

Christian Democrats ousted in German state election

Lena Sokoll and Ulrich Rippert
22 January 2013

The state election in Lower Saxony on Sunday was widely regarded as a test run for the general election due this fall. The major parties led a so-called “camp campaign” with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which currently rule in a coalition at federal level and also in Lower Saxony, facing off a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens.

In fact, in terms of political content there was little in the way of differences between the two camps. All of the parties support the existing policy of budget consolidation and the so-called “debt brake”, which is used to shift the costs of the economic crisis onto the population. After billions of euros of public money were provided to effect bank rescues, governments at a federal and local level are introducing one austerity program after the other—with catastrophic consequences for public spending and social benefits.

Policies are determined by the country’s business federations and finance circles regardless of which coalition forms government. While the SPD and Greens criticized some social cuts in the course of their Lower Saxony election campaign, an SPD-Green state coalition has been carrying out exactly the same cuts in neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia.

Under these conditions the election was marked by purely tactical considerations. The CDU encouraged their voters to lend their second ballot vote to the ailing FDP to secure the state administration and strengthen the hand of the federal government. As a result the FDP, which is polling nationwide at around 3 percent, suddenly skyrocketed to 9.9 percent in Lower Saxony—a 1.7 percent increase on their result of 2008. For its part the CDU lost 6.5 percent of its vote, dropping to 36 percent. Compared to the last election the conservative-liberal government camp lost 4.8

percent of its vote.

With all the parties resembling peas in a pod there was a very arbitrary element to the decisions made by many voters. Surveys show that a third of the electorate decided how to vote on the day of the election. Both camps were on level footing until late into the night of the election, with the SPD-Greens emerging at the end with a razor-thin majority.

The SPD was able to win 34,000 votes from former CDU voters and 20,000 from former FDP voters, making clear that there was a palpable switch to the SPD in the bourgeois camp. At the same time, however, the SPD lost 49,000 votes to the Greens.

In total, the social democrats increased their vote by 2.3 percent, gaining 32.6 percent of the total vote. The party then celebrated this result as a great success. In truth, it is the second worst result for the SPD in a state election in Lower Saxony. Although, according to polls, voters cast their ballots by an overwhelming majority of 57 percent to replace the existing state administration led by David McAllister (CDU), the SPD is not perceived as an alternative.

The increase in the vote for the Greens is striking. The party improved its result from 8 percent five years ago to 13.7 percent—its best result at a Lower Saxony state election. The Greens were able to win nearly 30,000 votes from the CDU-FDP camp. The Green Party is positioning itself as a new conservative bourgeois party and, regardless of its currently declared aim of forming a coalition with the SPD, is indicating its willingness to work together with the CDU. The party’s leading candidate for the general election, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, is regarded as an ideal choice to initiate a government with the CDU.

On election night Green Party leader Jürgen Trittin confirmed that his party was not committed to

unconditional loyalty to the SPD. He commented on a film sequence showing him in a confidential conversation with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel (CDU) with the words: “We are democrats and we treat each other with trust and respect.”

Given the political unanimity between the parties, the result for the Left Party in the election is instructive. The party has done nothing to counter this uniformity, but is rather an integral part of the political consensus. The Left Party lost more than half its votes to voters of all political persuasions; 11,000 former Left Party voters switched to the CDU, 13,000 to the SPD, 16,000 to the Greens, while another 36,000 abstained.

The only party from which the Left Party gained votes was the FDP, gaining an additional 1,000 votes. The result means that the Left Party failed to cross the 5 percent hurdle and is no longer represented in the new state parliament. Following a deliberate media campaign to build up the Pirate Party following its launch in 2006, the Pirates also failed to register a significant vote in the state election.

In the course of the past five years the 10 members of the Left Party in the Lower Saxony state parliament have failed to conduct any serious opposition to the administration. Instead the party concentrated on offering its services to secure majorities, or as a coalition partner for the SPD and Greens.

Prior to becoming a member of the Left Party its current state leader Manfred Sohn had joined a string of other parties, commencing with the FDP before moving to the SPD, the DKP (German Communist Party), and then the PDS (East German forerunner to the Left Party). His demands for a minimum wage and more social housing were aimed at achieving closer cooperation with the SPD, the Greens and the trade unions. His deputy, and head of the state parliamentary group, Ursula Weisser Roelle, is closely linked to the trade union bureaucracy. Prior to joining the Left Party she was a trade union representative at Siemens and an SPD functionary.

In the final phase of the campaign the Left Party sent its deputy party leader, Sahra Wagenknecht into the field. Wagenknecht has received considerable media attention in recent months for her advocacy of the policies of Ludwig Erhard.

Erhard was a free-market conservative politician and staunch anti-communist. As German economics

minister (1949-1963) and chancellor (1963-1966), he played a key role in restoring the fortunes of German capitalism which had been so compromised by the Nazi dictatorship. Wagenknecht’s call “Back to Erhard” is no bizarre fringe occurrence. Instead it makes clear the utterly bourgeois nature of the Left Party.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact