

State election in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

The right-wing threat in Germany and the need for a socialist party

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7 September 2016

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won over a fifth of the vote Sunday in state elections in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The AfD finished second behind the Social Democratic Party (SPD), pushing the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, into third place in the north-eastern state where Merkel has her own parliamentary constituency.

In terms of per capita economic output, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania is the poorest German state. The vote here, more clearly than in any other of the nine states where the AfD has won legislative seats, shows what is buoying up these right-wing agitators and demagogues. It is popular anger at unemployment, poverty and the austerity policies of the establishment parties, including the Left Party, and the absence of a progressive alternative.

Although only 11,000 refugees live in the sparsely populated state, and, at 3 percent, the proportion of foreigners is very low, all the establishment parties competed with the AfD in their xenophobic scaremongering. The CDU's lead candidate Lorenz Caffier campaigned for a burqa ban, while SPD state premier Erwin Selle attacked the federal government's refugee policy from the right.

Although polls show that unemployment was the most important issue for 38 percent of the electorate, no party demonstrated any interest in this. None of them could address the burning social issues that impact on hundreds of thousands because they are all responsible. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the SPD has been in the state executive for 22 years, the CDU for 18 years and the Left Party for 8 years.

In hardly any other German state have working

people been treated so harshly as in this predominantly rural state with its 1.6 million inhabitants. In the quarter century since German reunification, people living between the city of Schwerin in the west of the state and the Polish border to the east have been comprehensively lied to and cheated. One government after another has implemented massive cuts in social spending.

Aside from a narrow coastal strip on the Baltic, where EU subsidies have helped to boost the tourism industry, and where the locals are employed as servants or seasonal workers on low wages, the rest of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania resembles a wasteland. Since German reunification, around 300,000 inhabitants have left the state. What remains are dying villages and towns with an aging population.

Because they knew how hated their policies are, the establishment parties sought to channel growing opposition into right-wing, nationalist channels, providing grist to the mill for the AfD. This far-right outfit presented itself as an anti-establishment party, on the one hand, while simultaneously riding the wave of refugee baiting.

In fact, there is mass opposition to the rise of the right-wing. One indication of this is the anti-AfD song "Only the dumbest calves chose their own butcher" by the band "Jennifer Rostock," which circulated on the Internet just before the election. The lyrics read, "A religion as bogeyman for right-wing terror and whatever else, everything smells damn like 1933" (the year Hitler became German chancellor). The song received 13 million clicks in just one week. That is ten times as many clicks as there are voters in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

But no one is providing this opposition with a voice and a perspective. The most pernicious role is played by the Left Party, which specializes in stifling any social resistance and supporting every attack on the working class with a jumble of pseudo-left phrases. On Sunday, the Left Party got its just desserts. Losing more than five points, it recorded the biggest decline of any party. With 13 percent of the vote, the Left Party achieved the worst result in its history in the state.

As the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the former party of state of East Germany and then refashioned as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which organised the dissolution of the former East Germany in 1990, it promised social reforms. In the 1998 state elections it received 25 percent of the vote and entered the state government in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania as a junior partner of the SPD. The former PDS and today's Left Party state leader Helmut Holter was deputy state premier and labour minister.

The result was devastating. There has been no trace of any social improvements. The PDS minister fawned over entrepreneurs and businessmen, and acted arrogantly and high-handedly against workers. Holter's ministry sold off state-owned assets and municipal facilities. In no other state at that time were so many hospitals privatized, usually against the fierce resistance of the workers. Holter describes the biggest success of his government work as being the consolidation of the state's budget.

At the end of the eight-year reign of the SPD and PDS, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania had the lowest wages of all Germany's states. Forty-one percent of employees worked without any contract, the highest rate in the East. On top of this came corruption and nepotism in the authorities under Holter's control, against whose administration the Regional Court of Auditors raised serious allegations.

The Left Party is responsible for the growth of the AfD in two respects. First, in its years in government it has created the social misery that now drives many working families to despair. Second, the right-wing capitalist policies it pursues under the cover of left phrases create the political frustration that is exploited by the right-wing demagogues.

Only the independent intervention of the working class into political developments can prevent the further growth of the AfD. For this, the working class needs a

party that links the struggle against capitalism, poverty and want with the struggle against war; a party that upholds a socialist programme and which fights for the international collaboration and unification of all workers.

This is the significance of the election campaign of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) in the Berlin state election. As the lead candidate of the PSG, I urge all WSWS readers who are eligible to vote in Berlin on 18 September to cast their ballot for the PSG. Read our election programme, support our campaign and join the Socialist Equality Party, the German section of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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