

German political establishment and big business call for grand coalition government

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Following the failure of the exploratory talks on the formation of a Jamaica coalition, influential sections of the ruling elite spoke out against new elections and in favour of a grand coalition over the weekend. They are pursuing the goal of continuing their unpopular policies of militarism, the build-up of a police state apparatus, and social counterrevolution, in spite of mounting opposition among the population.

The right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Horst Seehofer, as well as the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/CSU parliamentary leader Volker Kauder, appealed Sunday for a grand coalition. This is “the best variant for Germany,” Seehofer told *Bild am Sonntag*. “Better at least than Jamaica, new elections, or a minority government.” Kauder noted on the Bericht aus Berlin programme that “proceedings in parliament [are] much easier to direct with a coalition than with accidental majorities.”

Leading business representatives struck a similar tone. Volkswagen executive board member Herbert Diess told *Handelsblatt* that new elections would be “not a good solution...because they would take far too much time.” He also favoured a new instalment of the grand coalition, adding, “All participants are familiar with it. Fewer points of conflict are to be expected than in a Jamaica alliance. Two partners are easier than four.” The SPD does not need any further legitimisation of this through new elections; “They just need to give themselves a jolt.”

The Social Democrats long ago gave themselves the necessary “jolt.” At least since the discussion between Social Democrat leader Martin Schulz and the SPD German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Thursday, the SPD leadership has been feverishly working to enforce its change of course among the party membership.

On Friday evening, Schulz informed the SPD youth movement (Jusos) at their congress in Saarbrücken, “If the president calls upon me for a discussion, you will of course understand that I cannot and will not dismiss a desire to talk.” What will result in the end is “open,” but the SPD has to identify shortcomings in many political areas and consider how they can be resolved, he added. “And then the question is posed: will we do this if we get the levers of power for this or are we not going to do so?”

The Jusos, which had described themselves as a “bulwark against grand coalitions,” responded to Schulz’s speech with thunderous applause.

Other representatives of the party’s “left wing” indicated that they would certainly be available for continued cooperation with the CDU/CSU. “New elections would be a sign of poverty,” deputy party leader Ralf Stegner said. The existing majorities in parliament have to “be used creatively,” he added. The SPD should “consider new forms of cooperation” and play a “constructive role.”

Two key issues are behind the SPD’s change of course. The SPD fears that new elections and a lengthy period of political uncertainty could destabilise conditions in Europe and undermine the global interests of German imperialism. At a meeting organised by *Die Zeit* in Hamburg on Sunday former SPD leader and current Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel stated that the SPD has the important task of ensuring that “there is a stable situation in Germany.” He did not consider new elections to be the best option, because a permanent state of affairs in which “an unstable situation in the centre of Europe” exists could not be tolerated.

This approach is also being supported by the Left Party. On Saturday, Thuringia Minister President Bodo Ramelow called on the CDU and CSU to agree as

quickly as possible on a governing coalition. “I would consider a months-long period of self-inspection to be a major burden for our democracy,” warned Ramelow at the state party congress of the Left Party in Ilmenau. “I hear that the SPD wants to poll its membership—then they should please get it done quickly.”

The Left Party’s two parliamentary leaders in the Bundestag took a similar view. Sahra Wagenknecht blustered in the NDR programme “Das!” that under existing conditions, new elections are “a farce” that “the people [should] not be expected to put up with.” Although she feels it is not “good” that the SPD is “once again on a trip to enter a grand coalition,” the SPD’s entire election campaign had been “grand coalitionist.” Her colleague Dietmar Bartsch has also accepted the continuation of a grand coalition. “The CDU/CSU/SPD can expect stiff pressure from a left social opposition,” he told *Die Welt*.

The SPD leadership initially spoke out against the continuation of the unpopular coalition with the CDU and CSU. This was driven above all by the fear of the development of a socialist opposition in the working class. Under the pressure of events—just within the past week thousands of workers demonstrated at Siemens, Air Berlin and ThyssenKrupp against mass layoffs and plant shutdowns—the SPD and the ruling class as a whole has adopted an entirely new orientation. All of the capitalist parties are closing ranks so as to suppress, with the assistance of the trade unions, mounting opposition in the working class.

President Steinmeier will invite the leaders of all parties to Bellevue Palace over the coming days for secret talks. Green parliamentary leaders Katrin Göring-Eckhardt and Anton Hofreiter are invited today, followed by Kauder and, in the early evening, Wagenknecht and Bartsch. SPD parliamentary leader Andrea Nahles will follow on Tuesday morning. Direct talks between current Chancellor Angela Merkel, Schulz and Seehofer are to take place on Thursday.

To enforce its policies of social cutbacks and a military build-up, the ruling class is relying, as it did in the 1930s, increasingly on right-wing extremist forces. According to media reports, Steinmeier will also invite AfD parliamentary leader Alexander Gauland, who openly called during the election campaign for a positive evaluation of Hitler’s Wehrmacht. The newly established grand committee in the Bundestag, which is

supposed to guarantee the parliament’s capacity to act until a new government has been established, has AfD representation. A continuation of the grand coalition would make the AfD the leader of the opposition in the Bundestag.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) firmly opposes the manoeuvring of all parliamentary parties behind the backs of the people and demands new elections. There is absolutely no democratic support for the continuation of the policies of militarism and social attacks. The CDU/CSU and SPD achieved their worst results since the founding of the Federal Republic in September, losing a combined 14 percentage points of the vote.

In its statement, the SGP explained that the shift to the right can only be stopped through the creation of a socialist party in the working class. The SGP raised the demand for new elections “to expose the true goals of the bourgeois parties—including the SPD, Left Party and Greens—and to build a socialist alternative to capitalism, war and authoritarianism.”



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