

German trade unions beat the drums for another grand coalition

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As popular opposition grows against the outgoing grand coalition between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, the unions are beating the drums for a new version of the same political alliance to assume power. On Monday, German Trade Union Federation (DGB) leader Reiner Hoffmann called on the Social Democratic Party (SPD) to enter formal coalition negotiations with the Christian Democrats (CDU / CSU).

“On the whole, this grand coalition is better than what we would have ever achieved with a Jamaica coalition,” (named for the party colours of the Christian Democrats, Free Democratic Party and the Greens, which correspond to those of the Jamaican flag). In comparison, an alliance between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats would be of “far more substance” for workers, Hoffmann told radio station MDR aktuell.

Of course, there were also weak points, added the DGB boss. But you cannot “close your eyes and say: I don’t accept all that and leave it all alone.” That would not be appropriate. Hoffmann emphasized that the debate in the SPD was “completely understandable and correct”. He assumed, however, that the SPD leadership would receive full support at the upcoming party congress on 21 January.

The chairman of the IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie union, representing workers in mining, chemicals and energy, Michael Vassiliadis, expressed similar views on Deutschlandfunk. He recommended that “the SPD bring forward these important projects for workers”. That could “now be done in the grand coalition”. Opposition was “not rehab”, offering better opportunities to “undergo programmatic renewal”.

The “substance” and “programmatic renewal” that the unions have in mind was shown by the “Results of

the exploratory talks between the CDU, CSU and SPD” published last Friday, which are meant to serve as the basis for a new edition of the grand coalition. The content of the 28-page paper are not “important projects for workers”, but the programmatic cornerstones for the formation of the most right-wing government in Germany since the end of the Second World War.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has already commented in detail on the objectives of the CDU and SPD.

On refugee policy, the demand of the extreme right for a cap on refugees was adopted, and it was agreed “that the immigration figures will not exceed a yearly span of 180,000 to 220,000”.

On social and financial policy, the austerity course that has driven millions of workers and young people in Germany and throughout Europe to despair in recent years will be intensified. Formulations such as, we want to strengthen “the EU’s competitiveness in the context of globalization” and, “We want to push for fiscal control in the EU”, speak volumes.

Internally, the powers of the state apparatus are being massively increased to keep the growing opposition to social inequality, militarism and war under control and, if necessary, to brutally suppress it. The CDU/CSU and the SPD want to “strengthen the federal and state security agencies...by an additional 15,000 posts” and “create at least 2,000 new jobs in the judicial system (courts, prosecutors, law enforcement agencies)”.

On foreign policy, the grand coalition wants to push ahead with the return of German militarism it announced at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. For the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) to be able to properly fulfil the “orders given to it in all dimensions, we will provide the soldiers with the best possible

equipment, training and support,” the paper states. In addition, the CDU/CSU and SPD announced an expansion of the Bundeswehr’s military operations in Mali, Afghanistan and Syria.

In his interview with Deutschlandfunk, Vassiliadis emphasized that the trade unions fully support the offensive of German militarism. There had been “much programmatic and important work done by former foreign minister [Frank-Walter Steinmeier], by the current foreign minister [Sigmar Gabriel],” (both SPD) he said. In this way, Vassiliadis is lining up behind the aggressive great power plans of the two social democratic architects of the new foreign policy course.

Just a few days earlier, in an interview with newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, Gabriel had declared, “in a world of carnivores, vegetarians have it very hard”, and explicitly demanded that Germany pursue an independent war policy. Germany could no longer rely on “the French, British and above all the Americans enforcing our interests in the world”. The reliance on the US to assist Germany in case of war should not be over-emphasised, said Gabriel. “In an uncomfortable world, we will not be able to make ourselves comfortable as Europeans and wait for the US.”

The support of the trade unions for the return of German militarism and a new edition of the grand coalition comes as no surprise. As early as the beginning of 2013, the then-DGB leader Michael Sommer had closed ranks at a joint press conference with then-Defence Minister Thomas De Maizière (CDU) and the Bundeswehr. Trade union bureaucrats like Hoffmann and Vassiliadis are themselves leading Social Democrats and work closely with the SPD leadership at Willy Brandt House (the SPD headquarters in Berlin) to enforce social attacks.

Workers and young people must understand the reactionary policy of the trade unions as a declaration of war. In the current industrial disputes in the metal and electrical industries and in the protests against mass layoffs and factory closures at Siemens and Bombardier, the unions are not on the side of the workers, but on the side of the bourgeois government and capitalist corporations.

For that reason, workers who want to fight for their jobs and to improve their wages and working conditions must organize themselves in independent action committees and establish contact with workers in

struggle in other countries. Everywhere in Europe, the eruption of class struggle is rumbling just beneath the surface, and opposition to anti-social and militarist policies pursued by all capitalist governments and unions is growing. At the end of last year, Ford workers in Romania rebelled against the company-controlled union in a wildcat strike, and in recent days, tens of thousands of workers in Greece have been striking and protesting against the social cuts and the limitation of the right to strike by the pseudo-left Syriza government.

At the same time, the defence of wages and jobs demands a political struggle against the union-backed grand coalition in Germany. The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) calls for the current protest strikes and demonstrations to be extended, and for the beginning of a broad political mobilization for new elections. Under no circumstances should the CDU/CSU and SPD be allowed to implement their reactionary plans.

The SGP is stepping up its campaign for new elections and its fight in the working class for a socialist programme, with the following demands at its centre:

- * No to another war! Stop Germany's return to aggressive great power politics!

- * Expropriate the super-rich, the banks and the corporations! End poverty and exploitation--for social equality!

- * Defend democratic rights and the right to asylum! No to increased state powers and surveillance!

- * No to nationalism and the European Union! For the United Socialist States of Europe!

The most important prerequisite for the realization of this programme is the establishment of a new mass socialist party. We appeal to all workers and young people in Germany who reject the attacks on jobs and wages and want to fight against capitalism, war and oppression to contact the SGP and take up the fight for a socialist alternative.



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