

Social Democrat membership backs coalition agreement with conservatives for new German government

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Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) membership has voted by a clear majority in favor of a coalition government with the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). No technical barriers now stand in the way of the election of CDU leader Friedrich Merz as German Chancellor on May 6.

SPD General Secretary Matthias Miersch announced on Wednesday that 56 percent of the 358,000 members took part in the vote. This is significantly less than in the corresponding membership votes in 2013 and 2018, when 78 percent cast their vote in each case. Of the participants, 84.6 percent approved the coalition agreement.

The SPD's participation in government under Merz marks a new stage in the decline of the party, whose history began more than 150 years ago under the banner of Marxism. The Merz government is without doubt the most right-wing and anti-working class government in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Its most important goal is to throw off all the shackles that were placed on German militarism because of its crimes in the Second World War. To this end, the Bundestag (Federal Parliament) passed war credits amounting to €1 trillion on March 18.

The return to militarism goes hand in hand with the adoption of the far-right Alternative for Germany's (AfD) program of domestic state repression as well as its anti-refugee and retrograde cultural policy. Some members of the government, such as Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt and State Secretary for Culture Wolfram Weimer, are on the far right of the political spectrum. Chancellor Merz himself is a man of the financial oligarchy. He headed the German branch of Blackrock, the world's largest asset manager, for four years.

In the new government, the SPD is responsible for rearmament and social spending cuts. It will head the defense, finance and labor ministries. Although the names of the future SPD ministers will not be announced until next Monday, it is already clear that party leader Lars Klingbeil will be the new Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister. In this role, he will be responsible for imposing the cost of exploding military spending and the consequences of the international trade war on

the working population.

Only a few specific social spending cuts are mentioned in the coalition agreement. They primarily affect the poorest members of society, who can already afford less and less and whose numbers are growing rapidly: recipients of the citizens' benefit and refugees. According to the Paritätischer Gesamtverband welfare association, the proportion of poor people in the population rose from 14.4 percent to 15.5 percent or 13 million people in 2024 compared to the previous year.

All other social spending is either subject to funding provisos or the deliberations of special commissions to finalise cuts. This means that they will fall victim to the red pen if the economic situation continues to deteriorate, as is already foreseeable.

Long-time SPD functionary Ralf Stegner, who for some inexplicable reason describes himself as a "leftist," justified the approval of the Merz government by saying that otherwise the field would be left to the right-wing extremists from the AfD. This would be absolutely unacceptable, he added.

In fact, it is the militaristic and anti-working class policies of the SPD that are paving the way for the far right in two ways: On the one hand, the Social Democrats are promoting the AfD by adopting its refugee-baiting and law-and-order policies; on the other, by closing ranks with Merz, Dobrindt and co. they are enabling the far right to pose as the only opposition to the hated political elites.

Since 1998, the SPD has been part of all federal governments with a break of only four years. Twice—from 1998 to 2005 and from 2021 to 2025—it nominated the Federal Chancellor. From 2005 to 2009 and from 2013 to 2021, it served as a junior partner to the CDU under Chancellor Angela Merkel. During these 26 years, the SPD's election result fell from 40.9 percent to 16.4 percent. That of the AfD, which was founded in 2013, has risen to 20.8 percent. In the latest polls, the AfD is the strongest party with 25 percent.

At the same time, the assets and incomes of the super-rich have exploded. As of late 2024, 249 billionaires and 3,000 super-rich people with financial assets of more than 100 million dollars were living in Germany. A tiny minority of around 0.6

percent of the population owns 45 percent of total wealth. On the other hand, the number of poor people has risen sharply. Taking into account the burden of high rents, more than one in five inhabitants of Germany is now affected by poverty.

The growing social divide is a direct result of the SPD's policies—its Hartz reforms, its numerous pension, healthcare and other social reforms and the billions it used to “rescue” banks from their self-inflicted bankruptcy. The term “reform,” which once meant social improvement, has become the epitome of social cutbacks in the language of the SPD.

The SPD—like all other parties in the Bundestag—represents the interests of capital and German imperialism. The former workers' party no longer has anything in common with the interests of the population at large. Its shrinking membership—in 1973 it still had over a million members—consists mainly of office-holders, civil servants, party functionaries and trade union bureaucrats who need the party membership card for their personal careers.

One of the few voices to publicly call for the rejection of the coalition agreement was that of Young Socialists (Juso) chairman Philipp Türmer. This form of harmless youthful protest is part of career planning in the SPD.

Türmer's predecessor Kevin Kühnert already led a “No-GroKo [grand coalition] campaign” against the continuation of the coalition with the CDU/CSU in 2018, gaining nationwide fame. *Der Spiegel* published his picture on the front page, NDR dedicated a six-part series to him and the *F.A.Z.* described him as “incredibly talented.” Two years later, Kühnert was elected Deputy Party Chairman and later General Secretary of the SPD. By that point he backed the grand coalition and later the coalition with the Greens and Free Democrats (FDP) following the 2021 federal election.

In the meantime, Kühnert, who unexpectedly resigned from his posts shortly before the end of the coalition government, is preaching general political reconciliation. He recently confided to *Die Zeit* that he fell in love with a man with an FDP party membership card a few years ago and learned that you have to make an effort to put up with different opinions. “You need to be constantly aware that your political opponent could also be right,” *Die Zeit* quotes him as saying. Millions who suffered under the aggressive financial policy of FDP Finance Minister Christian Lindner will see things differently.

Türmer also declared after the announcement of the membership vote that the Jusos accepted the “yes” vote “as a matter of course.” The members had made their decision “in an extremely difficult democratic situation.” It is now important to “put social issues first” in the coalition. This means that the Jusos will loyally support Merz and his right-wing government.

The trade unions and the Left Party also play an important role in defending the SPD and the Merz government.

The trade unions, many of whose top officials are SPD members, have been pushing through social spending cuts, real wage reductions and mass redundancies for years and

suppressing resistance to them. During the Bundestag elections, the services union Verdi stabbed the collective bargaining struggle of almost 3 million federal and municipal employees in the back to prevent a broader mobilization.

IG Metall (IGM) chairwoman Christiane Benner said it would be a “disaster” if the formation of the government fails. The coalition agreement contains “many good elements” that “must now actually be implemented,” she told *Der Spiegel*. The IGM also sees “critical points in the coalition agreement, but no alternative to it.”

The Left Party occasionally criticises the SPD's right-wing course. But when the Left Party's support really counts, the SPD can rely on. In Berlin, Thuringia, Brandenburg and other federal states, its ministers have organized vicious social spending cuts and the brutal deportation of refugees. The Left Party even approved the €1 trillion arms package in the Bundesrat (Federal Council), the second chamber of parliament, even though its vote was not necessary for a majority.

Broad sections of workers and young people will inevitably come into conflict with the Merz government and its policies of militarism, state repression and social spending cuts. In order to lead and win the struggle, they must free themselves from the paralyzing influence of the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions.

They need a party of their own that combines opposition to militarism and austerity with the struggle against their cause, capitalism, that opposes the nationalism of the rulers with the international unity of the working class and that fights for the construction of a socialist society in which human needs take precedence over profits.

This party is being built by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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