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SPD, Greens and FDP discuss social cuts, herd immunity and war in German coalition talks

The first talks between the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP) on forming a governing coalition began Thursday. The party leaders announced the talks on Wednesday, after individual exploratory talks had already taken place between the Greens and the FDP with the SPD and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) respectively.

The SPD had already emphasized that it wanted to hold coalition negotiations with the Greens and FDP as soon as possible. On Wednesday, the Greens then announced that they wanted to negotiate in this constellation and had made such an offer to the Liberals. Two hours later, FDP leader Christian Lindner also declared himself ready for talks.

Lindner reported that the “proposal was unanimously welcomed” to hold a first round of exploratory talks in the “traffic light” format, with reference to the party colours: red (SPD), yellow (FDP) and green. However, he did not want to rule out later negotiations with the CDU. Green Party chair Robert Habeck also said the “traffic light” talks were “not a complete rejection of ‘Jamaica’” (referring to a CDU [black], FDP [yellow] and Green coalition). In the talks, he said, the CDU/CSU had “really made an effort.”

The reaction within the CDU/CSU was divided. While CSU leader Markus Söder viewed the decision by the Greens and FDP to hold three-way talks with the SPD as a “de facto rejection of ‘Jamaica’” and spoke of a “clear preliminary decision,” CDU leader Armin Laschet stressed that the CDU/CSU remained willing to talk.

Virtually nothing was made public about the content of the respective meetings. The parties' representatives refused to comment in any way on the content of the exploratory talks. The formation of a new government coalition was declared a high-security matter. Every effort is being made to ensure that negotiations on forming a new government take place entirely behind the backs of the voters.

A CDU/CSU negotiator told news weekly *Der Spiegel* that the negotiating team had agreed to absolute silence. Even a cell phone ban has been imposed. Anyone who gave information to the outside world would immediately be excluded from all further negotiations and would also not be given a post in the new government, the negotiator said.

The politicians of the establishment parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) are shielding themselves from the public like a military general staff as they prepare a frontal attack against the working class in all areas. The elections had already revealed the deep crisis of the bourgeois party system, which no longer represents the interests of the majority in any way. No party won more than a quarter of the electoral votes, and for the first time in post-World War II history, three-quarters of the electorate will have voted against the chancellor's party.

Behind the scenes, the parties are now preparing a new government that will far eclipse the social attacks, rearmament and ruthless herd immunity policies of the outgoing government. There can be no doubt about this, even in view of the announcements made so far.

Speaking to broadcaster ZDF on Monday, FDP Secretary General Volker Wissing assured there will be no tax increases with his party in a "traffic light" coalition. "The FDP is not backing away from this position," Wissing said. SPD Chairman Norbert Walter-Borjans had already stated last week that a relaxation of the debt ceiling would not be negotiated in the talks.

The message is clear. After the outgoing grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD, with the support of all Bundestag parties, transferred hundreds of billions of euros to the big banks and corporations as part of the so-called coronavirus rescue packages, the money is to be exacted exclusively at the expense of the vast majority of working people.

This frontal assault on the social rights of workers is accompanied by fierce attacks on working conditions and wages by the big corporations. Already, a number of companies have announced mass layoffs or the expansion of short-time working. Horrendous inflation is already leading to losses in real wages in most industries. The decision by the delivery service Gorillas on Tuesday to dismiss striking workers without notice also underscores what the government and corporations are preparing.

There is also agreement among all parties on the “profits before lives” pandemic policy, which is reaching new dimensions with the infection of unvaccinated children and the withdrawal of even the last protective mechanisms. The SPD-Left Party-Green state government in Thuringia is just as involved in this as the Green-CDU government in Baden-Württemberg or the CDU-FDP government in North Rhine-Westphalia. During the election campaign, the lead candidates of all parties ruled out new lockdowns.

In the election campaign, the SPD, the Greens and the FDP pledged that they will continue the horrendous rearmament course of the grand coalition and intensify Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy. While Olaf Scholz, SPD candidate for chancellor and current finance minister, assured that he would continue to increase the military budget, Annalena Baerbock, Green Party candidate for chancellor, regularly criticized NATO’s 2-percent target from the right. With the economy in decline, she said, it ultimately meant not more but less military spending. During the election campaign, the FDP even called for spending 3 percent of gross domestic product on “national security.”

This programme of militarism, inequality and mass infection is hated by working people. That is why the exploratory talks are being held behind closed doors under the utmost secrecy.

Four years ago, when the grand coalition was voted out of office, the CDU/CSU and SPD held months of secret negotiations to form the most right-wing government since the end of World War II. This came to fruition with massive rearmament spending, billions in gifts to the super-rich, and the “profits before lives” policies in the pandemic that have cost more than 93,000 lives in Germany alone. At the same time, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was made the official opposition party and integrated into parliamentary work at the federal and state levels.

A “traffic light” coalition would be a continuation of this right-wing conspiracy. It would intensify the course of the grand coalition in every respect and, like it, would de facto put the AfD programme into practice. The FDP has particularly close ties to the fascist party. Numerous AfD members of parliament, including deputy parliamentary group leader Beatrix von Storch, are former FDP members. A year and a half ago, Thomas Kemmerich, the FDP’s state chair in Thuringia, used the votes of the AfD to win election as state prime minister.

But resistance to these right-wing policies is growing. Strikes and protests against layoffs, wage theft and mass infection are developing in the health care, auto industry and logistics sectors. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) participated in the federal elections to provide this opposition with a voice and a socialist perspective. We emphasized that only the independent intervention of the working class can put an end to reactionary government policies. Against the background of talks to form a “traffic light” coalition, this is now the decisive question.

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