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German government talks: A grand coalition of social cuts and imperialist foreign policy

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26 October 2013

Even before negotiations between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) over forming a new German government began and the ministers were named, let alone sworn in, the government has gone on the offensive.

Just before the opening of the European Union (EU) conference in Brussels on Thursday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed that the EU Commission be given more influence over the budgets of individual member states. Merkel's office has already dictated massive social cuts through the EU's institutions to a number of states. In Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and other countries these policies have had devastating consequences. Now this social counterrevolution is to be intensified.

Merkel reportedly agreed on the initiative with the SPD, who demanded in exchange the right to name the new EU commission president. The SPD want to replace the current commission President José Manuel Barroso with the current chairman of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, an SPD member.

Ten years ago, the SPD introduced drastic social attacks in Germany with the Agenda 2010 reforms. Then, in the recent election campaign, they accused Merkel of benefiting from the successes of the Agenda reforms. The SPD are now planning a coalition government with the CDU/CSU in Germany, in order to intensify social attacks.

This takes place amid the worsening of the global economic crisis and of its impact on Europe. During the election campaign, reports on the euro crisis were almost entirely blacked out and the situation portrayed positively. It is obvious, however, that none of the problems which led to the deepest recession since the 1930s has been resolved. On the contrary, the austerity measures dictated by Berlin and Brussels have worsened the debt crisis.

In the name of bailing out the banks and making reforms, a massive redistribution of wealth from working people to the ruling elite has taken place. The financial aristocracy has enriched itself at the expense of the working class and state budgets. While the number of millionaires rises and the stock markets post record profits, mass poverty, unemployment and state indebtedness have soared.

The future government will not simply be a repetition of the grand coalition of 2005-2009, when Merkel governed in a coalition with the SPD. Since then, the economic and political crisis has deepened significantly. The super-rich who control the banks, corporations and financial funds will seek to dictate policy throughout Europe even more ruthlessly.

At the same time, disgust and opposition to the devastation of society is growing within the population. The initial signs of coming class struggles have brought all the parties closer together; a future CDU-CSU-SPD government would control four-fifths of all deputies in parliament, thereby effectively installing a parliamentary dictatorship against the people.

The so-called opposition parties, the Greens and the Left Party, are in full agreement with the CDU/CSU and SPD on all essential issues.

The Greens have responded to their disappointing result in the federal election by moving sharply to the right. They have declared that they would be available for a coalition with the CDU/CSU in future. The Greens' greatest mistakes in the election campaign, the party leadership concluded, were its calls for minimal tax increases for the better-off and privileged layers, and its insufficient recognition of the interests of big business.

The Left Party has also indicated its backing for the cartel of ruling parties by repeatedly offering its support in the building of a government. Only with the assistance of the Left Party could the two parties responsible for the reforms realise their program in reality, they continuously stated.

The formation of a new government thus increasingly takes the form of a conspiracy of all of the parties, whose policies are directed against the overwhelming majority of the population. This applies not only to economic and social policy, but particularly to foreign policy.

In the face of the intensifying global economic crisis and sharpening international tensions, all of the parties are agreed that Germany has to play a more assertive role as a major power.

During the election the political parties held back, leaving it to the media to push for a more aggressive foreign policy. Conservative, liberal and supposedly “left” newspapers all called for an American military strike on Syria, and for German participation in it. Germany’s decision to abstain from participation in the Libyan war was repeatedly criticised as a mistake that could not be repeated.

Immediately after the election, German President Joachim Gauck posed the question in his speech on the anniversary of German unification: “Is our engagement appropriate for the significance of our country?” Germany was Europe’s most populous country, in the centre of the continent, and the fourth largest economic power in the world, he said. It could not be allowed to avoid its international responsibilities.

Since then, media and research institutions close to the government have published numerous comments calling for a return of German great power politics. The SWP research institute published a study several days ago titled “New power, New responsibility.” Its main point can be summarised as follows: the United States, due to its decline as a global hegemon, can no longer fulfil its role of guaranteeing international order. Consequently, the future coalition government in Berlin will have to take on more responsibility on the global stage.

The return of German great power politics, as in the 1930s, is bound up with the revival of militarism both domestically and abroad: the build-up of arms, a massive assault on social achievements and democratic rights and the construction of a police state.

The preparations for a grand coalition make one thing clear. The working class must prepare for major class conflicts. Therefore the building of the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) assumes immense significance.

The PSG was the only party to intervene in the federal election with an international, socialist programme, giving the widespread opposition to the austerity dictates from Berlin and Brussels a voice and a political orientation. Workers in Germany, Europe and internationally who agree with this perspective should make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party in preparation for the coming class battles.