

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7458>



Germany

The coalition government agreement

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV564 - January 2022 -

Publication date: Sunday 2 January 2022

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To put it plainly: the coalition agreement of the traffic light government is a clear rejection of the 1.5° target; it is no longer even maintained in words.

The climate target that the government wants to achieve is very softly formulated: Climate neutrality by 2045. Climate neutrality means that a process or activity does not affect the climate. This means that more CO₂ can be emitted, as long as everything possible can be offset against it: additional CO₂ sinks, rights from emissions trading, and so on. It is also said that the coal phase-out should take place by 2030, but only “ideally”, in other words: if it happens that way.

There are no binding targets to guide government action. There is certainly no mechanism that the Federal Constitutional Court has called for in order not to jeopardize the future of the younger generations: namely, that interim targets be formulated that can be used to check whether the measures are sufficient or not.

The replacement of fossil fuels is to be achieved exclusively by market-based means, i.e. by products that function on the basis of renewable energies forcing fossil fuels out of the market. This is clearly visible in the case of the internal combustion engine: there is no fixed date for its end, it is only said that it should disappear from the market as far as possible by 2030.

Whether the climate turnaround works or not is thus placed in the hands of the corporations, and the state once again abandons its protective function.

Doors open for renewables

At the same time, the traffic light "party" is placing the abandonment of fossil fuels at the centre of its government programme; it is pursuing an extremely ambitious programme to replace them with renewable energies. Wind power and photovoltaics are to be massively expanded, there is a roof programme for the building industry, new buildings are to be low-energy houses, motor vehicles are to be converted to electric drives - battery factories are to be built on a large scale in Germany for this purpose so as not to be dependent on foreign supplies. Hydrogen production is also to be systematically expanded.

However, these measures are thwarted by a crucial precept: The main purpose of government action is to boost economic growth and thus production output to the maximum. This, however, will lead to a massive increase in electricity demand: the government expects an increase from 545 TWh today to 680-750 TWh in 2030. Where this additional electricity is to come from, it does not say. A not insignificant part of it will probably be imported - in any case, the traffic lights are aiming for climate partnerships with other countries, Eastern European ones or those from the global South. One instrument for this is, of course, development aid.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that the phase-out of fossil fuels will simply not take place to a sufficient extent - even the country's own “soft” climate targets will be missed. Then we'll just be out of luck. The entrepreneurs are betting that by then a suitable technology will be ready to suck the excess CO₂ out of the air and dump it in the ground. It's a cynical game.

Insatiable

From an ecological point of view, the main flaw in the coalition agreement is that it only focuses on energy conversion and expansion; there is no mention of energy saving, which would require certain areas of the economy to be cut back. But that would be the devil. On the contrary, the government's primary goal is to open all the floodgates to economic growth.

The energy transition is seen exclusively as a drive transition, supplemented by improvements in energy efficiency where possible. These are therefore purely technological measures that are supposed to lead to a reduction in CO2 emissions. But what really causes the climate catastrophe - and also other environmental catastrophes such as the extinction of species, water and air pollution, etc. - is capitalism's inherent compulsion to produce excessively, because in the end that is the only way to make a profit.

With this programme, Germany is treading with seven-league boots on the path to global warming of 2.5-5 degrees, which the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now predicts. The only precaution that the traffic lights offer against this is the personnel and technical expansion of disaster protection against flooding.

We have to look at it soberly: The primary goal of the traffic lights is not to comply with the Paris Agreement. Their ultimate goal is to use ecological restructuring as a springboard for a new phase of capital accumulation.

Significant parts of German capital sense a large market in the transition to renewable energies and digitalization and the opportunity to gain a technological advantage over competitors and thus expand their own global market position. The entire treaty is written under this star, right at the beginning it says: "The climate crisis endangers our livelihoods and threatens freedom, prosperity and security. In the face of intensified global competition, Germany and Europe must re-establish their economic strength. In the international systemic competition, we must resolutely defend our values with democratic partners."

And the chapter on "Climate protection in a social-ecological market economy" also begins with the sentence: Because the German economy is facing far-reaching transformation processes in global competition, we therefore see "the task of giving our country's economic strength a new dynamism".

Citizen participation: decoys and deceptions

It is inevitable that the internal contradictions of this programme will soon become apparent. "Trouble lurks behind every bush," Robert Habeck has noted in his overall assessment of the negotiations. Indeed, the programme has chances of making trouble with all sorts of social groups. Internally, therefore, the government is endeavouring to involve trade unions, environmental associations and others in its plans as early as possible and to build up all kinds of "alliances": for example, an "Alliance for Transformation", or a "Strategy Platform Transformation of the Automotive Industry", in order to neutralize possible resistance as early as possible. It sells this as participatory democracy, similar to the "citizens' councils" that the Bundestag is supposed to elect (sic!). The procedure has a potential for division, you can bet that the leaders of the trade unions and environmental associations will get involved in such procedures. In fact, this means nothing other than an extension of the practice of co-management to many other social fields.

The flip side of citizen participation comes across as more robust: namely, in order to eliminate legal resistance earlier and more effectively, approval procedures (for major projects, for example) and jurisdiction are to be

accelerated. Citizen participation is even restricted, namely to the initial phase of a procedure. Objections at a later stage are only to be possible if significant changes have been made to the plan.

The march towards the eco-liberal competition state

The welfare state is being further weakened - now under allegedly ecological auspices

For its plans, the government with the traffic light system wants to create a veritable start-up mood. Above all, their far-reaching digitization plans will have a profound impact on the structures of society - if they are realized.

The ambitious investment plans are thirsty for additional workers, and all the floodgates are being opened: the low-wage sector is being expanded - mini- and midi-jobs bring a little more money; there are to be more further qualifications for people on Hartz IV, the additional income limits are being raised, but the sanctions regime remains. Better social security is planned for the self-employed. The adjustment of incomes in these lowest areas is ridiculous: the standard rate will be increased by a proud 3 euros from 1.1.2022 - almost a mockery. And the 12 euro minimum wage has already been eaten up by inflation, leaving further adjustments to a commission.

The facilitation of the naturalization of asylum seekers also falls into the category of "recruitment of labour". The government sees Germany as a country of immigration, and a citizenship law based on the principle of descent is ill-suited to this. The fact that it is to be fundamentally reformed is to be welcomed, regardless of the fact that this won't make the asylum regime any more humane: the already militarized defence against refugees at the EU's external borders is to be Europeanized and made more effective, and Frontex is to be expanded.

That is too meagre for a spirit of optimism. The traffic light therefore has a number of extended civil liberties in its baggage, with which the government will certainly meet with approval - however, they can also have a polarising effect: for example, the abolition of 219a, which makes medical information about abortions a punishable offence (the fundamental punishability of abortions remains unchanged); the legalization of cannabis (but home cultivation remains prohibited); the lowering of the voting age to 16; the restoration of non-profit status also for politically engaged associations, etc.

Privatization and digitalization

There is no mention of cushioning the social costs of the ecological transformation. Yet tens of thousands of redundancies are threatened in the car industry alone. The Working Time Act is to be put to the test: the employers' associations are demanding the abolition of the daily maximum working hours, the government is seeking the consent of the trade unions for even more flexibilization and in return throws them the candy that collective bargaining is important and the rights of works councils and trade unions in the company are to be strengthened.

The state continues to withdraw from the provision of services of general interest, the major deficits of underfunding, staff shortages and poor working conditions are addressed at most in the area of nursing care, and the fee-per-case system is not touched. The health sector is now called "health economy", the 15 lines dedicated to it are exclusively about the expansion of high-tech medicine. And Health Minister Karl Lauterbach is known as a hospital privatizer?

The goal of making the financing of pension insurance future-proof is no longer even set by the traffic lights. In future, a state-backed equity pension will transfer part of the statutory pension to the capital market.

Staff shortages, for example in the education sector or in state administration, are to be replaced by digital technology. Digitization is the magic word and the most important pillar of the entire coalition programme: the government sees it as the key to an effective lean state and once again suggests that social and ecological problems can be solved by investing in technology.

Aggressively outward

Externally, the eco-liberal competition state supports its great power ambitions through Europeanization and militarization. The seesaw policy towards Russia (and China) pursued by Merkel and Kohl is being abandoned in favour of a more aggressive stance. Germany's great power ambitions are becoming even more apparent. The distribution of power in the EU is to shift again in favour of more communitarized structures and more decisions are to be taken by qualified majority. This is particularly important with regard to the creation of a European army, because this old project has never met with, and still does not meet with, unanimous agreement among the member states. In future, Germany is to spend three per cent of its gross domestic product on 'international action' - this puts diplomacy, development aid and the military in the same sack - it is probably not only meant in mathematical terms, but also politically.

And: Germany, as a state that stores nuclear weapons on its territory, wants to have a say in the future when the red button is to be pressed. This could be prevented so far.

What of all this can be translated into reality is, of course, written in the stars. "Trouble lurks behind every bush," commented Robert Habeck of the Greens, who is now economics minister. Let's make sure he's right on this point. The opposition must not get lost in the minutiae, it must counter the traffic light with a counter-concept.

18 December 2021

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