

# False start for the Merz government

Peter Schwarz  
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Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz was only elected German chancellor in the second round of voting on Tuesday—and only thanks to the help of the Left Party and the Greens. Merz had failed in the first round of voting because only 310 of the 328 members of the Bundestag from the governing coalition of the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) voted for him. To be elected chancellor, Merz required at least 316 votes, the majority of all parliamentary deputies.

This was unprecedented in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. So far, all chancellors have been elected in the first round of voting. But although the CDU, CSU and SPD agreed after weeks of negotiations on a 144-page coalition agreement, which was passed by the relevant party committees, Merz did not manage to unite the necessary number of deputies behind him.

In order for the second round of voting to take place on the same day, Merz had to rely on the support of the Left Party and the Greens. Both were determined to help him into office as quickly as possible so that he could stabilise the situation and implement the right-wing coalition programme.

The Bundestag's (Federal Parliament) procedural rules stipulate a deadline of three days for the second round of voting, which can only be shortened by a two-thirds majority. The Left Party and the Greens, together with the governing parties, tabled a motion to this effect, which the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) also agreed to in the end. In the second round of voting, 325 deputies voted for Merz, who was sworn in as federal chancellor in the evening.

The Merz government's false start provides an unsparing exposure of the real political situation in Germany. His government is not only the most right-wing but also the most unpopular since the Second World War.

At the heart of the coalition agreement is the most comprehensive rearmament program since Hitler, a "fundamental turnaround" in migration policy in the spirit of the AfD, the establishment of a police state and

massive social spending cuts that will shift the costs of war and trade war onto the working population.

This program has no support among the population. In the Bundestag elections, the CDU/CSU achieved the second worst result in its history and the SPD the worst. Together they only received 45 percent of the vote and have since lost a further 7 percent in the polls. According to a survey by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, only 38 percent welcome the election of Merz as chancellor, while 56 percent oppose it.

However, this opposition is not reflected in official politics. At every opportunity, the AfD offers Merz the chance to implement his right-wing program together with them instead of the SPD. The parliamentary secretary of the AfD, Bernd Baumann, justified its approval of the early second round of voting with the words: "Germany needs a government."

The nominally "left-wing" opposition parties made their support for Merz and his reactionary program even clearer. As soon as the election debacle became apparent—and share prices began to fall—they forgot their occasional criticisms of Merz and rushed to his aid.

A commentary that appeared on *Zeit Online* shortly after the first round of voting summed up the attitude of this milieu:

The world order is tottering, and Germany is still without a government. That is quite simply fatal.

Green politician Renate Künast described the weakening of Merz as a "thunderbolt for the whole country." Katrin Göring-Eckardt wrote: "This is not good." Even though she does not support the chancellor, she could "only warn everyone against being happy about chaos."

Britta Hasselmann, parliamentary group leader of the Greens, regretted that "trust in Merz and Klingbeil has been shaken." The worst thing that could happen to this

country now would be new elections, she commented. Her colleague Katharina Dröge added: “Germany needs a stable government.”

Nothing else could have been expected from the Greens. In Olaf Scholz’s government, they were the strongest supporters of military armament, the war against Russia and the genocide against the Palestinians. The only reason they are not part of the new government is because they are not needed for a majority. Outgoing Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had a visibly good-humoured chat in the Bundestag with her successor, CDU politician Johann Wadephul. She herself will represent the new government at the UN in New York, where she will chair the General Assembly for a year.

The Left Party, which voted for the CDU and SPD’s war credits in the Bundesrat (Federal Council, the upper house) in March, also reacted with visible concern to Merz’s election defeat. Party leader Jan van Aken gave him helpful advice. If Merz does not even get the trust of his own people, van Aken said:

[H]ow is he supposed to win the trust of people who are struggling with the real problems of everyday life?

Co-chair Ines Schwerdtner explained: “It is now up to the CDU whether they dare to talk to us.”

The former Minister President of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, now Vice President of the Bundestag, was “quite angry” about the election debacle. The party leaders of the planned coalition should have ensured that such a scandal did not occur, he criticised. Ramelow was one of the first to suggest an immediate second round of voting to help Merz out of his predicament. “As the Left Party, we will also help to ensure that the two-thirds majority is achieved,” he said.

The important role played by the Left Party in Merz’s election as chancellor was also recognised by *Der Spiegel*. One of six lessons that the news magazine draws “from Merz’s stumbling start” is:

It won’t be the last time that the CDU/SPD coalition will have to rely on the approval of Heidi Reichinnek’s party. Merz now has reason to seriously consider overturning the ban on cooperation with the Left Party. It is no longer in

keeping with the times.

The new, ultra-right Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (CSU) took a similar view. He said:

Today it was relatively clear that if we want a two-thirds majority, we have to give the Left Party a call. ... Where two-thirds majorities are needed, we will have to do so again in the future, regardless of whether the political colouration suits us in any given case.

It is not known which 18 deputies from the governing parties refused to vote for Merz in the first round of voting and what their reasons were. The vote is secret. However, it is clear that the Merz government is extremely weak and internally divided.

Broad sections of the working class and youth will inevitably come into conflict with it when it militarises society, reintroduces compulsory military service, suppresses political opponents, cuts social spending and wages and cuts tens of thousands of jobs in the escalating trade war.

This resistance can only be successful if it is also directed against the Left Party, which is not an opposition but a left-wing fig leaf for the Merz government. It must oppose the government’s nationalist migration policy with the international unity of all workers and combine the rejection of war and militarism with the fight for the expropriation of the super-rich, whose interests are represented by the former head of BlackRock Germany and his government.



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