

Germany: SPD leadership seeks to fool party members in vote on grand coalition

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The Social Democratic Party (SPD) has recently sent out ballot papers to its approximately 464,000 members asking them to vote on a new edition of the grand coalition with the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU). The binding vote on the coalition agreement, negotiated between the parties, runs until March 2.

The ballot paper is accompanied by a three-page letter from the party executive, signed by all 37 members of the SPD negotiating team. It explicitly calls on members to vote yes. Opponents of the coalition agreement, however, have not been given any opportunity to explain their position.

Clearly, the party executive has considerable fears that even its own party members would reject the grand coalition if they knew only part of the actual plans agreed by the CDU/CSU and SPD.

That is why the executive is putting so much effort into disguising the true content of the coalition agreement. The grand coalition agreed to implement the largest military rearmament since the Second World War, police state measures, along with deep-going social cuts. But in the letter from the executive, and an accompanying full-colour brochure, the agreement is instead presented as a paradise for families, workers and senior citizens.

Apparently, the SPD leadership assumes that its own membership and the population as a whole can be taken for idiots.

Under the heading “For a democratic and social Europe”, the executive claims that the coalition parties have decided on “an end to the austerity dictates”. On the contrary, the coalition agreement states that the “Stability and Growth Pact” and the “European Stability Mechanism” will be maintained, the two most important instruments of torture in European austerity policy. The designated SPD finance minister, Olaf

Scholz, has already stated in newsweekly *Der Spiegel* that he will continue the rigid austerity programme of his predecessor, Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU).

In the area of education, the letter from the executive promises to increase spending by €11 billion, or €2.75 billion a year. That, too, is a deliberate deception. These €11 billion actually refer to the 51st finance plan of the previous federal government, which was decided by the coalition parties expressly as the basis of their further agreements.

This finance plan does not foresee any additional investment in education and research, but rather cuts. From 2017 to 2021, spending is expected to drop from €17.65 billion to €17.23 billion. Considering the expected rate of inflation, these are massive cuts. The €2.75 billion now promised will be counted towards this reduced budget.

The same applies to spending for families. Here, the letter lists alleged additional investment in child support, nursing care, etc., but conceals the fact the budget of the Ministry for Families, Youth, Women and Senior Citizens will be reduced from €9.52 billion in 2017 to €9.16 billion euros in 2021, according to the 51st finance plan.

The letter of the SPD leadership completely fails to mention that an incoming grand coalition would adopt the refugee policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). From an upper limit for accepting refugees to the “creation of reception, decision-making and deportation facilities”, carrying out “consistent deportation”, the “effective protection of internal borders” to the barbaric abolition of family reunification for refugees from regions affected by civil war, all this is in the coalition agreement.

One of the few departments set to receive more money is the interior ministry. After raising its budget

by more than €1 billion to €8.98 billion in 2017, the budget is set to rise to more than €9 billion by 2021. The coalition agreement includes 15,000 new security forces, “better police equipment,” the “extension of DNA analysis,” “video surveillance at hotspots” and the strengthening and centralisation of the security agencies and secret services.

Above all, however, the letter from the SPD party executive covers up what stands at the heart of the coalition agreement: a massive armaments programme for the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and the creation of a European army. While spending for education and families is being cut, the defence budget is set to be massively increased. At 14.5 percent, it is rising faster than any other department. After the defence budget was increased in 2017 by almost €2 billion to €37 billion, it stands to increase to €42.39 billion by 2021, according to the finance plan.

But even that is not all. In an act unprecedented in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the SPD and CDU/CSU have decided that all possible budgetary leeway will be used as a priority for arming the Bundeswehr and, in the same proportion, for civilian crisis intervention. If one takes last year’s budget surplus of €10.4 billion as the reference value, this alone would result in further expenditure for the Bundeswehr amounting to €20.8 billion in the coming legislative period. The defence budget in 2021 would then be around €50 billion.

The coalition agreement also stipulates that Germany adhere to the NATO agreement to increase the defence budget to 2 percent of GDP by 2024, which would correspond to more than €70 billion, depending on economic developments. With the prioritisation of military expenditure, the SPD and CDU/CSU have created an instrument with which every cut in spending on families, education or pensions brings the Bundeswehr one step closer to achieving this goal.

Not only have the coalition partners committed themselves to horrendous military spending for NATO, but they have also decided to build an “Army of the Europeans.” The first step is to develop the “permanent structured cooperation (PESCO),” the “European Defence Fund” and a “properly equipped EU headquarters for civilian and military missions.”

This massive rearmament programme cannot be financed even with generously calculated budget

surpluses. Since the coalition parties have ruled out new debts and the taxation of the rich, the funds can only be raised through cuts in other areas. The question therefore arises, what cuts have already been agreed in secret talks in order to launch the European armaments machinery that the grand coalition has decided upon. SPD members have a right to know what has been negotiated if they are now to vote on the future government.

This also applies to many other questions, which are only partly hinted at in the coalition agreement. For example, it states that Germany has “an interest in participating in strategic discussions and planning processes” about nuclear weapons. What was agreed here? Are there plans for the construction of a German nuclear bomb? Are there any agreements with President Emmanuel Macron regarding German participation in the French *Force de Frappe* ? These questions must be answered.

Such questions are also not being raised by the opponents of the grand coalition within the SPD. The Juso (Young Socialist) Chairman Kevin Kühnert says he has no differences with this programme, but only believes that it can be better carried out by a CDU minority government, with the SPD as the formal opposition. He has explicitly backed the military upgrade plans and praised the results of the negotiations.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party), on the other hand, demands the disclosure of all the secret talks by parties to the grand coalition. All necessary information must be made available to SPD members so they can make a judgement about the coalition contract.

The SGP rejects the grand coalition. The only way to stop its reactionary policies is to mobilise the working class for new elections and a socialist programme. Only in this way can workers be educated about the reactionary character of the grand coalition and the struggle against social cuts and war be won.



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