

German Social Democratic Party votes to form grand coalition

Johannes Stern
5 March 2018

The membership of Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) voted Sunday by a large majority in favour of a grand coalition in the party's membership ballot. Of the more than 363,000 SPD members who voted, more than two thirds backed a continuation of the alliance with Germany's conservative parties, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union.

The result was announced by SPD treasurer Dietmar Nietan in the SPD's Berlin headquarters on Sunday morning. "We now have clarity: the SPD will enter the next federal government," enthused acting SPD leader Olaf Scholz.

With this vote, the SPD has cleared the way for the formation of the most right-wing government in Germany since the downfall of the Nazis. A new instalment of the grand coalition would not simply continue the policies of its predecessor, but escalate its hated policies of militarism, the strengthening of the police state apparatus and social counterrevolution, and enforce these policies by resorting to increasingly authoritarian methods against growing opposition among the population.

In the coalition agreement, which the *World Socialist Web Site* analysed carefully, the CDU/CSU and SPD committed to increase military spending to more than €70 billion per year by 2024, hire 15,000 police officers, and adopt the far-right Alternative for Germany's (AfD) refugee policy. In addition, the "new beginning for Europe" proclaimed in the title of the agreement includes the intensification of austerity policies, which the grand coalition used during the last legislative period to drive millions of people in Germany and across Europe into poverty.

The ruling class celebrated the SPD vote and is pressing for a rapid implementation of the right-wing programme. Acting German Chancellor Angela Merkel

(CDU), whose re-election is expected on March 14, congratulated the SPD for "this clear result" on Twitter. CSU leader Horst Seehofer, who will pursue a hard-line law-and-order agenda as the new Interior Minister or "homeland minister," commented, "The result is a good basis for a stable federal government. Every opportunity for Germany's renewal now exists."

The meaning of this statement was underscored by the statements from several leading business representatives. Eric Schweitzer, president of the German Chamber of Industry and Trade (DIHK) stated that for German businesses, it is "good, that the process of forming a government is now at an end." The CDU/CSU and SPD secure "the one thing that the business world expects from Germany: stable relations and a high degree of reliability." He demanded that "businesses be given noticeable tax relief so they do not lose out in the international race for investment."

Thilo Brodtmann, head of operations for the German Association of Machine and Plant Manufacturers (VDMA), took a similar view. "After the tortuous months of government formation," the message must now be "wake up GroKo [grand coalition], time is running out."

German big business and the tax system must be made competitive in order to enforce German imperialism's interests against its rivals around the globe. "While the US has initiated a trade war and China is challenging our position as a leading industrial power, we have been unnecessarily focused on ourselves," he stated.

Since the grand coalition has absolutely no democratic legitimacy—it was voted out of office during the federal election and is now supported by less than a third of voters—the ruling elite is closing ranks to enforce their militarist and anti-working class agenda.

All parliamentary groups of the governing parties, as well as those of the so-called opposition, are collaborating closely with these right-wing policies.

Kevin Kühnert, leader of the Social Democrats' youth movement (Jusos), said on Sunday he would accept the result. "Undoubtedly disappointment" dominated his feelings and many other Jusos today, but they are "not bad losers." They will "keep a close eye on the government [...] and ensure that concrete policies emerge from the many unbinding declarations of intent."

Kühnert's campaign against the grand coalition was never intended to organise political resistance to the right-wing policies of the CDU/CSU and SPD, but rather motivated by the fear that the SPD would continue to lose support if it joins another grand coalition. Following the vote, Kühnert and the Jusos have given their full backing to the grand coalition so as to prevent the further decline of the SPD and to block a socialist development in the working class.

The Greens and Left Party, which are pursuing the same goal, responded similarly. Former Greens leader Cem Özdemir wrote on Twitter, "Let's go, GroKo, best of luck." The Greens are a "constructive opposition" and are "ready for dialogue." Dietmar Bartsch, parliamentary group leader for the Left Party, wrote on Facebook, "SPD rank-and-file gives go ahead to continuation of conservative/SPD coalition. For Chancellor Merkel, the issue is: on to the last fight! I expect the conservatives and SPD to immediately free the country from six months of stalling and form the government without delay."

The far-right AfD, which becomes the largest opposition party in parliament with the SPD vote, called on the coalition to transition to enforcing government policy. It "is not the government we would have liked, but it is right to form a new government and not stumble into new elections," said AfD parliamentary group leader Alexander Gauland. "Mass immigration, internal security and a European policy" are also key issues for the AfD and they would "look at these things closely" and "place the opposition's chief focus on them."

The installation of the grand coalition is a dangerous turning point in post-war German history. The SPD and conservative parties have already largely accepted the far right's programme and will cooperate even more

closely with Gauland and co. in the future. With the support of the Free Democrats, Greens and Left Party, they elected three representatives of the AfD's most extreme right-wing faction to head parliamentary committees in early February.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, which has conducted an intensive campaign against the coalition agreement over recent weeks and for new elections, will step up its struggle against the government and its stooges in parliament. We base ourselves on the opposition in the population to social attacks, militarism and war, which must now be politically organized. In the final analysis, a relapse into dictatorship and war can be prevented only through the construction of an independent mass socialist movement and the overthrow of capitalism by the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact