

Berlin election results show growing anger towards establishment parties

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The results from the election for the Berlin state House of Representatives show the growing anger and alienation of large sections of the population from official politics. All of the parties are hardly distinguishable from each other and represent the same right-wing, anti-social programme. All of them have taken part in different governments in the capital city over the past 25 years and created a social catastrophe. They received payback for this at the polls on Sunday.

The so-called people's parties of Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), who formed the previous Berlin state government and are also in a coalition at the federal level, suffered heavy losses of more than 6 percentage points each. With 21.6 percent, the SPD achieved one of its worst results since German reunification. The CDU, with 17.5 percent, had its worst result in Berlin since the founding of the Federal Republic. Compared to 2011, the Greens lost 2.5 percent and ended up at 15.2 percent of the vote.

The Left Party was able to increase its vote somewhat from its catastrophic result five years ago, finishing with 15.7 percent. But Left Party lead candidate Klaus Lederer's attempt to portray himself as the election victor is absurd. In 2011, voters punished the Left Party for its 10 years in coalition with the SPD, with its support collapsing to 11.7 percent. Just 10 years earlier, the PDS, the Left Party's predecessor that governed in the eastern part of Berlin until reunification, had obtained 22.6 percent of the vote.

The Free Democrats (FDP), following their historic low in 2011 of 2 percent, will return to the House of Representatives after securing a little over 6 percent.

Under conditions where the working class has not yet built a leadership to intervene independently into political events, the right-wing extremist Alternative for

Germany (AfD) was able to profit from the widespread anger and disgust at the establishment parties. In Berlin, for the 10th state election in a row, the AfD surpassed the hurdle for representation in a state parliament, with 14.1 percent. The majority of those casting ballots for the AfD voted for the right-wing party out of protest. According to market research firm Infratest Dimap, only 26 percent of AfD voters backed the party out of conviction. Sixty-nine percent voted for the AfD out of disappointment with the other parties.

In 2011, thanks to a huge media campaign, the Pirate Party secured 8.9 percent of the vote in its first election, channelling the mounting dissatisfaction of mainly young voters with its demand for more transparency and consultation. But over the past five years, the Pirate Party has been quickly exposed as yet another bourgeois party and rapidly lost support. On Sunday, with less than 2 percent of the vote, it missed the 5 percent required for parliamentary representation by a long way.

Under conditions of a deepening crisis of bourgeois rule, which currently finds expression in the decline of the established parties and the rise of the AfD, the ruling elite views a red/red/green (SPD/Left Party/Green) coalition as the best option to enforce a programme of austerity and the build-up of the state apparatus at home and abroad. The SPD's lead candidate, Michael Müller, already spoke out during the election campaign for cooperation with the Greens and Left Party. He saw "a lot of common ground with the Greens" and would "also conduct coalition talks with other parties," he stated on election night.

Left Party representatives pledged that they were not only prepared for a red/red/green coalition in Berlin, but also at the federal level. As party chairwoman Katja Kipping declared, the election result was not only a

“tremendous signal” for Berlin, but also “for the federal level.” The chair of the Left Party parliamentary group in the Bundestag (federal parliament), Dietmar Bartsch, commented, “Sahra Wagenknecht is of course prepared for a different constellation at the federal level.”

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party), which took part in the elections with a statewide list of candidates and direct candidates in Wedding, Tempelhof-Schöneberg and Friedrichshain, had warned in its election statement, before the results of the balloting, of the danger of red/red/green:

“The Berlin election is seen as a trial run in laying the foundations for an SPD-Left Party-Green coalition at the federal level, a so-called red-red-green government. Such an administration would not represent progress. In 1998, the SPD and Greens formed a coalition, which sent the Bundeswehr on foreign combat missions for the first time since World War II, and cut wages and benefits. Now this alliance is to be revitalized using the Left Party in order to impose the next round of social cuts and pave the way for further German militarism.”

Throughout the entire election campaign, the Left Party signalled to the ruling elite that it was a reliable partner in the implementation of these reactionary plans.

Along with a few promises on social issues, the Left Party demanded in its election programme “appropriate training and equipping” of the security forces and the hiring of “more police officers.” A few days ago in the Bundestag, Bartsch accused the grand coalition of being “responsible for misguided policies on hiring and cost-cutting.” They had made the police a “victim of cuts” over recent years and, since 1997, “eliminated 17,000 positions in the police.” But what was necessary was a “state capable of action.” This included “well trained and equipped personnel in the public sector, particularly in the police.”

The Left Party is preparing the same shift on the issue of war that the formerly pacifist Greens carried out 18 years ago. During the election campaign, Bodo Ramelow, who was the first “left” minister president and leads a Left Party/SPD/Green coalition in Thuringia, told *Der Spiegel* that the Left Party was “not pacifist.” For her part, Wagenknecht said in a summer interview with public broadcaster ARD, “Germany will of course not leave NATO on the day we enter

government.”

While all parties are demanding the domestic build-up of the state and war—and the tensions between the major powers increase and a new world war is threatened—the PSG placed the building of an international movement against war at the centre of its election campaign. The PSG noted on thousands of placards, tens of thousands of leaflets, at stalls and public meetings, and in appearances online and on television, that such a movement had to be based on the working class, oppose the capitalist system, fight for a socialist programme, and be international.

The PSG was not concerned with winning the largest number of votes with superficial slogans, but to prepare for the coming developments that will confront the working class with the question of war or revolution. On this principled basis the PSG received more votes than ever before in an election in Berlin. With over 2,000 votes, it was able to achieve a significant increase from the 1,690 votes won in 2011.

In the districts in which the party concentrated its campaign, the PSG won even higher percentages. In the Mitte 6 district, Peter Hartmann won 0.9 percent of first votes. Ulrich Rippert, the PSG chairman, and Andreas Niklaus, each won 0.6 percent in their districts, and Christoph Vandreier and Endrik Bastian got 0.5 percent. In Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Markus Klein secured 0.3 percent.



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