

Germany's Greens select Baerbock as chancellor candidate

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Germany's Greens will participate in the federal election on 26 September with Annalena Baerbock as their candidate for chancellor. The party's two co-leaders, Baerbock and Robert Habeck, made the announcement at a joint press conference on Monday morning.

The decision had been awaited with anticipation. If the current trends in the polls persist, the Greens have a chance of nominating the successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is stepping down after 16 years in power.

Baerbock and Habeck took the final decision in a one-on-one meeting, and concealed it from party committees, the party membership, and the public. What the Greens, who once upon a time swore by grassroots democracy, would have previously described as a rotten backroom deal, was praised by Baerbock as a new political culture in which everyone works together instead of against each other.

In reality, all political discussion was suppressed because the Greens are determined to continue the policies of the Merkel government, even though it is deeply despised. Since their poor election result in 2017, the Grand Coalition parties, the Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU), and Christian Social Union (CSU), have lost a further 10 percentage points in support, leaving them with a combined support of less than 45 percent.

Revealingly, Baerbock and Habeck did not criticise the Grand Coalition's policies at their press conference. Instead, they promised a different style of politics, a "different political culture" and a "new understanding of political leadership." In other words: the same policies packaged anew.

When Helmut Kohl's 16 years as chancellor came to an end in 1998, things were very different. The SPD and Greens won the federal election because they promised more social and peaceful policies—promises which they transformed into their opposites as soon as they entered

government. The Greens paved the way for the first foreign interventions by the armed forces and adopted with the SPD the Agenda 2010, the greatest social counter-revolution since the formation of the Federal Republic.

Following Merkel's 16-year chancellorship, which deepened the militarist and anti-social policies of the Agenda 2010 and is responsible due to the "profits before lives" policy for over 80,000 deaths from the coronavirus, the Greens do not even pose as a political opposition.

Baerbock promised to "unleash" all forces to strengthen the country, prompting the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to comment with satisfaction, "She didn't just speak about core Green issues, but also about the competitiveness of German industry and mid-sized businesses." *Spiegel* editor Dirk Kurbjuweit enthused that after the CDU "mismanaged the economy," the "highly-disciplined Greens could be the next anchor of stability for the Federal Republic."

The 40-year-old Baerbock is well qualified as the Greens' chancellor candidate because she embodies more than perhaps anyone else the party's rightward shift. She joined the Greens in 2005, when the SPD/Green government fell apart because workers abandoned the SPD in droves.

She studied political science, public law, and international law in Hamburg and at the London School of Economics and was active in various leadership functions for the Greens at the European, national, and state levels. She was elected to parliament in 2013 and as co-leader alongside Habeck in January 2018. This marked the first time that the right-wing so-called "realo" wing of the party nominated both co-leaders.

While the Greens were formally an opposition party at the federal level under Baerbock and Habeck, they were in reality the fourth wheel on the Grand Coalition's wagon. In 2017, they negotiated a coalition deal with the CDU, CSU, and Free Democrats (FDP) that only fell

apart after the FDP balked at the last minute.

The Greens then supported the government's deadly coronavirus policy more fervently than some of the government parties' own deputies. They also focused on attacking the government from the right on its militarism and foreign policy, especially towards Russia and China. For example, Baerbock rejected the building of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea.

At the state level, where the Greens are involved in 11 out of 16 governments, they collaborate with the CDU, SPD, FDP, and Left Party in all conceivable combinations. In Baden-Württemberg, where the Green politician Winfried Kretschmann is entering his third term as Minister President, he has long ago become a favourite of the auto industry.

In June 2020, the Greens published a new party programme that called for a massive build-up of the military and the domestic forces of state repression, and the pursuit of an aggressive European imperialist foreign policy. "The EU must be able to manage world politics," it stated, and the armed forces must be equipped "in line with its responsibilities and tasks."

At the party congress that adopted the programme in November, Baerbock made clear that the party's central issue, climate change, would be aimed at supporting German capital. "Fear not, this climate change revolution is just about as crazy as a building loan contract. A new structuring of the economic system does not mean overturning it, but merely about protecting the world," she insisted.

Shortly thereafter, Baerbock spoke out explicitly in a lengthy interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in favour of a major rearmament programme and new military interventions. It was high time to respond to the proposals of French President Emmanuel Macron for a sovereign European defence policy, she said, "And that also means talking about foreign interventions. That won't be easy. But we can't avoid the issue."

On refugee policy, Baerbock also supports the strategy of sealing borders pursued by the Grand Coalition and European Union (EU). She advocates building reception centres on Europe's external borders, where refugees will be "swiftly registered, given a security check, and have their data analysed." According to Baerbock, a "humanitarian refugee policy" can only work with a stricter policy of deportations.

Politically, Baerbock and Habeck agree on all issues. If the Greens—undoubtedly following extensive consultations with influential sections of the ruling

elite—decided Baerbock should be the chancellor candidate, this was not only because of her gender, as many media outlets are speculating. She is considered to be more hard-line, ruthless and able to impose her will than Habeck, who is 11 years her senior.

Baerbock's secret weapon is "demanding more from herself and her party than is pain-free," wrote the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. By contrast, Habeck belongs "to a Green generation that once broke out of the parental household in search of freedom, including from the performance culture."

Baerbock is not merely a "Merkel in Green" with an "instinct for high stakes gambling," but also a Margaret Thatcher. She represents those privileged elements of the middle class—the most important base of support for the Greens—which has profited from the stock market boom over recent years and the impoverishment of the working class that has accompanied it. They are now responding with increased hostility to growing worker radicalisation.

The naming of Baerbock as chancellor candidate underscores that there is no electable alternative for the working class among the established parties. The SPD and Left Party govern with the Greens in several states and would immediately join a Green-led government at the federal level. They advocate the same right-wing policies.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) is the only party fighting for a socialist programme and representing the interests of the working class. Support the SGP's participation in the election with your signature and apply to join the party.



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