coalition agreement.

In all these cases, the government was responding to acute crises with wars abroad and attacks on the working class at home.

Once again, the government is again preparing for violent crises. The euro crisis is unresolved. Experts are warning of another financial crash as a result of speculation on the stock markets. At the same time, international tensions between the US and China, in the Middle East, and between Russia and Europe are intensifying.

Berlin has deliberately fueled protests in Ukraine, increasing strains in Germany’s relationship with Russia.

It is in this context that the ruling class is closing ranks. In this, the Left Party is taking on the role of safety valve. In the Bundestag, it criticizes the grand coalition, while at the state and local level, where it is in government, it works closely with it, supporting cuts and social attacks.

The government knows that its policies will inevitably trigger massive resistance. But this resistance requires a perspective and a political leadership. To oppose the grand coalition, workers need their own independent party—the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party).

As a section of the Fourth International, the PSG calls for the unification of workers and youth around the world in the struggle for a socialist society based on the principle of social equality, rather than the profit of a

few at the expense of the majority.



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