

Right-wing maneuvers follow collapse of government coalition talks in Berlin

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The maneuvers in Berlin following the collapse of talks to set up a so-called “Jamaica” coalition government—Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Green Party and Free Democratic Party (FDP)—are increasingly taking the form of a political conspiracy. Behind the backs of the population, the German ruling class is elaborating various scenarios that share a common aim: the establishment of an extreme-right government to forge ahead with policies of militarism, police repression and social austerity, while suppressing all socialist opposition.

Yesterday, the Social-Democratic federal president and former foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier invited Green Party leaders Simone Peter and Cem Özdemir for talks at his palace, Schloss Bellevue. Steinmeier then also met with the head of the FDP, Christian Lindner. The exact content of the talks remains secret, but it is clear that Steinmeier intervened with the aim of preventing new elections at any cost. “If you contend for political responsibility in elections, you cannot shirk such responsibility once you have it,” Steinmeier wrote in a grim statement addressed to German political parties published in his official register on Monday.

As head of state and a leading social democrat, Steinmeier speaks for influential circles of the ruling class. They fear that a new election and months of political uncertainty in Berlin could further destabilize Europe and severely undermine the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism.

At the opening of the German Bundestag (parliament) on Tuesday, Bundestag president Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) urged the various parties to “take responsibility for our country in Europe and in the world.” Europe, he declared, needs “a Germany capable of acting. Reactions from abroad show that Europe and many other countries in the world are waiting for us.” To face these challenges, he added, Germany needs “an effective government.”

Acting Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) made similar comments in the subsequent parliamentary debate on extending German military operations abroad. In the coming weeks, Gabriel said, no one should “provide evidence for those who rejoice in the weakening of a liberal and tolerant world order.” Germany is “a country that has a great deal of influence all over the world, sometimes more than we realize. But this is also bound up with the expectations of many other nations that we Germans exert this influence.”

Prior to the meeting planned between Steinmeier and SPD chairman Martin Schulz tomorrow, a growing chorus inside the SPD is calling for a continuation of Germany’s outgoing grand coalition government between the conservative parties (CDU and CSU) and the SPD. “We are called upon to consider under what conditions we could enter into a grand coalition,” declared SPD parliamentary spokesman for economic policy Bernd Westphal.

Another leading SPD parliamentarian, Johannes Fechner, agreed, and told the German business daily *Handelsblatt*: “The SPD should not hastily press for new elections and should take seriously the talks with the federal president.” The head of the social democratic faction in the state of Brandenburg, Mike Bischoff, also said it was possible for the SPD to enter a grand coalition government at the national level.

So far, the SPD leadership’s official position is that it will not renew its coalition with the CDU/CSU. This was reaffirmed by the SPD executive in Berlin on Monday. The parties of the so-called Jamaica coalition have maneuvered the country into a difficult situation, Schulz said, but based on its historically poor performance in the general election, the SPD was “not available to enter a grand coalition.”

Schulz and the SPD fear that a socialist perspective could gain mass influence if they continue their unpopular

coalition and allow the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to lead the opposition in the Bundestag. Beneath the surface, social relations are seething in Germany and throughout Europe, and there is growing opposition to policies of militarism, police repression and social devastation supported by all the capitalist parties. Thousands of workers are demonstrating this week against the plans of Siemens to slash nearly 7,000 jobs and shut down entire plants.

The Left Party in particular is alarmed by these developments. Like the other parties, it fears new elections and is responding to the collapse of the Jamaica talks and the intensification of class struggle with a sharp shift to the right. On Monday, the head of the Left Party parliamentary group Dietmar Bartsch called for a minority government headed by Merkel, which the Left Party would support. "The Left Party has tolerated a minority (CDU-led) administration in Saxony-Anhalt for several years. That's conceivable," Bartsch said in an interview with the news channel n-tv. His party was always ready to agree to "reasonable proposals," he said, but "the initiative rests with chancellor Angela Merkel."

Thuringia state premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) also campaigned for the rapid installation of an effective new federal government. "The challenges we face are too big to be put off for long. We cannot afford more months of uncertainty," he said, echoing Steinmeier and Schäuble. Ramelow said he considers "a minority government in Germany" to be "entirely conceivable."

Over the course of the talks on forming a "Jamaica" coalition, it has become ever clearer what type of "challenges" the German bourgeoisie is prioritizing. A few days ago, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) accused the "Jamaica" parties of "putting German security at risk" and failing to take seriously "the future viability of our country, against the background of increasingly dangerous developments in a complex world situation."

"Will the new government plan, initiate and finance timely and effective measures to restore the defense capability Germany requires in Central Europe?" the conservative paper asked. It continued: "Will Germany be willing and able to achieve what is the right of every state, the capacity to assert its own interests [i.e., to wage war], over the long term?"

Now the same very circles are cheering on the neo-liberal FDP for its role in ending the exploratory talks. To explain why the proposed coalition's policies were "ultimately unacceptable," FDP leader Christian Lindner

listed four objections: "The failure to do away with the solidarity tax [to support East Germany], no flexibility in the labor market, no renewable energy reform, no limits to the euro." If this was the last offer, then "it is the Free Democrats who prevented the black-yellow-green experiment from taking power," the FAZ wrote on Tuesday.

The far-right AfD has also welcomed the collapse of negotiations. "We think it's good that Jamaica is not happening, because it would have been a coalition of business as usual," declared AfD parliamentary group chairman Alexander Gauland. During the autumn federal election campaign, Gauland publicly demanded a positive reassessment of Hitler's Wehrmacht. According to Gauland: "Merkel has failed."

AfD neo-fascist André Poggenburg has already offered to support a CDU-CSU-FDP minority government, on condition that Merkel is removed as chancellor and a new government agrees to expand its domestic security policy and intensify its policies against refugees and immigrants.

It remains unclear how and in which direction the situation will move in the coming days—towards a renewal of the grand coalition, a minority government, or ultimately towards a fresh election. One thing is clear, however. If the initiative remains in the hands of the ruling class and its parties, a new right-wing government will emerge to undertake a massive buildup of police-state measures and launch fierce attacks on the working class—irrespective of which parties are involved.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) firmly rejects the political maneuvers all the parties in the Bundestag are carrying out behind the backs of the population. Amid political and economic upheaval recalling the end of the Weimar Republic, we are fighting to build the SGP as a new mass party of the working class, pledged to a socialist and internationalist solution to the current crisis.



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