German conservatives and Social Democrats prepare formation of far-right government

Peter Schwarz
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Germany has not had an elected government for more than a hundred days. This surpasses the previous record in 2013, when 86 days elapsed between election day and the swearing in of the new government.

An end in the crisis is not in sight. Following a series of initial contact meetings, exploratory talks will begin next week between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) on the continuation of the grand coalition. An SPD party congress scheduled for January 21 will then decide whether to initiate formal coalition talks. Experts suggest it could take up to two months after this until a new coalition agreement is completed. But it is also possible that the talks could collapse.

The reason for the drawn-out crisis is not political differences between the three parties. They largely agree on all fundamental issues and are cooperating seamlessly in the acting government. The reason is that they are preparing a sharp shift to the right for which no support exists among the population.

This is fuelling sharp tensions. In the SPD in particular, the fear is growing that the party could implode like its sister parties in France, Greece and many other countries if it continues in the same government coalition following its worst electoral performance in 70 years.

Others are provoking the crisis in hopes of producing an atmosphere of impatience and frustration that can be exploited to carry out a fundamental political realignment. The voices calling for an end to the Merkel era are growing ever louder. After 12 years in power, they view the chancellor, notwithstanding her right-wing policies, as too willing to compromise and too weak. They look longingly at Austria, where 31-year-old Sebastian Kurz took over the conservative Austrian People's Party in a coup and led the party into a governing coalition with the far-right Freedom Party.

This was made particularly clear in a guest commentary by Alexander Dobrindt published in Thursday's edition of *Die Welt*. The chairman of the CSU parliamentary group is also the head of the CDU/CSU negotiating team for the exploratory talks. His comment could have just as easily appeared in the right-wing extremist *Junge Freiheit* newspaper or another Alternative for Germany-aligned (AfD) publication. He called for a "conservative revolution" and spared his readers none of the slogans from the AfD, Pegida or other far-right groups.

Dobrindt urged the "defence of our Christian Western dominant culture," described "home and fatherland" as the "roots of our identity," praised the "national feeling" as "a gift to our country," and demanded the demarcation of "our community of values" from "other world outlooks."

Combining this Calvinist and racist filth with appeals for a neoliberal economic policy and a strong state, Dobrindt insisted that "self-responsibility" is the "driving force for achievement" and the "social state" has the task of imposing "incentives for achievement." He stated further, "We want to strengthen private property."

"We therefore want a strong state which protects the citizens' freedom … we stand side by side with our police officers and armed forces," he wrote. For Dobrindt, "freedom" mainly means "security."

Dobrindt, who studied sociology, knows what he is talking about. He did not accidentally employ the concept of a "conservative revolution." The concept was developed by ideological tendencies during the Weimar Republic which advocated anti-liberal, anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian standpoints, and paved the way for the Nazis. Dobrindt believes the time has come to rehabilitate these positions. Following the "left-wing revolution of 1968" 50 years ago, Dobrindt wrote, "left-wing activists and thinkers [have] secured key positions in the arts, culture, the media, and politics." It is now time for a "bourgeois conservative turn."

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He is not alone in calling for a return to the most reactionary German traditions. Former SPD leader and current Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel demanded in *Der Spiegel* three weeks ago that his party adopt the ideas of "identity," "dominant culture" and "home" from the conservatives. And in the Left Party, the wing led by Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine has long used similar arguments to advocate sealing off the borders against refugees.

With this shift to the right, the ruling class and its parties are preparing for bitter class struggles. The times when they could smother and maintain control over the class struggle with the aid of the SPD, Left Party and trade unions are over. The past 20 years, during which time the SPD has been responsible for labour and social affairs legislation apart from only one four-year interruption, have been characterised by rising poverty, an expanding low-wage sector, increasing stress, crumbling infrastructure, and the obscene enrichment of a tiny minority at the top of society. As a result, the SPD's share of the vote fell from 40 percent to 20 percent over the past two decades.

The Left Party, which has always seen itself as a potential coalition partner for the SPD and bears joint responsibility for the social attacks in the areas where it has participated in government, was unable to profit from this, losing 450,000 voters in the federal election to the AfD. This far-right party was able to partially exploit social anger. But the AfD advocates a pro-capitalist programme and serves to assist the ruling elite in shifting the entire political spectrum to the right.

The second reason for the political shift to the right is Germany's return to militarism and great power policies. Militarism, which is deeply despised in Germany following the horrors of two world wars, can only be enforced by means of a strengthening of the state apparatus, right-wing propaganda and domestic political repression.

The SPD is playing a leading role in this. Former foreign minister and current president Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) initiated the "end of military restraint" four years ago. Gabriel, who succeeded Steinmeier at the Foreign Ministry, called in a keynote foreign policy address in early December for a German great power policy which employs military methods and relies on sober "political-strategic analyses" rather than "moral and normative imperatives."

Ever since, articles and analyses have been published with increased frequency calling for the "rule of law, human rights, multilateralism, and adherence to global agreements" to be curtailed—i.e., a return to the criminal methods of the Nazi era—so as to "achieve foreign policy goals … in Germany's interests" (*Der Spiegel*).

This is why the talks on forming a new government are increasingly assuming the character of a political conspiracy. The political parties have vowed to keep all negotiations secret. Barely anything about the issues really at stake—a major military build-up, foreign policy, a new round of cuts, social attacks and layoffs—is being made public.

All parties, from the Left Party to the AfD, agree that new elections must be avoided. The Socialist Equality Party in Germany opposes these proceedings and demands new elections. "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 wrote in late November.

This has since been confirmed. New elections are, as we wrote at the time, "Under present conditions … 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."

This author also recommends:

The Socialist Equality Party in Germany demands new elections

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