

Polls in German state elections forecast massive rejection of Grand Coalition

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Elections are taking place in two German states, Bavaria on Sunday and in Hesse two weeks later. These are the first significant elections since the re-launching of the grand coalition in Berlin. If current opinion polls are correct the results will not only send shock waves through the states affected, but also through the federal government.

Both in Bavaria and Hesse, polls indicate a massive rejection of the policies of the grand coalition (CDU, CSU, SPD) at a federal level, an opposition, which only finds a distorted expression in the existing party system.

In Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU), which has governed the state since 1957, and the Social Democratic Party SPD, which has sat in opposition for just as long, face losses of 25 percent. The CSU, which had received 47.7 of the vote five years ago and over 60 percent in its best ever results, is currently polling at 33 percent. The party only polled worse in 1950, when two strong right-wing opponents sat in the state legislature. In the last state election the SPD received 20.6 percent. It is now polling at 10 percent.

A number of parties are profiting from this situation. The Greens, until now resigned to a vote in single digits, are now reckoned to be the second strongest party with 18 percent. The far-right Alternative for Germany, which is running in the state for the first time, is in third place with 14 percent, followed by the Free Voters, who have improved their share of the vote from 9 to 11 percent. The Free Democratic Party could enter the new state parliament with 5.5 percent (up 2.2 percent), while the Left Party is unlikely to be able to clear the five percent hurdle necessary for representation, despite doubling in the polls from 2.1 to 4.5 percent.

In Hesse the picture is similar. The Christian Democratic Union, CDU, which governs the state in an alliance with the Greens, has dropped to just under 29 percent (from 38.3 percent in 2012), the SPD to 23 percent (from 30.7). The Greens have improved from 11.1 to 17, the AfD from 4.1 to 13, the Left Party from 5.2 to 8 and the FDP from 5.0 to just under 7 percent. The polls do not include non-voters and invalid votes.

If the voting results follow the polls, they will be a blow to the grand coalition in Berlin as well as a clear rejection of the right-wing politics pursued in Bavaria and Hesse.

The CSU has played a key role in helping the AfD impose its own refugee policy. CSU chairman Horst Seehofer is the federal minister of the interior responsible for the "Migration Master

Plan," which envisages a comprehensive system of camps for refugees, the hermetic sealing of borders and mass deportations. When thousands of right-wing extremists marched into Chemnitz at the end of August, Seehofer expressed his solidarity with them, declared migration the "mother of all problems" and lined up behind the domestic intelligence agency chief, Hans-Georg Maassen, who also defended the neo-Nazis.

Markus Söder, who replaced Seehofer in March as Bavarian premier, also placed the persecution of refugees at the center of his policy. He railed against "asylum tourism" and said that Bavaria would "organise deportations much more effectively and in a targeted manner." At the same time, the state government passed a new Police Act (PAG), which grants the police far-reaching powers, overrides fundamental civil rights and serves as a model for other federal states.

These right-wing policies have met with massive resistance. On the day devoted to German Unification, 40,000 people demonstrated against racism and the Police Task Law in the Bavarian capital. It is already the fourth major demonstration this year in Munich.

At the same time, social contradictions in Bavaria have intensified enormously, although the state is home to seven major German companies, including Siemens, BMW and Allianz. With a gross domestic product of 600 billion euros, Bavaria is surpassed by just five European countries.

Poverty is increasing, especially in the big cities. Last year, the Munich Poverty Report counted 269,000 poor adult persons, 65,000 more than five years ago; a percentage increase from 14.7 percent to 17.4 percent. Horrendous levels of rents and the high cost of living have forced many families to spend half of their income on housing while low earners are unable to find any accommodation at all. Child care places and nursing staff for the elderly are also in scarce supply. The debacle of the Bavarian State Bank, caused by the state government, cost the state budget billions, which were then subsequently recovered by cuts to social spending.

In Hesse the situation looks the same. Here too, recent protests against social cuts have come together with demonstrations against the far right. On September 1, Germany's traditional day devoted to opposing war, more than 10,000 participated in a Rock against the Right concert in Frankfurt. On September 17, 7,000 people called for the resignation of the Interior Minister at the demonstration "Sea Rescues instead of Seehofer!" Wherever the

AfD holds electoral meetings, it is met by ten times as many demonstrators shouting “Nazis out” and “Stop the AfD.”

In factories, anger is growing over the attacks on jobs and social gains. Recently, bus drivers, airport workers, daycare workers, teachers, hospital staff and employees of Siemens, Amazon and Ryanair have all taken strike action and hundreds of thousands of workers are ready to go on strike.

Hesse is one of Germany’s richest states, but social polarisation is rapidly increasing. Around 900,000 inhabitants, or 15 percent, are considered to be at risk of poverty. Every sixth pensioner and two-fifths of all families with single parents are affected by poverty. Workers and clerical employees struggle to find a long-term job with reasonable pay. They can no longer afford to live in the cities and there is a lack of teachers and educational assistants. There is a desperate lack of housing in the conurbation of Frankfurt. Following Brexit, more and more banks and bankers are moving to the city, in turn driving up rents. The number of millionaires is increasing at a double-digit rate.

In both in Bavaria and Hesse it is not only the ruling conservative parties (CDU and CSU) that are losing votes. Support for the Social Democrats is also plummeting, although they have been in opposition for years. With its anti-social Hartz laws, support for repressive measures against refugees, police state rearmament and militarism during its tenure as part of the federal coalition, the SPD has destroyed any illusion that it is some sort of left-wing alternative to the other bourgeois parties.

While the AfD has been able to benefit from the fact that its policies have been adopted by the federal government, the urban-based middle classes which formerly voted for the SPD are increasingly turning to the Greens. This is particularly pronounced in Bavaria, where its cities have grown recently due to influx from other federal states. Even former voters of the CSU and CDU, who support a humanitarian refugee policy in line with their Christian faith, are now supporting the Greens.

But the Greens have long since become a loyal representative of the interests of big business, banking and the state. In Wiesbaden (Hesse), they have been governing in a coalition with the CDU for five years. Referring to the Greens, state premier Volker Bouffier (CDU) boasted, “We work together successfully and respectfully. ... We don’t argue.”

Under the Green Economy and Transport Minister Tarik al-Wazir, state owned companies such as Fraport, the clinics Giessen-Marburg, Offenbach and Frankfurt-Höchst as well as public transport are being systematically deregulated and privatised. In the election campaign, the Greens prioritised nationalist slogans and placards with the slogan: “Homeland? Naturally!”

In Bavaria, the Greens have long been regarded as bitter opponents of the CSU, now they are already preparing to form a possible coalition government. In a “television duel” between Premier Markus Söder (CSU) and the Greens leading candidate Ludwig Hartmann, Söder repeatedly emphasised their “similarities.” Other leading Greens, including the premier of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, who has ruled in an alliance with the CDU for two years, have commented positively on a possible coalition.

The Left Party hopes to form a government with those parties

expected to be punished by the electorate. While it is trying to enter the state parliament in Bavaria for the first time, in Hesse it is abiding by its old plan of forming a governing coalition with the SPD and the Greens, which, according to the polls, has little chance of gaining a majority.

The leading candidate of the Hessian Left Party, Janine Wissler (Marx21), has appeared in the election campaign alongside Sahra Wagenknecht, who recently formed a movement called “Stand Up.” which defends xenophobic and nationalist policies. Wissler has also appeared alongside the SPD’s leading candidate Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel. The Left Party would play its role in a so-called red-red-green alliance, Wissler asserted in an election rally in Frankfurt. Such a coalition is currently in power in the state of Berlin, and its policies are just as right-wing and anti-working-class as those of other state governments.

The Hessian SPD politician Heidi Wiecek-Zeul called in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* for “a new alliance of left-wing parties.” In the article she defended the right-wing policies of the former SPD-Green federal government headed by Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer government, in which she acted as a development aid minister.

She went to defend German participation in the war against Serbia and promotes new wars. It is not acceptable “that one praises the UN on the one hand, but on the other Germany refuses to participate in a UN-mandated mission because it rejects any such missions in principle and defames them as ‘war interventions’,” she writes.

The extent to which the Left Party resembles the other bourgeois parties is also demonstrated by its constant calls for an increase in police. All of the parties are responding to growing popular and working-class opposition by moving closer together and further to the right. This will shape political developments after the elections in Bavaria and Hesse.

There are already voices promoting a future coalition with the AfD. For example, the Erlangen CSU city councilor Stefan Rohmer has demanded that the CSU “consider a coalition with the AfD” and justified his call with the “broad agreement on political positions.” These voices are quiet for the moment for tactical electoral reasons, but will undoubtedly become louder after the two elections, when political infighting breaks out.

The danger from the right, the agitation against refugees, police state rearmament and militarism can only be fought by a movement that mobilises the working class and links the fight against the right wing with the struggle against capitalism and a socialist program. This is the policy of the Socialist Equality Party.



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