

Germany's conservative parties shift further to the right

By Peter Schwarz
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After ten hours of negotiation on Sunday, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian partner, the Christian Social Union (CSU), agreed on a common approach for negotiations on a future government coalition with the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens. The result of the talks is a clear shift to the right that will also determine the policy of the next German government.

The dominant issue in the talks was setting a ceiling on the number of refugees, a dispute that has been raging for the past two years between the CDU and CSU—collectively known as the Union. The leader of the CSU, Horst Seehofer, has long insisted on a limit on refugees, declaring it to be a prerequisite for his party's participation in a new government. CDU leader Angela Merkel has so far rejected such a ceiling.

The CSU has now prevailed in substance, while making a concession to the CDU in words. The two parties agreed that no more than 200,000 people should be admitted annually to Germany for humanitarian reasons (asylum seekers or refugees), but the word “ceiling” is not mentioned in the agreement.

Newly arrived asylum seekers are to be detained in special “residence centres” and their asylum procedures are to be bundled into so-called “decision-making and recycling centres.” They are thus effectively deprived of their freedom. The Union parties have refrained from using the word “camp” only because of its historical associations with the period of Nazi rule.

The deal struck at the expense of refugees, the weakest section of society, is only the surface appearance of a much more fundamental turn to the right. Both the CSU and the CDU lost heavily in the Bundestag [parliamentary] election September 24, achieving the worst result in their history. They have reacted by adopting in large measure the far-right program of the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

This is clearly revealed in the ten-point plan, “Why the Union needs a bourgeois-conservative renewal,” drawn up by Markus Blume, Deputy Secretary General of the CSU, in

close co-ordination with CSU leader Seehofer. The plan formed the basis for the discussions with the CDU and expressly demands a sharp shift to the right on a wide range of issues.

The document defines the Union as a party which must “unite the political center with the democratic right-wing” and “fill its traditional place of centre-right.” “The electorate rely on the values and characteristics of the country, they want law and order, they desire security and prosperity for all,” the paper continues. One looks in vain for any reference to democracy, and the concept of freedom is turned upside down.

Part of openness and freedom is a ceiling for refugees and a guiding national culture, the CSU claims. “Unlimited freedom creates fear. And fear is the greatest enemy of an open society. That is why we need a bourgeois order of freedom: that is a state able to impose its will, a clear limitation to immigration and a direction for integration.” Astonishing and reactionary reasoning!

The document proclaims the virtues of a “healthy patriotism” and “love of *Heimat*” (homeland—a German term that strongly recalls “Blood-and-Soil” mysticism). “The values and characteristics of our *Heimat* ensure identity and cohesion,” it continues. “Blind populism against the right-wing”—i.e., the strict rejection of the far-right—the paper continues, is “just as dangerous as far-right radical populism.”

In the manner typical of the far right, the CSU document rages against alleged “bans on thought and expressions of opinion” and laments that “everything not corresponding to the spirit of the old-68ers is considered to be right-wing and therefore bad.” It ends with the assertion that “now even the *Zeitgeist* is conservative.” Conservatism is “the new modernity.” To be conservative is “once again sexy.”

A similar tone prevailed at the “German Conference” of the Young Union, which took place one day before the CDU-CSU meeting in Dresden. The Young Union (JU) is the joint youth organisation of the CDU and CSU. Chancellor Merkel received a rough reception from the

assembled JU delegates who went on to cheer Jens Spahn, regarded as a right-wing challenger to Merkel within the CDU. The “Dresden Declaration,” passed at the JU conference stated that a simple “business as usual” response was not permissible given the Union’s poor election result. The CDU and the CSU must sharpen up their conservative profile “more clearly than before.”

On October 18, almost a month after the Bundestag election and three days after next Sunday’s state election in Lower Saxony, the Union plans to begin exploratory talks with the FDP and Greens on a so-called “Jamaica” (black-yellow-green) coalition. It is already clear, however, that both of the latter parties have no basic problem with the Union’s lurch to the right.

During the recent election campaign the FDP already demanded an immigration law that would only allow immigrants to enter the country who could be of use to German business. In addition, the FDP called for a time limit on refugees from civil wars staying in the country and clear rules for their eventual deportation.

For their part, the Greens, who posed as friends of the refugees in their election campaign, have already indicated they are ready to accommodate to the right wing. The party’s leading election candidate, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, welcomed the union agreement on refugee policy. It represented “a starting point,” she said, which now had to be looked at more closely. Cem Özdemir, the Green Party’s other leading candidate, also refrained from a clear “no” to the Union’s deal, thereby leaving the door open for a possible Jamaica coalition. He was “looking forward to how they will explain this to us,” he said on German television.

Above all, the Greens agree when it comes to glorifying the “love of *Heimat*” propagated by the right-wingers in the Union.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) had already moralised on the values of *Heimat* in his “Day of German Unity” speech October 3, thereby laying down the leitmotif for the right-wing course of the new government.

At the Green Party conference, which agreed to conduct negotiations with the Union and FDP on a new government, Göring-Eckardt was exuberant in professing her passion for *Heimat*. In this respect, the Greens “cannot be surpassed,” she declared: “We love this country. This is our *Heimat*. No one divides this land. We will fight for this *Heimat*.”

Robert Habeck, an environmental minister in the first-ever Jamaica coalition in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, and a rising star in the Green Party, also enthused about the significance of *Heimat* in an interview with the right-wing *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper. “I very much favour not yielding up green concepts like *Heimat* and

Germany to the AfD,” he said. He had often found that people defined themselves through their local traditions, their profession, their *Heimat*. “This excludes any sort of contempt (for such concepts).”

“We must dare to talk about terms like *Heimat* and patriotism, to claim them for us and define them,” he demanded. “*Heimat* is the space in which we live and shape for ourselves, where we come from. *Heimat* is how we live together.” The fact that many people in eastern Germany voted for right-wing populism was not a communications problem, but rather “a problem of lack of recognition. Of being lost in a world that is rapidly changing.” This means the problem cannot be solved merely by more money, he concluded.

Germanomania, conservatism, the demonisation of refugees—these are the ideological forms through which the turn to the right is taking place in all the mainstream parties—including the SPD and the Left Party, who are expected to form the opposition in a new parliament. Contrary to what is widely propagated, this turn to the right does not reflect any broad sentiment among the masses, whose lives, especially in the case of the younger generation, are increasingly characterized by the global economy, international communication and the Internet.

It is rather the ideological nationalist reflex with which bourgeois and wealthy middle class layers react to the break-up of the world economy into competing trading blocs, along with increasing wars and social tensions. The fomenting of chauvinism and xenophobia serves to prepare new wars and suppress the class struggle. When the CSU refers to the “spirit of the old-68ers,” it does not mean the rebellious bourgeois youth who have long since returned to their bourgeois hearth in the form of the Greens. Rather the CSU is expressing its hostility to the lifting of the lid on Germany’s Nazi past and its reactionary ideologies, which also took place in the 1960s.

The WSWS has stressed in many articles that the German ruling class “cannot return to a policy of war and militarism without reviving its political traditions which have played such a devastating role in history—nationalism, racism and suppression of all opposition.” This diagnosis has been confirmed even before negotiations for a new federal government have properly begun.

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