

German SPD congress agrees to initiate coalition talks with conservatives

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At the German Social Democrats' special party congress in Bonn on Sunday, a majority of the approximately 600 delegates voted in favour of the initiation of coalition talks to form Germany's new government with the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). A total of 362 delegates, or 56.4 percent of those eligible to vote, voted for talks, while 279 voted against.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Bonn party congress, acting-Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) appeared before the media at Konrad Adenauer House in Berlin to declare that she welcomed the SPD delegates' decision. The way is now clear for coalition talks, she said, and she will strive for a strong government. The further course of negotiations is to be determined at a meeting Monday with the CDU's sister party, the CSU, before talks can begin with the SPD.

CSU leader Horst Seehofer spoke in similar terms.

The Bonn party congress was a disgusting spectacle. In their speeches, leading SPD officials praised the document agreed with the CDU/CSU after exploratory talks and tried to sell it as an indication of a better future. Chief among them was SPD leader Martin Schulz, who piled one lie on top of another in his approximately hour-long speech to the congress. He claimed, among other things, that the decisions represented a break with austerity policies in Europe, more democracy and a more humane refugee policy.

The exact opposite is true. The document agreed after exploratory talks is a blueprint for the installation of the most right-wing government in Germany since the downfall of Hitler's Third Reich. The 28-page document proposes to step up militarist policies, strengthen the domestic police apparatus and intensify social attacks. On refugee policy, the parties explicitly adopted one of the far-right's demands by agreeing to

an upper limit, stating in the document that "migration numbers will not exceed the annual range of 180,000 to 220,000."

On social and financial policy, the austerity policies that have plunged millions of workers and young people into destitution in recent years will be intensified. Key passages, such as, "We want to strengthen the EU's competitiveness in the context of globalization," and, "We want to press ahead with fiscal controls in the EU," leave no doubt about this.

Domestically, the building of a police state to suppress growing opposition to social inequality, militarism and war is at the heart of the programme. The CDU/CSU and SPD want to "expand by an additional 15,000 jobs... the security agencies at the federal and state level" and "at least 2,000 jobs in the judiciary (courts, state prosecutors and law enforcement)."

On foreign policy, the grand coalition is planning to press ahead with the return of German militarism, which was proclaimed at the Munich Security Conference four years ago. So that the German army "can expertly fulfill its assigned tasks in all of their dimensions, we will make available the best possible equipment, training and care for the soldiers," the document states.

The SPD is the driving force behind this. Shortly before the party congress, Hans-Peter Bartels, the SPD parliamentary ombudsman for the military, attacked the CDU-led Defence Ministry from the right. "The hard currency in which the success of the defence minister [Ursula Von der Leyen] will be measured is the army's readiness to deploy. And this has not really gotten better over the past four years, but rather worse," he complained in the news magazine *Focus*. While foreign interventions with small troop contingents have gone

well, the army as a whole is “not currently deployable in the context of collective defence,” he continued. The “soldiers’ deficit” has to be “quickly overcome.”

At the party congress, Schulz demanded the swift implementation of a joint European militarist and great power policy in cooperation with France. “Only a strong and decisive SPD can make our country and Europe strong,” he declared, adding that “there is much to do.” Europe is waiting “for a Germany that is aware of its responsibility for Europe and acts decisively, and this will not be possible without the SPD,” he added. French President Emmanuel Macron’s proposals are waiting “on the table.”

The fear that German imperialism’s interests in the Middle East could be undermined by a further period of months without a stable government, while opposition among the population grows, was written all over the SPD leaders’ faces. “The SPD has assumed responsibility for the state. Some of the parties giving us advice have never been there,” Schulz warned at one point. This was a reference to the SPD’s approval of war credits in 1914 and the brutal suppression of the 1918 November Revolution by the government 100 years ago.

SPD General Secretary Andrea Nahles delivered a hysterical appeal for continuation of the grand coalition and against new elections. She said she had “no fear of new elections, but...fear of the questions from citizens.” One would be “running with the same programme,” and voters would “turf us out.” The truth is that “many of our European social democratic parties, whether they have governed or not, are stuck in the same malaise.”

Fear of the Social Democrats’ potential collapse also dominated the delegates who voted against the coalition. The issue is “as in the past, the tremendous crisis of trust in our party,” warned Kevin Kühnert, leader of the Social Democratic youth. The further he traveled from Willy Brandt House, he added, “the more irreconcilable the tone.”

At the same time, he said he had no fundamental differences with the party programme. “Of course, there are negotiating successes in the document,” and “of course this is why we do politics,” insisted Kühnert.

The Left Party fears it will face the same fate as the SPD. “I consider it to be an historical error that the SPD wants to enter a grand coalition again,” stated Left

Party leader Katja Kipping on Twitter. The threat is of “the atomisation of German Social Democracy.” She said this “with great disappointment, because an SPD result below 20 percent would be a defeat for all progressive forces to the left of the CDU.”

Last September, the SPD scored its worst election result since World War II, with just 20.5 percent of the vote. A survey by the polling firm Forsa found that the SPD would receive the votes of only 18 percent “if a federal election took place next Sunday.” This is the lowest-ever level of support for the SPD.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) will intensify its campaign for new elections and fight for a socialist alternative to the grand coalition. Only in this way can the policies of militarism, state repression and social counterrevolution, which are essentially supported by all of the parties in parliament, be stopped.



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