

Berlin Mayor elected with votes of far-right AfD

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The election of Kai Wegner as the new Mayor of Berlin last Thursday has exposed the character of the new state executive he now heads in the German capital. It was only in the third round of voting that the Christian Democrat (CDU) politician was elected by a simple majority, and presumably only with the votes of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The new grand coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (SPD) has 86 votes in the House of Representatives (state assembly), the opposition parties—Greens, Left Party and AfD—together have 73. Wegner initially received only 71 yes votes, with 79 in the second round. To be elected in the first two rounds would have required an absolute majority of 80 votes.

After the end of the second ballot, the Green and Left Party parliamentary groups had requested that the all-party Council of Elders be convened, as there had never been a third ballot in the Berlin state assembly before and open legal questions had to be clarified.

Wegner was finally elected with 86 votes in the third round. However, the fact that these came exclusively from SPD and CDU deputies is not considered likely in view of the previous votes.

It would seem Wegner came to power with the votes of the far-right. In a press release, “to end any further speculation,” the AfD faction in the House of Representatives published the names of ten deputies who allegedly voted for Wegner. This cannot be verified due to the ballot being secret, but both the previous reservations expressed against a grand coalition and the openly right-wing character of the new Senate (state executive) make AfD support very likely.

SPD members had only voted by an extremely narrow margin of 54.3 percent for the coalition agreement negotiated with the CDU. Some parts of the

SPD fear the party will lose its last vestiges of popular support by entering this coalition. February’s recall election was a disaster for the SPD. The party lost a total of 111,000 votes in its former stronghold since the original election in September 2021, which was annulled by Berlin’s Constitutional Court, and recorded its worst result in history.

While CDU and SPD representatives repeat the mantra that the majority came solely from the votes of the two parties, the Left Party and Greens have criticized the election of the governing mayor with the help of the far-right. For example, Thuringia’s state Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) told RND: “If you want to protect parliamentarism, then you must never put yourself in the hands of this political force [the AfD].”

This is hard to beat in terms of hypocrisy. It was Ramelow himself who, following his re-election in 2020, used his own vote to help AfD legislator Michael Kaufmann into the office of vice president of the Thuringia state parliament. At the time, he declared he had “very fundamentally decided” to “clear the way for parliamentary participation, which must be granted to every parliamentary group,” even with his own vote.

A closer look at the coalition agreement of the new Berlin state government makes it clear that large parts could just as easily have been penned by the AfD. Beyond the irrelevant phrases and declarations of intent regarding health, education, and social policy, it consists mainly of plans for an extreme right-wing law-and-order policy.

In addition to a massive increase in personnel and funding for the police and security authorities, the grand coalition intends to create the necessary legal basis for more extensive telecommunications surveillance. With the usual references to the threat of

terrorism, online searches using Trojan software are to be made easier for the security authorities.

Through the expansion of so-called “no-knife zones” and video surveillance in public spaces, stop-and-search will be reintroduced through the back door. In the name of “public order,” the right of assembly is to be drastically curtailed. In the process, demonstrations are to be more easily prevented and the powers of the police expanded. Accompanying this is the implementation of an extension of preventive detention from two to five days, which can be used to detain activists and those the authorities find disagreeable—without their having committed a crime.

The incoming state cabinet also underscores the right-wing nature of the coalition. Wegner himself stands on the far-right fringe of the CDU. He talks the talk of a “Leading German Culture” and in the past has openly shown solidarity with the far-right former head of the secret service, Hans-Georg Maassen. The latter, could “of course also be a member of the Berlin CDU,” he declared.

The secret service now sits directly at the cabinet table in the new state government. The new Justice Senator (state minister) is Felor Badenberg. The 47-year-old non-party member has worked for the domestic intelligence agency, which is riddled with far-right forces, since 2006 and was most recently vice president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as Germany’s secret service is called. Between 2013 and 2018, she worked closely with Maassen, jointly drafting reports to the Bundestag (federal parliament) and government.

Franziska Giffey (SPD), the outgoing mayor and head of the state government, will take over the economic portfolio. She is also on the right wing of her party and, together with the Left Party and the Greens, with whom the SPD was then in coalition, made it clear she ruthlessly enforces cuts against the population when it is in the interests of big business.

Stefan Evers (CDU) will be finance senator and Wegner’s deputy. His task is to intensify the social attacks of the previous state government. Evers is considered the “strategic head” of the Berlin CDU. He was largely responsible for the party’s election campaign, which focused almost exclusively on law-and-order. Evers was one of the agitators of the racist campaign against immigrants after New Year’s Eve,

saying that the alleged perpetrators were not punished quickly and severely enough.

Manja Schreiner (CDU), an outspoken representative of big industry, will be responsible for transport and climate protection. As the mouthpiece of the construction industry, she has spoken out vehemently against the rent cap and any expropriation of real estate corporations. Any measure for environmental protection, no matter how cosmetic, is a thorn in her side if it runs even the slightest bit counter to the interests of industry.

The department of construction and housing will be taken over by the current State Secretary Christian Gaebler. The Social Democrat will ensure close cooperation with the real estate sharks. Gaebler epitomizes the line of the past building senator Andreas Geisel (likewise SPD). The latter called the expropriation of private housing corporations demanded by the population “economically crazy” and openly demanded the result of the referendum be disregarded.

The SPD politician Iris Spranger remains interior senator. Most recently, she had come to the defence of the Berlin police despite the mounting cases of violence and harassment against immigrants, claiming that there was no racism in the Berlin police. Her task will be to further strengthen the right-wing repressive apparatus to subdue the growing social and political opposition among workers and youth in the capital.

The extreme right-wing agenda of the new Senate, which relies on the fascists of the AfD, underscores the importance of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) campaign in the recall state election. The SGP warned that any new bourgeois government would advance the policies of rearmament and social cuts and suppress the growing popular resistance to them. The only way to stop these policies is through the independent mobilization of workers based on a socialist program, for which the SGP fought in its election campaign.



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