

New Conservative-Green state coalition in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, declares war on the working class

Elisabeth Zimmermann
8 July 2022

Last Tuesday, Hendrik Wüst (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) was elected premier of Germany's biggest state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). The following day he presented the 12 ministers of the state's new CDU-Green government. Four ministries go to the Greens, including a so-called "super-ministry" for economy, industry, climate protection and energy, headed by Deputy Premier Mona Neubaur.

The formation of the coalition in Germany's most populous state underlines two basic tendencies in German politics—first, the interchangeability of all of the main political parties, and second, the central role being played by the Greens in enforcing right-wing policies in the face of growing opposition from workers and youth.

In addition to the federal government, the Greens are now represented in 11 of the country's 16 state governments. In Berlin, Bremen and Thuringia the Greens govern together with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party; in Saxony and Brandenburg with the CDU and the SPD; in Rhineland-Palatinate with the SPD and the Free Democratic Party (FDP); and in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg and Schleswig-Holstein—where a new state government was also sworn in last week—with the CDU.

Following the lead of the federal government (SPD-Greens-FDP), the NRW coalition calls itself a "government of progress." The coalition agreement bears the lofty title "Future Contract for North Rhine-Westphalia." A closer look at the 146-page document, however, makes clear that all the promises of climate neutrality and a few social concessions are just hogwash. The coalition agreement is basically a declaration of war on the working class.

Already in the introduction, and using the familiar propaganda phrases of "democracy, freedom and human rights," the coalition backs NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. In plain language this means that all the policies of the CDU-Green state government are subordinated to its war policy. The costs of Germany's

intervention are to be passed onto the working class—through exploding living costs, mass unemployment and ever greater impoverishment.

At the heart of the budget policy is strict adherence to the debt brake (no new credit), which makes a mockery of promises to recruit new teachers, improve working conditions, raise wages in the health sector and an extra year of nursery school for young children.

"We will draw up budgets without new debts, as stipulated by the constitutional debt brake, including exceptional payments for natural disasters or extraordinary emergency situations, as a prerequisite for a sustainable and generationally just budget policy," the coalition agreement states. And then even more explicitly: "This requires strict spending discipline and resolute prioritisation and places all existing and additional financially effective expenditures under budgetary reservation."

The money that has flowed mainly to big corporations and the super-rich in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic is also to be recouped at the expense of the working class. "By 2024 at the latest," the contract reads "the process begins of repaying the loans taken out for the corona bailout aimed at facilitating the economy."

Like all other governments at the federal and state levels, the CDU and Greens in NRW place the interests and profits of big business and the banks above the health and livelihoods of the vast majority of the population. Although the pandemic is still on the rampage, there is not a single concrete measure to contain the coronavirus to be found in the coalition agreement.

Climate protection is also to be completely subordinated to economic profit. "We will make North Rhine-Westphalia the first climate-neutral industrial region in Europe," the coalition agreement states. "In doing so, we will ensure that our state becomes one of the most innovative, sustainable and competitive business locations in Europe."

In total, the words "competition" and "competitive"

appear 22 times in the text.

It is clear what this means. Under the slogan of “transformation” (52 times in the text), the new state government will continue the attacks on jobs and wages with even more aggression than previous administrations. High unemployment and poverty have long characterised working class areas in Germany’s main industrial region.

In order to enforce the social attacks and contain growing opposition, the state government is counting on close cooperation with the trade unions. It seeks to “maintain and support strong social partners” and the “high quality of co-determination in North Rhine-Westphalia,” reads the section on the “labour market.” For this, “the work of works councils and trade unions as well as employers’ associations is essential.”

At the same time, the state’s security forces are to be massively expanded. The governing parties pledge to hire thousands more police officers every year. The equipping of police with tasers, already begun under the former coalition of the CDU and FDP, is to be continued. The Greens, who had originally opposed tasers, now support the policy and link it to the use of body cams and an evaluation process planned for 2024.

Parts of the chapter on internal security read like a strategy paper for a police state. “We will ensure a qualitatively trained and educated, well-positioned and motivated police force. We are consistently continuing to strengthen the force with police enforcement officers, administrative officers and government employees. We will therefore recruit 3,000 police officers annually.”

The coalition agreement goes on to say that the security forces “need sufficient powers to intervene and fulfil their tasks.” This requires “police-controlled video surveillance” and the strengthening of “municipal law enforcement services.” The extremely repressive law on gatherings introduced by the previous government is to be retained and merely reviewed “independently and scientifically at the end of 2023.” The state secret intelligence agency (Verfassungsschutz) is praised in the document “as a necessary early warning system” for the “observation of anti-constitutional and anti-democratic aspirations.”

This huge strengthening of the state’s repressive apparatus is justified above all by the fight against “hate crime” and “right-wing extremism”—but this is just for propaganda purposes. The NRW police in particular are notorious for their links to far-right networks that spread extremist agitation and pay homage to Hitler and the Nazis. The state interior ministry headed by Herbert Reul (CDU), who significantly remains in office, is notorious for covering up far-right networks.

The Verfassungsschutz is at the heart of the far right-wing

conspiracy in the state apparatus and is waging war against leftists, and the CDU and Greens support this course. “Our society also faces a challenge from left-wing extremists—we will take action against this,” the coalition agreement states.

Despite some flowery words about integration and cultural diversity in the agreement, the coalition’s refugee policy is also de facto in line with the far-right Alternative for Germany. “When an asylum application has been rejected and there are no further grounds for residency or humanitarian reasons, departure must take place through voluntary return or repatriation,” the text states.

While priority is given to “the consistent and lawful deportation of criminals and dangerous persons,” “deportations from educational and care institutions as well as hospitals and psychiatric facilities” are also possible. The coalition document merely cynically notes that one seeks to “do everything possible” to “avoid” such measures.

The fundamental development behind this reactionary agenda is becoming increasingly clear. Germany’s most populous state with its historically militant working class is a social powder keg. For more than 10 weeks, nursing staff at the university hospitals of North Rhine-Westphalia have been on strike. The governing parties are aware of the growing opposition of the population to the war in Ukraine and unbearable living conditions at home.

The class divide, the enormous gap between the ruling elite and the working population, had already been clearly expressed in the state elections on May 15. With just under 55 percent participation, voter turnout fell to a historic low; 5.8 million of the almost 13 million eligible voters stayed home, about the same number as those voting for the three leading parties—CDU, SPD and Greens.

“The election in NRW confirms that it has become impossible for the working class to assert its interests within the framework of the ossified parliamentary system,” the WSWs commented on the election result. “The struggle against war, social cuts and the stepping up of state armament requires the development of an independent working class movement that unites it internationally and advocates a socialist programme.”

The formation of the current CDU-Green state government on a thoroughly right-wing basis lends enormous urgency to this perspective.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact