

Forming a new German government: Parties prepare for war, social attacks

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Just days after the German election, which saw a large vote for the conservative Union (Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union, CDU-CSU) led by Angela Merkel, conflicts between leading political parties and within the parties have broken out. Some media outlets are already referring to Angela Merkel's electoral success as a Pyrrhic victory. While the chancellor was the undisputed winner of the election, her "all-powerful Union" is discouraging potential coalition partners.

The real reason for the conflicts and tensions over the formation of the future government, however, is not the alleged fears of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens that they could be outgunned in a coalition with the CDU-CSU. Rather, all the parties are trying to establish a ruling coalition that is stable enough to push through unpopular measures on behalf of the ruling class against growing opposition.

Foreign policy issues are high on the agenda. All of the parties were relieved that a military attack on Syria was postponed and that NATO bombings of Damascus and other Syrian cities did not take place during the final phase of the election campaign. It meant they were not forced to take a firm stand for the war. The chancellor adopted a wait-and-see attitude, presenting her stance as restraint and prudence.

In truth, the federal government and the opposition parties are directly involved in preparing for war against Syria. They actively support the US war plans and the pro-imperialist opposition to the Assad regime.

At the same time, they are seeking to exploit Germany's relations with Moscow and Tehran. In a letter to the German president, Joachim Gauck, last Sunday, newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani described Germany as Iran's principal ally in Europe. This issue plays a major role in debates at the

UN General Assembly, which began in New York on Tuesday.

For some time, the US government has been urging Germany to play a more active role in US-led wars in the Middle East. This means, however, that the future German government must intensify its militarist policies, even though such a course confronts overwhelming opposition from the German population.

The same applies to economic and social policy. The Merkel government has transferred the main burden of the economic crisis onto southern and eastern European countries, but now the big corporations and banks are demanding a drastic intensification of austerity measures and cuts in social spending in Germany itself.

In a comment on the election result, the *Financial Times* wrote: "After years of neglect, the domestic reform agenda needs to be revived." The election results should not be misread as a vote for inertia, the newspaper warned, stressing that "this is no time for complacency."

The impending confrontation with the population in all spheres of foreign and domestic policy has led to sharp tensions regarding the formation of the new government. All of the parties are moving closer together, as if preparing for a siege, but this process inevitably creates friction and internal tensions.

In terms of political content, however, there is little to choose between the main parties. This is made clear by a glimpse at the political landscape at a state level. After the election, the media described Germany as a "black republic"—referring to the CDU's party colours—but at the state level, the SPD dominates. It heads 9 of Germany's 16 state governments and participates in a further 4 involving various coalitions with the CDU, the Greens and the Left Party.

On this basis, the SPD is the leading force in

Germany's second chamber, the Bundesrat, which comprises the premiers from the 16 states.

In reality, the Bundesrat has long since functioned as a "grand coalition" of the conservative parties and the SPD. Passing the legislation put to the Bundesrat invariably involves collaboration between the SPD and the Union. Many commentators are therefore arguing that it also makes sense for the Union and SPD to form a coalition at a federal level. Such a coalition would have a substantial majority in both of the German chambers (Bundestag and Bundesrat) and operate largely independently of the electorate.

The Green Party is also willing, however, to provide Merkel with a parliamentary majority. A number of leading Greens have resigned after the party's miserable showing in the election, significantly strengthening the wing of the Green Party favouring a coalition with the CDU.

As for the Left Party, it has stepped up its overtures to the SPD and the Greens following the election.

Graphs of voter swings in Sunday's election, when compared to the previous election in 2009, also show that the electorate largely regards the parties as interchangeable.

The CDU-CSU obtained their biggest increase in votes from their former coalition partner, the free-market Free Democratic Party (FDP). Some 2.1 million voters switched from the FDP to the Union, while half a million FDP voters (2009) went over to the SPD. The SPD was able to win the support of half a million voters who in 2009 voted for the Greens. Another 420,000 Green voters migrated to the CDU-CSU.

Not a single party in this spectrum represents the interests of the population. This is especially evident in the election results for the Left Party, which many voters recognised for what it is: a right-wing, bourgeois party. It lost almost a third of its votes, dropped from 11.9 percent in 2009 to 8.6 percent. Fully 320,000 former voters for the Left Party from 2009 decided not to vote at all this year. Disillusion by former Left Party voters was only topped by the FDP, which lost 460,000 voters who abstained on Sunday.

Significantly, 340,000 former Left Party voters cast their ballots on Sunday for the newly formed nationalist, anti-euro Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which was standing in its first elections. The support for the AfD from former Left Party voters was

only exceeded by the FDP, which lost 430,000 votes to the AfD. The only increase in votes recorded by the Left Party came from 90,000 people who voted for FDP in 2009 but for the Left Party in 2013.



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