

Germany: Greens join Saxony coalition government's right-wing agenda

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8 January 2020

Shortly before the end of the year, the new state government in Saxony was sworn in marking the first time a coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU), Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens is to hold government in the East German state.

It is the third state government coalition after those formed in Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg and the first three-party coalition in Saxony. The previously ruling CDU-SPD coalition had been massively punished in state elections in September. Together, the CDU and SPD lost 12 percent.

This was followed by the longest coalition negotiations in the history of the "Free State," lasting more than three months. The reasons for the long negotiations, however, were not political differences between the parties, rather, the time was needed to stage the allegedly "new" nature of the coalition as effectively as possible in the media.

After several weeks of exploratory talks, the coalition negotiations did not begin until the end of October, following approval by the relevant party committees. Summaries of the preliminary talks constantly emphasized the good, constructive and trusting atmosphere. The coalition negotiations proceeded in a similar manner. The result was then sold as providing a "stable basis," as a step towards more justice, "more movement" and as a "new start." The outgoing and incoming state premier, Michael Kretschmer (CDU), even called it the "Saxony Coalition."

In reality, the new government will further strengthen the right-wing policies of the CDU and SPD, which in the elections in September mainly strengthened the extreme right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The first sentence of the preamble of the coalition agreement is a mockery of the reality of workers' lives. It claims, "Saxony is a strong and successful state because the people who live here, with courage, willingness to change and diligence, are constantly facing new challenges and thus contribute to the fact that the Free State is doing well in many respects today."

Numerous studies prove the opposite. For example, according to the latest German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) study "Good Work," 30 percent of all workers in Saxony describe their working conditions as "bad." Saxony not only exceeds the national average (19 percent), but also the East German average (25 percent).

A major aspect of this dissatisfaction is likely to be frequent weekend, night and shift work. At 36.8 percent, the latter is almost twice as frequent as the national average. Despite higher average working hours, wages are significantly lower. Only 39 percent of

employees are paid according to collective bargaining agreements, putting Saxony at the bottom of the league nationwide.

The fact that this will remain so in the future is symbolised by the role played by IG Metall union district leader for Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony, Olivier Höbel, as part of the SPD's coalition negotiation team.

Previously, Höbel had been in charge of negotiations on adjusting East German wages and conditions to West German ones, including the adoption of the 35-hour week. The negotiations, which had been dragged out for more than a year and a half, were broken off without results in September; IG Metall had never organized a serious fight over the issue.

In an interview, Höbel himself made clear that IG Metall would continue its efforts to block or sabotage any industrial action in the future. "Where jobs are lost due to technological or climate change reasons, social solutions and perspectives for the people must be found," he told his union's district publication. "Only then will a socially acceptable, democratic and ecological change that takes everyone with it succeed. This is what we stand for as the IG Metall and this is what I stand for as a trade unionist."

Every worker whose company has ever been confronted with such a "socially acceptable change" or even a plant closure knows what this means: downsizing and concessions without end.

A catastrophe also threatens the education and training system. The government had only recently boasted its first place in the nationwide "Education Monitor" of the "New Social Market Economy Initiative." What the study only mentions in passing, however, is the growing number of school dropouts, which has risen to 8.2 percent in Saxony and to 18.2 percent among migrants.

The study also makes it clear that Saxony still benefits from broad coverage with kindergartens and after-school care centres, a legacy of the social provisions in the former East Germany. However, the fact that the majority of nursery and schoolteachers were hired during this period is not taken into account. A glance at the figures shows that there is an urgent need for action. About 60 percent of teachers in general education schools in Saxony are over 50 years old. This corresponds to about 18,000 teachers who will retire in the next ten years. In addition, there are about 12,000 pre-school teachers of a similar age.

The impending bottleneck in the age structure is a direct consequence of the social counterrevolution that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reintroduction of capitalism by the SED/PDS, the Stalinist predecessor organization of the Left

Party. The exodus from the East and the simultaneous halving of the birth rate, which only returned to its pre-reunification level a few years ago, have had dramatic consequences for the whole of society. The imminent departure of tens of thousands of workers in critical sectors such as health, care, education and infrastructure calls for a comprehensive, planned approach. The coalition agreement, however, contains little more than cosmetic changes, all of which are subject to funding.

The central part of the coalition agreement is a massive increase in powers of the state repressive apparatus. In the preamble it says about security, “Freedom requires security. That is why we are strengthening the presence of the state in all regions through police and justice [...]. We will strengthen our democracy and defend it against attacks from enemies of the constitution.”

Specifically, 1,000 new police stations are to be built during the legislative period. At least 700 candidates are to be recruited each year. Apart from that, there are more than six pages on how to “improve,” “modernise,” “promote” and “strengthen” the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as the secret service is called.

The Saxony police law, against which the Greens had at least tried to file a complaint with the Constitutional Court, is only mentioned in one sentence, where it says they will wait for the court’s decision and then implement it. Beyond that, no changes are being sought. Should the court therefore approve the police law in whole or in part, the Greens would not leave the coalition.

In addition to the police and the judiciary, which have attracted attention in recent years through exposure of connections to right-wing extremists, police violence and arbitrary sentences, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution is also to be expanded.

The coalition paper draws the conclusion from the “reappraisal of the NSU [neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground] complex” that “cooperation between the secret service and other security authorities” should be improved, collaboration between the state and national branches of the secret service “should be strengthened” and the “establishment of police and intelligence information and analysis centres” should be supported—in other words, the separation of police and intelligence service required under the post-war German constitution should be abolished.

The new state government will not change anything about the character of the Saxony Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which defames left-wing bands and mass events such as the rock-against-right concert in Chemnitz in 2018 as “left-wing extremist,” while describing the xenophobic Pegida movement as “not extremist.”

Gordian Meyer-Plath, the president of Saxony’s secret service, is an old master in the Marchia fraternity, which until 2011 was organised in the extreme right-wing umbrella organisation Deutsche Burschenschaft. As the former controller of the Confidential Informant and NSU supporter Carsten Szczepanski, alias Piatto, whom he recruited after being sentenced to eight years in prison for the attempted murder of an African man, Meyer-Plath has to this day prevented the NSU murder series from being fully investigated.

Regional newspapers speculate that Meyer-Plath will be replaced by the new coalition. But Dirk Müller, who is named as a possible

successor, is no less right-wing.

In an interview with RT Deutsch, Müller criticized the fact that the media perception of Saxony places a strong emphasis on right-wing extremism. In fact, “there is a slight excess of politically motivated violence from the left [...] and has been for many years.” This has nothing to do with reality. In 2018, even according to the official statistics of the Saxon Interior Ministry, 701 left-wing crimes were matched by 2,278 right-wing crimes.

Müller also complained that left-wing perpetrators of violence acted with “more planning, organisation and thought” and that this made investigations in this area more difficult. Such a statement following the ten NSU murders, after the killing of leading CDU politician Walter Lübcke and the Halle synagogue shooting simply reveals a contempt for reality.

Those who believed asylum policy would change with the entry of the Greens into government in Saxony are confronted with a different reality in the coalition agreement. So-called improvements are described using vague phrases such as “examine,” “support” or “if necessary.” Even the “placement of minors in pre-deportation custody,” family separation or deportation directly from school or work are only to be avoided “if possible.” As in many other federal states, priority is given cynically to “voluntary return” and to this end, “counselling” is being “strengthened.” In individual cases, “travel and resettlement allowances” are provided.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the term “poverty” does not appear at all in the coalition agreement and “poor” only in the context of “reducing bureaucracy.” The character of this new government could not be clearer.

It is in keeping with its mendacious, right-wing character that the members of the Greens have most clearly affirmed the coalition with 93 percent, compared to 80 and 74 percent in the CDU and SPD. Whether at the federal or state level, the Greens see their hour has come and are eagerly grasping for the levers of power.



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