

The Socialist Equality Party in Germany demands new elections

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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After the collapse of negotiations to form a so-called Jamaica coalition, talks are taking place behind the scenes in Berlin on the formation of a new government in what increasingly amounts to a political conspiracy. Bellevue Palace, the official residence of the German president, has become the epicenter of a political conspiracy. Under a shroud of secrecy, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is meeting with the leaders of all parties represented in parliament, including the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD). He is pursuing the goal of avoiding calling fresh elections.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) opposes these proceedings. The ruling elites cannot be allowed to resolve the political crisis and establish a new government among themselves. The result would be a right-wing, authoritarian regime beyond any democratic control and beholden to the interests of the capitalist state.

We demand fresh elections. Under present conditions, this is the only way in which the working class can intervene into political events, bring their interests to bear and combat the far right's political offensive. The SGP would utilize the election campaign to fight for a programme that expresses the interests of the German and international working class, connecting the struggle against war with the fight against capitalism, and provide a socialist way out of the blind alley in which the current social order finds itself.

The political crisis in Berlin has made clear that Germany is not an island of stability in a world that is increasingly characterised by war, social polarisation and growing nationalism. The cause of the crisis is not the petty squabbling between the potential coalition parties, but the deep gulf between the economic and geopolitical interests of the ruling class, which are upheld by all the parties represented in parliament, and the needs of the broad mass of the population.

Over the past four years, the grand coalition of the

Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social Democrats has initiated a massive military build-up, deployed the German army in new foreign interventions, imposed brutal austerity policies throughout Europe, and massively expanded rates of poverty and precarious work in Germany. These policies were deeply unpopular. The CDU, CSU and SPD were punished at the polls, losing a combined 14 percentage points and achieving their worst electoral result in seventy years.

But the attempt to extend Angela Merkel's chancellorship with the support of the Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens has only intensified the crisis.

The FDP represents those sections of the ruling elite that view the entry of the AfD into parliament as an opportunity to break with the policies of tactical compromise and mediation that have predominated in the Federal Republic and are embodied by Merkel. This is the reason why the FDP withdrew from the Jamaica coalition talks, causing them to collapse.

The model for FDP leader Lindner is not the social liberals of the 1970s, but rather today's Austria, where the hard-right Sebastian Kurz is forming a government with the right-wing extremist Freedom Party, the FDP's former sister party.

Lindner has received overwhelming praise from right-wing blogs and newspapers for causing the Jamaica talks to fail. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* gave "thanks to the FDP for not assisting the CDU/CSU/FDP/Green experiment to power." The right-wing publicist Wolfram Weiner praised Lindner for ending "the phrase-mongering republic as well as the history of the FDP as a pushover party," and based himself on the opinion of the stock market. This is "a better indicator of a political crisis than the drawing rooms in Berlin. While in the latter wounds are still being licked, the stock market took note of the end of Jamaica with relief."

President Steinmeier has now assumed the task of

bringing these shards together and developing a political mechanism to continue and intensify the policies of social cutbacks, militarism and the strengthening of the state apparatus. The Social Democrat is well suited to fulfill this role. As foreign minister, he played a major role in the revival of German militarism. In 2014, he proclaimed the “end of military restraint.” He went on to play a leading role in the right-wing coup in Ukraine, and army interventions in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Steinmeier wants to avoid calling fresh elections because he fears Germany will lose geopolitical influence in the event of a long, drawn-out government crisis, and because he wants to stop the mounting dissatisfaction from getting out of control and turning politically to the left. Tensions are seething below the surface. During this week alone, there have been demonstrations in several cities against mass layoffs at Siemens and Air Berlin.

The SPD has thus far resisted Steinmeier’s pressure for a continuation of the Grand Coalition. This is because it considers its chief task to be the establishment of a roadblock against the influence of left-wing and socialist ideas among the working class. The SPD fears that this perspective could win influence if it continues the discredited Grand Coalition and leaves the right-wing extremist AfD as the largest parliamentary opposition party.

However, the SPD’s resistance to a Grand Coalition is quickly melting away. Growing numbers of voices are urging the SPD to assume “responsibility for state policy” to end the crisis as quickly as possible. An alternative being discussed would see the SPD stay in opposition and tolerate a CDU/CSU or CDU/CSU/Green minority government.

This would result in the strengthening of the AfD. Since a minority government would be reliant on shifting majorities, it would collaborate with the right-wing extremists sooner rather than later. Andre Poggenburg, a leading AfD representative, has declared his readiness to tolerate a CDU/CSU/FDP minority government so long as Merkel is not chancellor and the government stops the policy of allowing refugees to reunite with their families in Germany.

All parliamentary parties showed on Tuesday that they are ready in principle to cooperate with the AfD. They established a so-called grand committee, in which all parties, from the AfD to the Left Party, are represented. This grand committee is tasked with ensuring the federal government’s capacity to act until a new government has

been finalised. It is first preparing to extend the military deployments in Mali, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, so as to, in the words of Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen, “set a strong international marker.” “That has the effect of forming a government,” the *Tagesspiegel* enthused. “A coalition of reason.”

The Left Party has responded to the government crisis by moving closer to the SPD. It also sees its most important task as blocking the influence of a socialist perspective in the working class. Left Party founder Oskar Lafontaine, who gave up his post as SPD general secretary 18 years ago and left the party, has now stated for the first time that he regrets this move. Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch and Bodo Ramelow, the Minister President of Thuringia, are even ready to tolerate a minority government lead by Merkel.

The crisis in Berlin recalls the last years of the Weimar Republic. At that time, a sustained social and political crisis culminated in a catastrophe, because the working class was paralysed by the false policies pursued by the SPD and Communist Party (KPD), and could not intervene independently into political events. The Nazis’ assumption of power in January 1933 was preceded by four years of bitter crises, maneuvers and intrigues during which one unpopular right-wing regime after another held power.

Hitler did not ultimately come to power because he enjoyed mass support—the Nazis’ had lost two million votes in the Reichstag elections and with 33 percent were far behind the combined result of the SPD and KPD. Hitler owed his appointment to a conspiracy in the office of Reich President Paul von Hindenburg, whose election had been supported by the SPD.

The most important prerequisite to prevent a repetition of such a catastrophe and halt the political shift to the right is the building of a socialist party in the working class. The SGP, in raising the demand for new elections, will seek to expose the real aims of the bourgeois parties—which includes the SDP, the Greens and the Lefts—and build support for a genuine socialist alternative to capitalism, imperialist war, and authoritarianism.



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