

Germany: Merkel's re-election and the fight against militarism, welfare cuts and dictatorship

Johannes Stern
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With the re-election of Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) as chancellor and the swearing-in of the new federal cabinet by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD), the most right-wing German government has taken office since the fall of the Third Reich.

The renewed alliance of the SPD and the Christian Democratic "Union" (CDU /CSU), forged in a six-month political conspiracy behind the backs of the people, will not simply continue the policies of the old grand coalition. It will dramatically escalate the return of German militarism and the establishment of a modern police state and carry out a new round of brutal social attacks against the working class.

The coalition agreement, signed by the leaders of the Union and the SPD on Monday, almost doubles the military budget by 2024 and envisages hiring more than 10,000 new police officers. Moreover, the coalition parties have agreed to adopt the far-right Alternative for Germany's (AfD's) refugee policy and tighten the austerity dictates with which the German government has already driven millions of workers and young people across Europe into poverty, unemployment and despair in recent years.

Under conditions of explosive economic, social and geopolitical tensions, the ruling class is not only pushing for the swift implementation of the reactionary coalition programme, but demanding the government go even further. For example, business daily *Handelsblatt* called for an "Upgrade of the Grand Coalition" on Tuesday, commenting, "If Merkel's third grand coalition were to deliver here and now, that would be progress. But if the alliance, as asserted by all three party leaders, is to last four years, it will have to

go beyond what has been agreed. That is already being forced by pressure from outside."

"The coalition agreement is already partially outdated," the mouthpiece of German big business announced. "Between last night's agreement and its current signing, US President Donald Trump has announced punitive tariffs and threatened a trade war." The "question of the competitiveness of the German economy" could therefore be "posed more quickly than the representatives of the Union and the SPD considered in their negotiations." As a result, the coalition agreement must be "the starting point of the next government—not the end."

By "competitiveness," *Handelsblatt* means *multi billion-euro tax credits à la Trump* for German corporations, too, with simultaneous wage cuts and mass sackings. All this has been long planned. In the last few days alone, Deutsche Bank, Postbank, Airbus, RWE and Eon announced plans to destroy thousands of jobs in close cooperation with the trade unions. Whole plants are threatened with closure at Siemens, Bombardier and ThyssenKrupp.

Earlier this week, the arrogant statement by the new health minister, Jens Spahn (CDU), that the Hartz IV so-called labour and welfare reforms meant "everyone has what he needs to live," summed up the anti-social character of the new government in a nutshell. One might wish that those like Spahn had to spend at least a few days in a low-paid "mini job" or as a bottle collector in the cold Berlin winter to top up his Hartz IV benefits, which are barely enough to survive on.

It is now internationally known—and can be read about in countless studies—that the so-called Hartz "reforms" of the then SPD-Green Party government

made Germany one of the most socially unequal—and poorest!—countries in Europe.

The entire cabinet reflects the extreme right-wing and anti-working class character of the new government. The interior and homeland minister is CSU chairman Horst Seehofer, who only on Sunday in the *Bild* newspaper presented a “master plan for more consistent deportations,” mass surveillance and other police state measures. Olaf Scholz, who stands for the austerity and law-and-order course of the SPD like no other, will be the new finance minister. As SPD secretary general, Scholz supported the Agenda 2010 and Hartz attacks on welfare and labour rights; as labour minister in the first grand coalition under Merkel, he raised the retirement age to 67, and as Hamburg mayor, organised the brutal police operation against the G20 protests.

Above all, the grand coalition will accelerate Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign and great-power policy promulgated by the outgoing and incoming defence minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), Steinmeier and his predecessor Joachim Gauck at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. *Der Spiegel* Editor-in-Chief Klaus Brinkbäumer speaks for the entire ruling class when, in his essay “Thanks, Donald,” he calls for Germany’s return to a “dirty” foreign policy that no longer “hides” and adopts “morally pure positions.”

What is meant by that was already expounded by right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski in a podium discussion entitled “Intervention power Germany?” at the German Historical Museum in October 2014. “And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether,” he said about the war effort of the German Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

It speaks volumes about the sharp rightward turn of the SPD-Green milieu that the daily *taz* newspaper has openly sided with Baberowski in its latest weekend edition, even defending his statement “Hitler was not cruel” against the criticism of the Socialist Equality Party and its youth and student organisation IYSSE. In the face of growing class conflicts, sections of the wealthy petty bourgeoisie are siding with extreme reaction.

This also applies to the leadership of the Left Party. In February, its parliamentary group leader, Dietmar Bartsch, had already supported the great power plans of the grand coalition and asked, *inter alia*, von der Leyen that the estimated additional billions scheduled for the Bundeswehr be “invested in the troops.” His colleague Sahra Wagenknecht emulates the anti-refugee propaganda of the far-right AfD, recently supporting the racist decision of the Essen Tafel charity that only Germans receive handouts from their food bank for the time being.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) is the only party that opposes the grand coalition from the left. The SGP campaigned intensively for new elections in recent weeks and will now fight to politically develop and organise the widespread opposition in the population against the grand coalition and its political henchmen in the Bundestag (parliament). The return of the German ruling class to extreme forms of political and social barbarism can only be halted by an independent movement of the working class based upon a socialist programme. With the taking of office by the grand coalition, this task now acquires enormous urgency.



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