

Merkel wins German election

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Chancellor Angela Merkel has won the German election. Her Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union increased its share of the vote by around eight percent to a total of 41.5 percent.

The current coalition partner of the conservative parties, the free market Free Democratic Party (FDP), however, suffered a debacle. Merkel has no clear majority to form a government and will have to negotiate a coalition either with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) or the Greens.

The SPD and the Greens have categorically rejected proposals to form a coalition including the Left Party. Such a coalition would have a small majority in the new parliament.

The FDP lost two thirds of its vote compared to 2009, polling just 4.8 percent. This means it failed to clear the five percent hurdle necessary under German electoral law for entry into parliament. Following its disastrous result in the key Bavarian state election last weekend, the Free Democrats held out the begging bowl, pleading for CDU voters to give their second vote on the ballot paper to the FDP and hereby secure its entry into parliament.

Merkel and the party leadership intervened immediately to declare that their supporters should give both their votes to the CDU.

This is the first German election since World War II in which the FDP—which has filled key ministerial posts in a number of postwar governments and is recognized as the party with the closest links to the banks and business lobbies—failed to enter parliament.

The opposition SPD failed to make any inroads on the government led by Angela Merkel, which has overseen a massive increase in social inequality during the past four years. The SPD polled 25.7 percent—less than 3 percent more than its disastrous low result at the last election in 2009. It is the second worst result in the SPD's postwar history.

Not only did voters hold the SPD responsible for the deepest cuts to German welfare spending in the post war period (Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV laws), they knew that SPD candidate Peer Steinbrück was finance minister in the last grand coalition government (2005-2009). He was the minister with the chief responsibility for bailing out German banks in 2008, after the global financial crisis broke out that year.

In the closing stages of the election campaign, when it was clear that the SPD was failing to make any headway against the conservatives, the party leadership sought to raise its social profile, calling for a minimum wage and concessions for pensioners. The poll for the SPD on Sunday made clear that the electorate did not take such promises seriously.

The Greens also suffered a severe setback in the election. In the previous election of 2009, they obtained over ten percent. In the course of this election campaign, Green leaders continually stressed that the party was seeking a double-digit result enabling them to form a coalition with the SPD. In the event, their party polled just over eight percent.

Over the past decade, the German Greens have emerged as a party with right-wing economic policies that fervently advocates German militarism. Representing wealthy layers of the urban middle class, the party has been clearly rejected by broad layers of younger voters who were prepared to support the party in the past.

The Left Party also suffered a more than three percent drop in support compared to its result in 2009, falling from 11.9 to 8.6 percent. It concentrated its entire election campaign on proposals for a coalition government with the SPD and Greens, and evidently suffered from the reduced vote for those two parties.

In cities and states where it has held power, the Left Party has readily imposed all the antisocial policies it criticized on its election poster. It paid the price for its

political hypocrisy.

In an important indicator of the right-wing nature of the party, polls registering voter preferences indicate that over 300,000 former voters of the Left Party switched their votes to the right-wing nationalist and anti-European Alternative for Germany (AfD). The only party that lost more of its former voters to the AfD was the FDP.

During the election campaign, Left Party leaders such as Sahra Wagenknecht publicly expressed their support for elements of the AfD program.

The AfD, which was founded less than eight months ago, won 4.7 percent of the vote on its first showing, just under the 5 percent limit necessary to enter parliament. With the exception of the Greens, who entered the Bundestag in 1983, this would have been the first newly formed party to win parliamentary representation in the history of the Federal Republic. The Left Party and its forerunner, the PDS, are the remnants of the ruling party of the GDR.

With four seats missing for a majority, the CDU-CSU are now obliged to find a coalition partner to give the new government sufficient clout to carry out its program of austerity, social cuts and militarism.

For its part, the SPD made clear it was quite willing to participate in such a coalition. Addressing the election result, Peer Steinbrück told supporters: “The ball is in Frau Merkel’s court, she has to find herself a majority.” The Greens have also indicated that they might be ready to form a coalition with Merkel’s CDU-CSU.

The leadership of the CDU meets on Monday to discuss the result and determine how to proceed in forming a new government. Should Merkel decide to form a grand coalition in alliance with the SPD, however, it will not simply be a repeat of the government that governed Germany from 2005 until 2009.

As we warned in a perspective two days ago: “It will not only intensify the ruthless austerity policies Germany is imposing on Europe, it will declare war on the working class within Germany itself. It will also abandon any military restraint and aggressively pursue the interests of German imperialism internationally.”

The only party to intervene in the election with a program that presented a genuine alternative for the working class was the Socialist Equality Party (Partei

für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG). Further articles during the course of the next days will analyse the new German government and comment fully on the vote and campaign carried out by the PSG.



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