

# The development of the radical right-wing parties in Germany

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With a total of 3.3 percent of the vote in last month's national elections, the radical right-wing and fascist parties in Germany received a much lower vote than was anticipated.

At the end of April the German Peoples Union (DVU) had won a surprising 12.9 percent in state elections in the east German state of Saxony Anhalt and entered the local parliament with a total of 16 deputies. It was the best result for a neo-fascist party since the banning of Hitler's Nazi Party.

The DVU sought to extend its success in the national elections. Once again they concentrated their election campaign in those areas with high unemployment and attempted to exploit the social crisis to spread their racist demagoguery. 'German money for German jobs!' and 'Jobs for Germans first, foreigners out!' were their rabble-rousing slogans.

A few days before the elections the head of the DVU, Munich-based publisher Gerhard Frey, called for a 'Storm on Bonn' in his paper *Deutsche National-Zeitung*. According to Frey the chances of entering the German parliament 'were never so good as today.' The 'bigwigs in Bonn won't know what hit them.'

However, after the votes had been counted a different picture emerged. With 1.3 percent of the vote the DVU followed the Republican Party, which, with just 1.7 percent, came off as badly as in the elections of four years earlier. In Saxony Anhalt the vote for the DVU fell from the state election total of 12.9 percent to 3.2 percent.

In another east German state, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, elections to the state parliament took place in tandem with the national elections, and here too the right-wing parties failed to make an impact. Although opinion pollsters had predicted a strong vote for the neo-fascists, and some even expected both the DVU and the National Democratic Party (NPD) to enter the state administration, none of the parties achieved representation in the new parliament. (In Germany, only parties with more than 5 percent are entitled to representation.)

The poor result for the extreme right parties confirms that their previous electoral gains came primarily from protest voters, who this time were carried along by the broadly based sentiment for the ouster of Chancellor Kohl. The fact that the great majority of workers used the election as a plebiscite against the Kohl government had a strong and positive influence on those wavering layers living on the edge of society whose desperate plight had been exploited by the extreme right.

It would, however, be wrong to speak in a light-minded manner of the elections being an 'all clear' signal on the danger from the right, as did the Social Democratic interior minister of Saxony Anhalt, Manfred Pueschel, on the evening of the vote.

In the first place, the percentage of young men who voted for the ultra-right in the east of Germany was still very high. Every fifth youth between the ages of 18 and 24 voted for the extreme right. Secondly, the influence of the right can grow powerfully under a Red-Green (Social Democratic and Green Party) coalition government. It is already clear that the coalition will not fulfil the hopes and expectations for improved conditions for the majority of the working population. While the most visible and extreme expressions of social inequality are to be circumscribed, the incoming ministers aim to encourage the spread of low-wage jobs and increase state pressure to force workers to accept such employment.

The trade unions have declared their unconditional support for the government and seek to prevent more than ever an independent movement of the workers. This means that alongside the social crisis, political frustration will grow.

For similar reasons the influence of the extreme right has grown strongly in the rest of Europe, particularly in those countries with social democratic governments. This is especially clear in Austria, where a social democratic chancellor has ruled continuously for nearly three decades. Over this period the right-wing radical Joerg Haider and his party have grown stronger, to the point where they now obtain up to 25 percent of the vote.

At the moment the extreme right wing in Germany is split into three rival parties. The German Peoples Party (DVU), which in the past recorded spectacular gains, is more of a tightly organised enterprise than a party, controlled from the party and publishing centre of the multimillionaire Gerhard Frey.

Frey maintains close contact with the Munich headquarters of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the conservative party based in Bavaria which previously shared power in Kohl's coalition. The DVU made an agreement with the leaders of the CSU not to stand candidates in the recent state elections in Bavaria, thereby enabling the CSU to mop up the right-wing vote.

Prior to the elections in Saxony Anhalt the DVU had gained representation in the German state parliaments of Schleswig Holstein and Bremen, but there the DVU factions fell apart after a short period of time. In Bremen a DVU deputy used money stipulated for the fraction to pay for garden furniture and dental work, and in other places tax money was spent to finance thousands of subscriptions to Frey's newspapers.

In the parliament of Saxony Anhalt the DVU fraction received a reprimand from the parliamentary president following an incident in which the head of the fraction, a confidante of Frey, sat next to the deputies in the parliamentary chamber and, without a blush, instructed them how to vote.

The second party, the Republicans, was founded 15 years ago by Franz Schoenhuber, a former member of Hitler's Waffen-SS. For a second time they have succeeded in winning seats in the Baden-Württemberg state parliament. In recent years the party has undergone a change. It seeks to distance itself from right-wing acts of violence in an attempt to win over layers of more traditional conservative voters.

This course has sparked controversy inside the party. In recent months it has lost members to the DVU, above all in the east of Germany. The founder of the Republicans, Schoenhuber, stood as the principal candidate for the DVU in Bavaria, and the head of the DVU slate in the eastern state of Saxony was a former functionary of the Republicans.

The oldest of the extreme right parties is the National Democratic Party (NPD). It provocatively claims the mantle of successor to Hitler's NSDAP, and has developed into a melting pot for the militant right.

Following German reunification, the party concentrated its activities in the east and established a party centre in the city of Dresden. From there it organised right-wing youth and skinheads--above all in those areas where social deprivation is most pronounced--and established so-called 'Kameradschaften', i.e., squads of comrades. The chairman of the party is the former German army captain Udo Voigt,

who is described as a 'militant technocrat' in the press (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung*), and who maintains close contacts with the army.

Symptomatic of the radicalisation of the NPD, which as early as the 1960s had won more than 6 percent of the vote in state elections, was the candidacy of Manfred Roeder in Stralsund. In 1982 Roeder was condemned to 13 years in prison as the ringleader of a terrorist group. In an arson attack carried out by an organisation founded by Roeder--the 'German Action Group'--two Vietnamese were killed.

Despite his conviction, Roeder was invited to an officers academy of the German army two years ago to speak on the role of Germany after reunification. The state election office for Mecklenburg Vorpommern did not oppose Roeder's candidacy, although his previous conviction was well known.

Along with its concentration on the states in eastern Germany and its efforts to build 'Kameradschaften', the NPD has carried out a remarkable change in its program. It now expresses sympathy with the old German Democratic Republic (Stalinist-ruled East Germany). Not everything was bad and reprehensible in the former Stalinist state, the party line runs. At least iron discipline and order prevailed.

As an NPD candidate Roeder played the GDR card. In the GDR there was no defacing of houses. 'Before there was the Free German Youth [GDR Stalinist youth organisation], now there are free drugs,' declared Roeder, as quoted by Annette Ramelsberger, a reporter of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, who followed the campaign of the NPD on the eastern German sea coast.

The NPD combines praise for the GDR with anti-capitalist rhetoric. The head of the party, Voigt, declares at market squares: 'International capital is trying to seize us', and calls for penalties for employers who produce abroad. 'We are not a right-wing party,' he claims, and adds, 'We have more to do with the PDS than with right-wing parties. We want a sort of national socialism.'

Following the election, a feverish discussion has begun in the right-wing camp aimed at a reorganisation of forces and more effective collaboration. The right-wing parties are seeking to organise an 'Alliance of Nationalist Forces' for the coming European elections and unify their activities within Europe.



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