

German Social Democrats take first place in Lower Saxony election but lose their Green coalition partner

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The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) won the state election in Lower Saxony last Sunday. The SPD led the state poll for the first time since 1998, winning 36.9 percent of the vote. However, the party's gain of 4.3 percent could not make up for the losses of its former coalition partner. The Greens lost 5 percent, winning just 8.7 percent of the total. This means that the SPD and Greens lack a majority to form a new administration.

The coalition in Lower Saxony was the last “red-green” alliance at a state level. Now just 2.5 million German citizens are governed by such a combination, in the cities of Hamburg and Bremen. At the beginning of last year this total population under SPD-Green coalition rule stood at 40 million.

The end of the red-green coalition, however, failed to diminish the festive mood in the SPD's Berlin headquarters, the Willy Brandt House. After losing four elections since the beginning of the year—in the states of Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, North-Rhine Westphalia and finally in the federal (Bundestag) election—the vote in Lower Saxony was frenziedly celebrated. SPD leader Martin Schulz spoke of a “grandiose election victory”, which had initiated a “turnaround” in SPD fortunes.

In fact, the result in Lower Saxony will only make the forming of an administration at state and federal level even more difficult. The provisional official result on Monday revealed that the Christian Democratic Union won 33.6 percent—its worst result since 1959. This, despite the fact that the party had led in the polls for some considerable time. The neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) also lost votes (-2.4 percent) and landed behind the Greens, with 7.5 percent. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) will enter the state

parliament with 6.2 percent, while the Left Party (4.6 percent) failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle necessary for participation.

Voter turnout rose from 59.4 to 63.1 percent, and the SPD was evidently able to win votes from among elderly voters who had abstained in previous elections. In addition, electoral analysis revealed that some Green voters had cast their votes for the SPD in order to prevent an election victory by the CDU.

Possible ruling coalitions in the state include a grand coalition of the SPD and CDU, a coalition of the SPD, FDP and Greens, or a so-called Jamaica coalition, of the CDU, FDP and Greens. Following the federal election, chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) declared her preference for such a Jamaica coalition at a federal level.

For its part the FDP has already ruled out any coalition with the SPD in Lower Saxony. On the eve of the vote, the Greens left open their attitude to a Jamaica coalition, but signaled a willingness to talk. The head of the SPD in the state, Stephan Weil, declared he was prepared to hold talks with all parties apart from the AfD.

The election result has considerable repercussions for federal policy. Negotiations between the parties on the formation of the next federal government were postponed to await the result of the election in Lower Saxony, but in the event, all the parties vying to form a Jamaica coalition lost votes in Lower Saxony—a combined total of almost 10 percent.

This has weakened the hand of the chancellor in the coalition negotiations, and disputes in the conservative camp are increasing. The influential CDU Economic Council declared that the leadership around Merkel

shared the blame for the defeat in Lower Saxony. Secretary General Wolfgang Steiger told the *Bild* newspaper that the key lies “unfortunately in the Berlin electoral evening on September 24, when the devastating loss of more than 8 percent (for the CDU) was talked up into a strategic victory”.

Christian Social Union General Secretary Andreas Scheuer also regarded the defeat as a “new alarm signal” for the Union (CDU and CSU). He announced a “sharper profile” for the CSU in forthcoming talks about a Jamaica alliance at federal level.

Faced with these conflicts in the Union, the Greens are desperately trying to prevent a breakdown of coalition negotiations with the conservatives and neo-liberals. The Greens, the former protest party founded in 1980 by leaders of the 1968 student movement, are prepared to go to any lengths to return to the fleshpots of power. The party’s twists and turns on its road to the right leave one breathless. It is presently involved in eight different coalitions in 10 different states.

Just one week after the Bundestag election a conference of the Greens agreed to participate in coalition negotiations with the CDU/CSU and the FDP. The “left wing” of the Greens plays an important role in this respect. Jürgen Trittin, ex-Maoist, former Environment Minister and a driving force in the Greens, is a much sought-after guest on television talk shows and for interviews. He justified cooperation with the CDU and the Free Democrats by claiming that the Greens could help contain the right-wing policies of a Jamaica alliance.

In fact the Greens agree with the Christian Democrats and the neo-liberals on all central issues of foreign policy, militarism, and the arming of the state. In 1998 the Greens, as part of the first-ever red-green federal government, paved the way for the first foreign military operation of the Bundeswehr, in Yugoslavia. The party then advocated German military participation in both the Libyan war and the Syrian conflict. In 2014, the Greens actively supported the Maidan coup in Ukraine and accused the German government of not being tough enough against Russia.

The Greens are in favour of the European Union, the setting up of a European army and the plans proposed by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who is implementing his own “European vision” via a permanent state of emergency and drastic labor market

reforms.



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