

German Greens, Christian Democrats seal coalition pact in Hesse

Helmut Arens**27 December 2013**

After several weeks of negotiations, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Green Party agreed to form a coalition government in the state of Hesse on December 17. On December 21, a majority of 75 percent of the Greens' state party congress voted to accept the outcome of the negotiations. A "small" party conference of the CDU unanimously voted in favour of the proposed coalition.

This clears the way for the first CDU-Greens government in a German state, apart from city-states like Berlin or Hamburg. This is particularly noteworthy because the CDU in Hesse is an arch-conservative party. It is the party of Alfred Dregger, Manfred Kanther, and Roland Koch, who are responsible for dirty money scandals and xenophobic campaigns.

A few weeks ago, the Greens were reviling CDU chairman Volker Bouffier in the election campaign. Since then, leading Greens candidate and designated finance minister Tarek al-Wazir has come to be on a first-name basis with Bouffier, who is being returned as prime minister.

The result of the coalition negotiations confirms that all the established parties agree on the basic political issues and constitute a common front against the interests of the majority of the population. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) would have been just as ready to form a coalition with the CDU in Hesse as they did in the grand coalition at the federal level. The Left Party constantly asserted its readiness to go along with the austerity policy demanded by the SPD and Greens, and enforce a statutory limit to state borrowing.

The Greens leave no doubt that their ultimate aim is to achieve a balanced budget in the shortest possible time. This was the common thread running through the CDU-Greens' coalition pact. After the talks ended, Tarek al-Wazir declared he was proud that this coalition would be the first government in fifty years to have a budget without further debts.

During the election campaign, the Greens were already the party most eager to insist on fiscal consolidation and compliance with a debt ceiling. Al-Wazir accused Volker Bouffier of lacking the Green's "courage to tackle the

country's financial problems". The result is a brutal programme of social cuts that will be implemented at the expense of workers and youth. The huge sum of €1 billion is to be saved every year until 2019.

Some €80 million is to be cut annually from expenditure on higher education. The sharpest attacks will target state employees. Public servants will be hit with a pay-freeze next year and salary increases limited to 1 percent subsequently. Moreover, supplementary benefits are to be trimmed in order to save €440 million. As many as 350 jobs will also be destroyed in state administration each year, in addition to the 800 positions already on the hit list. This is expected to cut €75 million in costs.

Because the structural budget deficit amounts to €1.5 billion and thus exceeds the targeted cuts of €1 billion, this coalition agreement is expected to be a prelude to another round of cuts.

During the election campaign, conflicting attitudes on environmental issues with the Frankfurt airport were considered an almost insurmountable obstacle to co-operation between the CDU and Greens. While the Greens claimed to oppose a further extension of the airport in the interest of local residents affected by the noise, the CDU always vehemently defended extension in the name of "job creation".

The coalition agreement for the state of Hesse spells out what the Greens really are: a right-wing bourgeois party.

Writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* under the title "CDU-Green-Embarrassment," Jens Schneider rails against the new era in Hesse. He complains that, in reality, the Greens have changed only "to the extent that they have now reached their end and blossomed into their true political colours".

The Greens, he writes, have "reduced themselves to an ornament for the modern bourgeois lifestyle". He wrote that the coalition was "a caricature of the transformation of the politics they promised. And the Greens expose themselves as a parody of what this party once represented and why it was founded... We don't need the Greens if all we want is a few petty improvements; the CDU can do that by themselves."

Only a person who has thoroughly misunderstood the character of the Greens could write like this. The Greens have not betrayed any of their ideals. It is rather the case that—as in the biblical story—the last of the lost sons has returned to the bosom of the bourgeois family.

The Greens emerged from the conflict between the bourgeoisie and its rebellious children in the wake of the social upheavals of 1968. They came from layers of the middle class, which had turned away from the SPD and trade unions in disappointment, when both these movements in the late 1970s renounced the promises of democratic and educational reform pledged by SPD chancellor Willi Brandt.

The Greens were never a left-wing movement. Even their initially spectacular protests as street fighters or woodland squatters—whether against airport extensions, nuclear power plants or armament programmes—could never hide the fact that the Green environmental movement was always conservative in its core values.

It never challenged the capitalist profit economy, which diametrically opposes a planned, environmentally friendly economy, but considered modern industry to be society's main problem. It described the fight against environmental degradation as a classless issue threatening humanity. The essence of its policy was always the rejection of the working class as the decisive force for social change.

This class character of the Green movement was already evident in the early 1980s, when plant closures provoked a wave of strikes and factory occupations in Hesse. At the time, the Greens organised a petit-bourgeois movement opposing the workers with their protests against the construction of a new runway at Frankfurt airport.

Prior to the founding of their federal party in 1980, Green deputies with sunflowers in hand had already taken seats in the state parliaments of Hamburg and Lower Saxony; in 1984, there were already 7,000 representatives of the Greens in municipal legislatures. A year later, Joschka Fischer—wearing trainers—took the oath of office in Wiesbaden to become environment minister of the first SPD-Green state government.

But trainers soon fell out of fashion and pinstripes were “in”. The Greens transformed themselves from a protest party into a pillar of the establishment. In 1998, Fischer became foreign minister in the SPD-Green federal government. From then on, the Greens supported Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010, creating western Europe's largest low-wage sector, and the Hartz IV laws, which set up a miserly unemployment benefits scheme. They often attacked the SPD from the right.

During the war in Yugoslavia, Fischer embarked on the task of persuading Green pacifists to support war. Spouting supposedly “humanitarian” arguments, he enabled German

armed forces to wage war for the first time since the Second World War and participate in the NATO bombing of Serbia.

In the wake of 9/11, the Greens defended anti-terror laws. After the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, when the conflict between the great powers increased, it was the Greens who most vehemently demanded German participation in combat operations. No mandate of the Germany army in Afghanistan has ever lacked decisive support from the Greens.

During NATO's war against Libya, they criticised the federal government again from the right, attacking it for abstaining in the vote on the Libyan resolution in the UN Security Council. When war against Syria almost broke out last July, the *taz* daily—a virtual mouthpiece for the Greens—devoted its pages to particularly shameless warmongers like publicist Micha Brumlik, who promoted the scenario of a blitzkrieg against Syria waged by Western troops with drones and cruise missiles.

The Greens have also faithfully supported the southern European policies of the European Union and the EU “troika” (European Commission, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund), which have been largely determined by Chancellor Merkel. They do this, despite the obvious fact that these policies have led to the worst social deprivation suffered by the southern European working class in peacetime.

The social base of the Greens is evolving in line with the country's social polarisation. The former street fighters are increasingly settling into comfortable, well-paid positions. The Greens have risen to become the party of the upper bourgeoisie.

The two Green Party “grey eminences”, Tom Koenigs and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, were both in favour of a CDU-Greens alliance. Koenigs told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that the much-vaunted “common culture of the SPD and Greens” never really existed in the past and today it exists even less so. According to Koenigs, “We are much closer to the urban CDU than the rural SPD”.



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