

Far-right party enters Austrian government

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The entry Monday of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) into the Austrian government marks a political turning point for all of Europe. In a country traditionally seen in the post-World War II period as part of Western Europe, where anti-fascism became a pillar of the official state ideology following the crimes of Hitler's Third Reich, politicians with close ties to the neo-Nazi scene and ultra-right circles are wielding power. The police, military and intelligence services are all controlled by FPÖ ministers.

When the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) first formed a coalition government 17 years ago with the FPÖ, led at the time by Jörg Haider, it provoked an international wave of protest and outrage. The European Union imposed sanctions on Vienna. This time around, nothing of the kind has taken place. Instead, the new government has been met with praise and support.

"The FPÖ has joined the mainstream of European politics," wrote Vienna's *Der Standard*. The Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* described the government's program as "right-wing conservative with a few symbolic policies, but overall solid and with good approaches." For the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the new government is "first of all a degree of democratic normality." It is not necessary to like the government, the newspaper adds, "but it should be respected."

Die Welt opined that there is no benefit to "pillorying Austria's new government." It should be "given a chance." The newspaper advised Europe to "react calmly," adding, "Austria is not on the edge of the abyss, as we hear from the left." Germany's government spokesman declared that Chancellor Angela Merkel and the German government as a whole are open to close cooperation.

The reason for these laudatory reactions is not that the FPÖ has grown more moderate. On the contrary, under

the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache, the new vice chancellor, the party has become more radical. However, the positions that provoked revulsion in 2000—xenophobia, national chauvinism, disregard for democratic rights, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus, militarism—are now the official policies of all bourgeois governments and parties.

Capitalist society the world over is much more unequal than it was two or three decades ago. This was powerfully documented once again in the recently published World Inequality Report. While the wealth of a tiny minority explodes, hundreds of millions of people are plunged into increasingly unbearable living conditions. This is resulting in mounting anger and social opposition.

The ruling class is responding by shifting sharply to the right, adopting the far-right's program, or—as in Austria—inviting it into government. The ruling elite is preparing for the coming class battles by building up the repressive state apparatus, strengthening the most reactionary forces, and inciting racism and xenophobia. These developments recall the 1930s, although this time it is Muslims rather than Jews who are the main scapegoat.

The rise of the far-right in Austria, Europe and the United States can be understood only in the context of the rightward shift by all of the established parties, particularly those which once claimed to represent the interests of the working class.

In Austria, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) have held the position of chancellor since 1970, with an interruption of just seven years. The SPÖ, although it had abandoned its socialist goals long before, was still seen in the 1970s as the guarantor of social reforms. But it has moved continuously to the right in the intervening years, drawing ever closer to the FPÖ.

The far-right FPÖ could not have risen to power so easily if the SPÖ had not paved the way for it. In the

state of Burgenland, the SPÖ formed a coalition with the FPÖ two and a half years ago. In the recent federal election campaign, then-Chancellor Christian Kern, the SPÖ's lead candidate, declared his willingness to form a coalition with the far-right at the federal level.

Similar developments are taking place throughout Europe and in the United States. In the face of mounting social tensions and the threat of class conflict, the established parties are closing ranks and marching jointly to the right. The far-right profits from this in two ways: it is strengthened by the established parties' adoption of its policies, and it fills the vacuum left by the social democrats' rightward shift with its populist demagoguery. As a result, the accumulating anger and opposition among the masses find no progressive outlet.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) took the lead in the social counterrevolution with its imposition 12 years ago of the Hartz labour laws, which brought about a massive deterioration in the living standards of working people. The SPD has since served as junior partner in coalitions with the conservatives (Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union), which have built up the state apparatus at home and the military abroad.

Foreign Minister and former SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel is now calling for the SPD to adopt the policies of the far-right Alternative for Germany. In a recent commentary in *Der Spiegel*, Gabriel argued that instead of focusing on "questions of redistribution," the SPD should concentrate on the desire for "identity," "homeland" and a "dominant culture."

Years of social cutbacks in Italy by so-called "centre-left" governments, in which the social democratic PD (Democratic Party) played a leading role, have encouraged the rise of various far-right parties, including the xenophobic Five Star movement.

The Greek pseudo-left Syriza Party of Alexis Tsipras, which was raised to power on a wave of opposition to the EU's austerity dictates, formed a coalition government with the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel) to impose even more vicious austerity measures.

In the United States, the symbiotic relationship between the Democrats, Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus created the conditions for Donald Trump to win the presidential election. With the reactionary character of the Trump government

becoming ever clearer, the Democrats are attacking it from the right. They are focusing their opposition not on Trump's tax cuts for the rich, his attacks on immigrants, democratic rights and social welfare provisions, or his war threats against North Korea and Iran, but because his stance towards Russia is not sufficiently aggressive.

The shift to the right in Austria underscores that the struggle against political reaction, poverty, social cuts, repression and war requires the development of an independent, socialist mass movement of the international working class.

Numerous pseudo-left organisations, which at times describe themselves as socialist and even Marxist, cling to the coat-tails of the social democrats, the Left Party in Germany or the Democrats in the United States. They claim that it is possible to apply pressure to these right-wing parties and win their support for progressive policies. This is a dangerous illusion that paralyses the working class and strengthens the right.

The world crisis of the capitalist system, generating mounting global tensions and a frenzied growth of militarism that leads inexorably to a new world war, has assumed dimensions that make any social or political compromise impossible. This is why the bourgeois media and the established parties are welcoming the far-right FPÖ "into the mainstream of European politics" with open arms.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, constitute the only political tendency in the world fighting for the international revolutionary mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. All who seriously desire to fight the rise of the far-right should make the decision to join this struggle and participate in the building of the ICFI.



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