Social Democrat Chancellor Scholz takes power in Germany at head of “traffic light” coalition

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Olaf Scholz was elected yesterday as Germany’s new Federal Chancellor with the votes of the Social Democrats (SPD), Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens. He is succeeding Angela Merkel of the Christian Democrats (CDU), who has held the office since 2005 and was saluted in parliament with a standing ovation.

Significantly, the Left Party parliamentary group also applauded. Like all other parties in the federal parliament and the trade unions, the Left Party loyally supported Merkel’s right-wing political agenda.

Scholz and the so-called traffic light coalition (named for the colours of the three parties, red, yellow and green) will aggressively pursue a programme of social spending cuts, rearmament abroad and the build-up of a police state apparatus at home, and the policy of mass infection in the pandemic. Neither the flowers given to Scholz and the Left Party nor the phrases about an alleged “progressive government” or a “revival of the left in Europe” (*New York Times*) can conceal this reality.

Olaf Scholz is a right-wing bourgeois politician and personifies like no other the anti-working class and militarist agenda of the past few years. Under his watch as finance minister in the CDU-SPD coalition headed by Merkel, the military budget was increased by about €t10 billion, and hundreds of billions were handed over to the super-rich, large corporations and banks through the so-called coronavirus emergency bailouts. The “Profits before Life” policy, which has claimed more than 100,000 victims in Germany alone, bears his signature.

In social and domestic politics, Scholz has always stood for a strict law-and-order agenda. As senator for the interior in the state of Hamburg in 2001, he introduced the forced administration of emetics to secure evidence from suspected drug dealers, a measure that the European Court of Human Rights later condemned as a method of torture and therefore as a violation of human rights.

From 2002 onward, as SPD general secretary, Scholz played a central role in the anti-working class agenda of the Schröder-Fischer government, which plunged millions of workers and their families into desperate poverty. Subsequently, as minister of labour in Merkel’s first cabinet, he organized the increase in the retirement age from 65 to 67.

His brutal action while mayor of Hamburg against the G20 demonstrations in the summer of 2017 was particularly notorious. In one of the largest police operations in post-war Germany, he mobilized over 20,000 police officers from all over the country, who transformed the Hanseatic city into a police state and brutally attacked the mostly peaceful demonstrators. Hundreds of young demonstrators from all over Europe, who did nothing other than make use of their right to demonstrate, are still being prosecuted to this day and some have received draconian sentences.

The coalition agreement signed by the traffic light parties on Monday and the makeup of Scholz’s cabinet are in line with this reactionary record. The *World Socialist Web Site* has already described the coalition of the SPD, Greens and FDP in previous articles as an alliance of the state, finance capital and the wealthy middle classes against the working class. The ministers appointed yesterday by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) represent this reactionary alliance.

Christian Lindner, the FDP chairman, will be the new finance minister, taking the position previously held by Scholz. The leader of the hated neoliberal party, which acts as an out-and-out mouthpiece of big business and the financial markets, is taking on the task of overseeing a new round of social austerity. In their coalition agreement, the traffic light coalition members committed themselves to “increasing the competitiveness of Germany as a business location” and reactivating the debt brake.

In doing so, Lindner and his coalition partners will work closely with the unions. The DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) was directly involved in drawing up the coalition agreement. DGB leader Rainer Hoffmann was already singing the praises of Lindner and the FDP during the exploratory talks to form the government. “The FDP with Christian Lindner” is “different from the FDP with Guido Westerwelle and Philipp Rösler,” he claimed, referring to the previous party leadership. A “Federal Minister Christian

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Lindner could see to it" that "Germany [is] secure as an industrial location."

With Marco Buschmann, another right-wing FDP representative takes over the Ministry of Justice. He is an outspoken advocate of the pandemic policy of mass infection. When the traffic light coalition officially ended the "epidemic emergency" in November, he cheered on Twitter, "We have removed measures such as lockdowns, general school and company closings or curfews from the law. These can no longer be used."

The appointment of Karl Lauterbach (SPD) as the new Minister of Health was already commented on by the WSWS. The licensed doctor and expert in epidemiology is the fig leaf for the aggressive "profits before life" policy, which Lauterbach fully supports despite his repeated public warnings about COVID-19. In November, he voted in the federal parliament to end the "epidemic emergency." After his appointment as minister, he explicitly ruled out that any lockdown measures were immediately necessary.

With the social democrat Christine Lamprecht, the previous Justice Minister will become Defence Minister in Scholz's cabinet. When she was presented by Scholz on Monday, she left no doubt that the return of German militarism will continue under her direction. "The German army soldiers deserve that we treat them with appreciation and respect, and I would like to expressly include the reservists," she said. Appropriate equipment is important, which is why the procurement system has to be modernized, she added.

The Greens' two party co-leaders, Robert Habeck (Vice Chancellor and Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection) and Annalena Baerbock (Foreign Minister) will play a central role in promoting the right-wing and militarist agenda of the new government. Baerbock already made clear in an interview with the *taz* before her appointment that the Federal Foreign Ministry under Green leadership will fully support the US war drive against China and Russia. She explicitly backed nuclear participation and called for new combat aircraft capable of using nuclear weapons to be procured for the German armed forces.

The remaining ministers—Hubertus Heil (SPD), Labour and Social Affairs; Nancy Faeser (SPD), Interior and Home; Cem Ozdemir (Greens), Agriculture; Anne Spiegel (Greens), Family, Seniors, Women and Youth; Volker Wissing (FDP), Digital and Transport; Steffi Lemke (Green), Environment, Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection; Bettina Stark-Watzinger (FDP), Education and Research; Svenja Schulze (SPD), Economic Cooperation and Development; Klara Geywitz (SPD), Housing, Urban Development and Construction; and Wolfgang Schmidt (SPD) as Federal Minister for Special Assignments and Head of the Chancellery—are cut from the same cloth. The WSWS will publish more portraits of the government in the next few days.

Four years ago, the grand coalition made the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) the official opposition in parliament. It then largely embraced the program of the right-wing extremist party and integrated it into parliamentary work. This process continues under the traffic light coalition. While the CDU now takes the position of official opposition, the established parties left four parliamentary committees to be headed by the AfD, including the important interior committee and the health committee.

Workers and young people must take this as a warning. In order to continue the policy of mass infection and suppress growing working class opposition, the traffic light coalition is deliberately strengthening right-wing and fascist forces. In doing so, it can also rely on the support of the Left Party. Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch presented Scholz with flowers after his election and wrote on Twitter, "I wish Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his cabinet make smart decisions for the people in our country."

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is the only party that opposes the traffic light coalition from the left with a socialist program. At the end of November, it held its party congress and passed an important perspective resolution. The document states:

> The working class will inevitably come into conflict with the new coalition and all the parties in the Bundestag. The SGP has prepared the working class politically for this confrontation. In the election campaign, we decisively opposed the all-party coalition and fought as the only party for an international, socialist programme. In our election appeal, we stressed: "No social problem can be resolved without expropriating the banks and major corporations and placing them under the democratic control of the working class. Their profits and wealth must be confiscated, and the trillions given to them over the past year must be returned. The world economy must be reorganised on the basis of a scientific, rational plan."

This programme takes on renewed significance in the aftermath of the coming to power of Scholz and the traffic light coalition.

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