

Germany's "traffic light" coalition government reaches agreement: Welfare cuts, state armament and militarism

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The Social Democratic Party (SPD), Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens in Germany agreed on a 177-page coalition agreement on Wednesday and presented it to the media. After it has been passed by the responsible party committees, nothing should stand in the way of the election of a new federal government under Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) after December 6.

Wrapped in flowery phrases about modernization, transformation, climate protection and solidarity, the program of the "traffic light" coalition (red, yellow, green—for the colours of the parties) is a declaration of war on the working population and a commitment to militarism. The coalition consists of three parties, one which represents in distilled form the interests of the corporations and banks (FDP), another the affluent middle class (Greens) and the third the state (SPD).

The coalition's COVID-19 policy reveals the class character of the new government most clearly. On the same day that the SPD, Greens and FDP presented their coalition agreement in Berlin, the official death toll exceeded the threshold of 100,000. The number of infected in Germany reached a new daily record total of 67,000. In much of the country, the pandemic is completely out of control, with seven-day incidence rates well over 1,000. Such an incidence rate means that one in every one hundred residents of a district has been infected within the past week.

The traffic light coalition bears direct joint responsibility for this catastrophe, and not just because the SPD has been in government for eight years. Just six days ago, the coalition used its majority in the federal parliament to allow the COVID-19 emergency to expire on November 25. This means there is no longer a legal basis for imposing lockdowns and similar measures essential to contain the pandemic.

The SPD's Scholz could not ignore the pandemic at the press conference and announced a series of measures, such as an expansion of the vaccination campaign, the establishment of a permanent crisis team and an expert group in the Chancellery, and a one-time bonus for overwhelmed health care workers. Scientists have long warned that only a combination of all available measures can prevent an even greater catastrophe.

But the traffic light coalition is determined to continue the brutal "profit before life" policy of the grand coalition. It would rather accept tens of thousands of deaths and the mass infection of the youth than endanger the profits of big business.

Perhaps the most important decision in the coalition agreement is handing over the finance ministry to the FDP. Although the ministers will only be named in the coming days, it is certain that FDP leader Christian Lindner will take over this post. Lindner has made a name for himself as a vehement advocate of austerity policies, an opponent of any tax increase for the rich and a representative of big business.

The coalition agreement accordingly states that the debt brake, which strictly limits new government borrowing, will come into force again without restriction from 2023. In Europe, too, Germany should "continue to live up to its pioneering role as an anchor of stability" and ensure compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact, which caps the deficits of European Union (EU) member states. "Financial solidity and the economical use of tax money" are "principles of our budget and financial policy," the agreement asserts.

Given the huge subsidies for the climate-friendly transformation of corporations, a massive increase in rearmament spending and the planned repayment of the COVID-19 debt, this can only be financed through drastic social cuts. The SPD is responsible for this. The FDP, the smallest of the three coalition partners, received not only finance, but also the justice, transport and education ministries.

The Greens will take over the ministry of economic affairs, which will be expanded to include climate protection, as well as the foreign, family, environment and agriculture ministries. Annalena Baerbock, a Green co-leader, is expected to become foreign minister and Robert Habeck, the other co-leader, to be named Vice Chancellor and minister of economic affairs.

Baerbock is known for her hostility to Russia and China. Accordingly, the coalition agreement describes the "transatlantic partnership and friendship with the USA 'as' a central pillar of our international action." The government's China policy is to be "coordinated transatlantically," and cooperation with China will be sought only "on the basis of human rights."

Like the current government, the traffic light coalition is also striving for a global strategy designed to serve German imperialist interests. Under the heading "Germany's responsibility for Europe and the world," Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Turkey, the Middle East, Africa and even the Indo-Pacific are defined as German areas of interest. "We know about the global responsibility that Germany,

as the fourth largest economy in the world, bears for this,” the document declares.

In order to bring Germany’s weight to bear, the European Union will be strengthened. A “capable and strategically sovereign EU” is “the basis for our peace and prosperity.” The document continues, “As the largest member state, we will assume our special responsibility ... for the EU as a whole.”

To this end, the rearmament of the German army (*Bundeswehr*) will be accelerated. All restraint is thrown overboard, with the coalition agreement committing to “arm the military’s drones” and nuclear deterrence. “As long as nuclear weapons play a role in NATO’s strategic concept, Germany has an interest in participating in the strategic discussions and planning processes,” the coalition agreement states. We “are committed to maintaining a credible deterrent potential.”

The deal also promises the acquisition of a “successor system for the Tornado fighter aircraft” at the beginning of the 20th legislative period.

The defence ministry will be led by the SPD, which will also head the interior, labour, health, building and development aid ministries. The SPD will also hold the posts of Chancellor and head of the Chancellor’s Office.

The ministry of labour, which the SPD has led for 23 years with a four-year break, is of particular importance in the traffic light coalition’s program. Under the heading “Modern world of work,” the torture instruments associated with the Agenda 2010 welfare reforms will be further developed. In the last red-green coalition under the SDP’s Gerhard Schröder, Agenda 2010 marked the initiation of the most extensive social cuts in recent history.

In connection with these attacks, the coalition agreement adopts a consistent approach. Measures that met with popular anger and outrage will be abolished and then reintroduced in a different form or under a new name.

For example, the unemployment benefit II (better known as Hartz IV) will be referred to as *Bürgergeld* (Citizen’s Benefit) in the future. “Citizen’s benefit focuses on the potential of people and aids the sustainable integration into the labour market, and enables social participation,” the coalition agreement proclaims in harmonious prose. But the “duty to cooperate” will be maintained. That is, the recipient of the citizen’s benefit will continue to be harassed by the job centre until they accept a low-wage job. Such jobs—mini and midi jobs, temporary work, agency work, fixed-term contracts, etc.—are not being abolished, but “adjusted,” according to the agreement.

The increase in the statutory minimum wage to €12 [\$US13.45], which the SPD is celebrating as a great victory, has also turned out to be a sham. The minimum wage is now €9.60 and would rise to €10.45 in the middle of next year anyway. The industry-specific minimum wages are already almost all over €12. In addition, the coalition agreement expressly calls for the retention of work contracts and temporary workers, with which the minimum wage can be undercut.

The same applies to the promise that there will be “no pension cuts and no increase in the statutory retirement age.” The decision to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 has not yet been completed. And no one can live on the “minimum pension level of

48 percent” of the average income after 45 years of contribution payment guaranteed by the traffic light coalition.

In fact, the coalition agreement specifically stipulates that older people, even if they have long since reached retirement age, will return to work in order to supplement their meagre pensions. To this end, numerous provisions of labour law are to be changed.

To address the housing shortage, the traffic light promises that 400,000 new apartments will be built every year. But the grand coalition already promised in 2017 to build 1.5 million apartments in four years. This target was never met. Even in 2020, when the number of new buildings reached a new record, only 306,000 units were built—and rents are now hardly affordable.

The traffic light coalition promises the introduction of a “basic child benefit” to tackle child poverty. But this merely involves the amalgamation of previous benefits—child benefit, child allowance, educational support—into a single support benefit.

In order to counter the growing social opposition, the coalition will strengthen the police and surveillance state. “The members of the security authorities in our country, who support us every day anew in the defence of the free democratic basic order, deserve our respect and recognition,” says the coalition agreement, and adds, “Intelligence services are an important part of a well-fortified democracy.”

Video surveillance, data retention, surveillance software and other forms of surveillance should not be abolished but made “legally secure.” The “use of agents, warrant officers and other informants from all security authorities” should not be prohibited, but regulated by law. There should be an “independent supervisory body” for “disputes” in the context of classifications by the *Verfassungsschutz* secret service (Office for the Protection of the Constitution). Instead of draining the swamp of far-right operatives in the state apparatus, the traffic light coalition intends to make March 11 a “national day of remembrance for the victims of terrorist violence.”

The traffic light coalition will also seamlessly continue the inhumane refugee policy of the grand coalition. It wants to allow more immigration—in order to attract workers and counteract the aging of society—while keeping refugees out even more rigorously. “We will reduce irregular migration and make regular migration possible,” the document states.

Climate protection, hailed as a breakthrough by the Greens, turns out to be an additional enrichment program for corporations and banks on closer inspection. It is approached exclusively from the standpoint of creating new sales opportunities for the troubled German export industry.

“As the largest industrial and export economy in Europe, Germany is facing profound transformation processes in global competition in the 2020s,” says the chapter “Climate protection in a socio-ecological market economy.” “We therefore see the task of giving the economic strength of our country a new dynamic.”



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