

German Green Party moves toward coalition with Christian Democrats

By Dietmar Henning
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The special congress of the Green Party in Berlin on Saturday will mark a political turning point in the direction of closer cooperation with the rightwing Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Support for CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel's proposal to end the use of nuclear power will provide the political rationale for the coalition.

The leadership of the Green Party has already begun to line up its members in support of Merkel's nuclear exit policy. On 30 June, the Bundestag (federal parliament) will vote on legislation to that end. In a resolution proposed for Saturday's congress, the party leadership calls upon delegates to require the parliamentary delegates to support the law. Parliamentary leaders Renate Künast, Jürgen Trittin and party co-chairs Cem Özdemir and Claudia Roth have agreed on it.

Künast said: "Why should the Greens stand on the sidelines?" The Green Party chair in North Rhine Westphalia is even of the opinion, "This is a Green exit" [from nuclear power].

There are some voices inside the Greens that are opposed to giving up the goal that the party had previously set—abandoning nuclear energy by 2017. And some environmental groups have called on the Greens not to support Merkel and the federal government.

But the party leadership will prevail. "This time we are not divided and torn apart," said Roth. There were no "differences in aim."

Merkel's change in nuclear policy is a clear offer to the Greens, to which they immediately responded. Trittin spoke of a "historic opportunity" to "resolve the nuclear issue, which has been simmering for decades, through a real consensus." Almost all the party leaders expressed themselves similarly.

In particular, Baden-Württemberg State Premier Winfried Kretschmann, a member of the Green Party, has escalated his campaign for an agreement with the CDU, something he has advocated for years. He was beside himself with praise for the chancellor and her reversal on nuclear policy, saying she deserved "great respect". Merkel returned the praise. The Green state premier had "been grappling with this for many years." She appreciated his staying power.

Kretschmann called Merkel's nuclear volte face a historic breakthrough. An unbridgeable gulf between the Christian

Democrats and the Greens had been "bridged." "In other words," said *Spiegel Online*, "the most powerful Green Party politician regards a federal coalition with the Christian Democrats as possible, and even by 2013."

Kretschmann often refers to himself as a "devout Catholic" and as a "citizen with conservative values." In the 1980s, he was a leading figure in the *Ökolibertären* (Eco-libertarians), a rightwing tendency within the Green Party.

He combines his "ecological humanism" with anthroposophical phrases about the "unity of man and nature" and speaks of a deep ideological connection between ecology and Christianity. The Greens and CDU link together the responsible use of nature and the preservation of creation, he declares. While the Christian Democrats include this more or less automatically through their religious foundations, the Greens pursue similar goals through their environmental policy.

Other Green Party leaders responded less enthusiastically to Merkel's approach, but the content is just as clear. Özdemir did not exclude a coalition with the CDU after the next federal elections. He told the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, "We have always said that we would talk to the CDU depending on the local situation."

In addition to federal Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen (CDU), who has long talked of a rapprochement with the Greens, the Frankfurt CDU Mayor Petra Roth told *Spiegel* she favoured cooperation at the federal level between the Christian Democrats and the Greens. They shared the same ideas in many important areas, she said.

The invitation given to Klaus Töpfer (CDU) to attend the Green Party special congress also illustrates the rapprochement between the two parties. In the late 1980s, Töpfer, the former director of the UN Environment Programme, was federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. He currently chairs the Ethics Committee of the CDU, which drafted the recommendations for the new energy policy of the federal government. Töpfer will speak to the Green Party delegates at the special party congress.

Merkel's nuclear turnaround arose out of tactical calculations. In the face of devastating poll numbers for the CDU and Free Democratic Party (FDP), Merkel is looking for

new coalition possibilities. The Christian Democrats are currently polling just over 30 percent, and the FDP lies below the five-percent hurdle needed for parliamentary representation.

Despite criticism from within the ranks of the CDU itself, and from the big energy corporations and European and international governments, Merkel has chosen to phase out nuclear energy. She urgently needs new political and social props for her rightwing and deeply unpopular policies. In view of the continuing financial crisis and intense global upheavals, the Greens are needed to bring on better-off layers of the middle class against the working class, and to support German imperialism.

The turn of the Greens to the CDU, however, is less a product of tactical calculations. Rather, the Greens are now in agreement with the CDU on almost all questions.

For example, the Greens are strict advocates of the constitutionally enshrined “debt brake,” even if this means massive cuts in social spending. In an interim report after one year of an SPD-Green Party minority government in North Rhine-Westphalia, the two Green Party state chairs Monika Düker and Sven Lehmann stress that “fiscal policy is taken seriously in light of the crisis of public finances.”

The Greens in North Rhine-Westphalia also insist that the interests of energy companies can be advanced in other ways, by cloaking them in “environmental” garb. Earlier this week, the Green state Environment Minister John Rimmel discussed the “reorientation of energy policy” with Klaus Engel, Jürgen Grossmann and Heinrich Hiesinger, the CEOs of Evonik, RWE and ThyssenKrupp.

Rimmel was “pleasantly surprised” and full of praise. He stressed that his climate change policy was not a matter of de-industrialization, but re-industrialization. “We are in the midst of new early days, which can stand proud in comparison with previous eras.”

Meanwhile, the mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, in an interview with *Zeit Online*, positioned the Greens as representatives of a strong state against the people. “In the past,” the Greens “understood themselves as the party that acts against excessive repression, against the encroachments of the state.” But that is not enough to govern. “Responsible domestic policy” means “that sometimes repression is called for.” The public space has long been under threat not by the police or private security forces, he said, but neglected young people. “You often cannot move about there without being afraid.”

The Green mayor vehemently rejects the notion that the neglect of youth is a social problem. He does not believe that it can be solved “through social work, prevention, better education and transfer payments.” “If someone tells me I cannot sleep at night because of this bawling, then I cannot refer him to the shortcomings of Hartz IV [welfare laws].”

The Green Party plays the same role in foreign policy. It supports the Merkel government’s planned reform of the

armed forces, transforming them into the tool of an aggressive German foreign policy, and the deployment of the German army into Afghanistan and other countries. It vehemently criticized the federal government for abstaining in the war against Libya.

The rapprochement of the Greens with the CDU is a further milestone in the transformation of the Greens. *Spiegel Online* commented that the latest development was “the reconciliation of the middle class with itself. Healing the wounds of 1968. The return of the lost children of the seventies.”

This relationship between the student protest movement of the sixties and the political development of the Greens, however, requires closer examination. After the Second World War, the German bourgeoisie was profoundly discredited by fascism and war, and was forced to show restraint. The student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s denounced the old political and corporate elite. The Greens emerged as part of this movement.

Founded in 1980 as an “anti-party party”, they are now the new party of the German bourgeoisie. They have provided German capital, discredited after World War II, with a new ideological basis.

Given the international financial crisis, for which working people will pay with enormous social cuts, the ruling class needs a strong state to enforce them. The Greens provide the arguments and ideological justification: “Responsible fiscal policy,” “sustainability,” “debt reduction in the interest of future generations,” “ecological-green-business”. Protests against social decline are beaten back with references to “neglect,” the “protection of public spaces” and the fight against “intolerance.”

At the same time, Germany must again defend its economic interests internationally, including with military force. Here too, the Greens provide the ideological justification. German troops no longer march into foreign countries for “*Führer, Volk und Vaterland*” (“Führer, people and fatherland”). In the future, the German military will drop bombs and occupy other countries for “peace and freedom,” “democracy,” human rights” and the “protection of the civilian population” from massacres, most recently in the Libya war. Former Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer justified the participation of the Bundeswehr in the bombing of Serbia in 1999 by saying: Never again, Auschwitz.

With their focus on Merkel and the CDU, the Greens are showing their true political face more clearly.

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