

Bavaria state election delivers major blow to Germany's grand coalition

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The result of the state election held in Bavaria on Sunday is a major blow to the grand coalition (Christian Democratic Union/CDU, Christian Social Union/CSU and Social Democratic Party/SPD) that rules Germany. After the conservative Union (CDU and CSU) and SPD achieved their worst results in the post-war period in the general election in September 2017, these parties suffered an even worse defeat in the first state election to be held this year, losing collectively more than 21 percent as the electorate registered opposition to the government's right-wing policies.

The CSU, which has governed the state of Bavaria since 1957, gained just 37.3 percent of the vote and failed to gain an absolute majority. It was its worst result since 1950. At the last state election in 2013 the party won 47.7 percent.

The SPD lost even more votes than the CSU and received just 9.5 percent—a fall of 11.1 percent and its worst result in a state election in post-war history. At a federal level, the Social Democrats are now polling at 15 percent, a historic low.

“We could not convince voters and that is bitter,” said the visibly aggrieved SPD chair Andrea Nahles on election night. One of the reasons for the miserable result was the “poor performance of the grand coalition” in Berlin. The SPD had been unable to “liberate itself from the political disputes between CDU and CSU.”

The result in Bavaria confirms the deep-seated hatred on the part of workers and young people for the SPD—the party that introduced the anti-social Agenda 2010 policy, which has plunged millions into poverty and created Europe's largest low-wage sector. The SPD's “performance” in the grand coalition has consisted in intensifying the policy of militarism, the build-up of the police and intelligence agencies and

social cuts, based on the support of the most right-wing forces.

The CSU chairman and federal interior minister, Horst Seehofer, has only been able to implement his “Master Plan for Migration” (largely based on the policy of the far-right AfD) with the backing of the SPD. The same applies to the still-current domestic intelligence agency (BND) president Hans-Georg Maassen, who works closely together with the AfD and far-right circles. When thousands of neo-Nazis marched through the city of Chemnitz at the end of August, chasing migrants and leftists and attacking a Jewish restaurant, both Maassen and Seehofer expressed solidarity with the right-wing mob.

Popular opposition is mounting as the SPD cements its relations with the far-right. One day before the election in Bavaria, a quarter of a million people took to the streets of Berlin to protest against the AfD and the right-wing agenda of the federal government and the opposition parties. Despite an increase in voter turnout of nearly 10 percent in Bavaria compared to 2013, this sentiment could find only a distorted expression within the existing party system.

The main party to profit was the Greens, who received 17.5 percent of the vote, about 9 percent more than five years ago. According to the election research institute Infratest dimap, the main increase in votes for the Greens came from former voters of the SPD (210,000) and the CSU (180,000). In addition, about 120,000 former non-voters gave their votes to the Greens this time round.

Some may have voted for the Greens with the notion that the party is less aggressive when it comes to refugee policy than other parties. But that is an illusion. After the former Green pacifists backed Germany's first post-World War II military intervention (in

Yugoslavia) in 1999, in the face of fierce popular opposition, the party also shifted far to the right in the sphere of social and refugee policy. Wherever the Greens are involved in government they back police-state measures and the brutal deportation of refugees. In the state of Hesse, the ruling coalition of the CDU and Greens, headed by Volker Bouffier (CDU), has set new records for deportations. Nearly 600 men and women were deported in the first four months of this year alone—50 percent more than in the same period in 2017. Germany’s next state election will take place in Hesse in just under two weeks.

In Bavaria, the Greens are preparing to form a coalition with Seehofer’s CSU and enforce its far-right political line against growing popular resistance. The party’s leading candidates in Bavaria, Ludwig Hartmann and Katharina Schulze, both expressed their support for an alliance with the CSU, along with leading Green politicians based in Berlin. Green Party spokeswoman Franziska Brantner stressed, “Following the negotiations over a Jamaica coalition (a coalition of the conservatives, Greens and neo-liberal Free Democratic Party) at a federal level, we are prepared to go all the way, we want to take part constructively, and to this end show we are also more determined than the SPD.”

Immediately after the election, however, there were indications that the CSU is seeking to form an administration with the state-based Free Voters (FW), which received 11.6 percent of the vote (gaining 2.6 percent). On the night of the election Bavarian Premier Markus Söder (CSU) declared the CSU had a “clear government mandate” and sought a “civic alliance” with the Free Voters. FW chairman Hubert Aiwanger announced he would “put feasible proposals on Söder’s table.”

The FDP enters the new parliament with 5.1 percent of the vote while the Left Party, with 3.2 percent, failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle for representation. The Left Party is widely regarded by workers and young people as a political foe rather than an alternative. In those administrations where the Left Party governs in alliance either with the SPD or Greens, it administers austerity policies with disastrous consequences. In the sphere of refugee policy, the party propounds extreme right-wing and nationalist views.

Last week the head of the Left Party’s parliamentary

faction, Sahra Wagenknecht, spoke out openly against the mass demonstration which took place on Saturday in Berlin. “When we talk about open borders for all, then we refer to a demand that most people find unreal and completely alien, and they’re right,” she explained, echoing the AfD. It is already clear that her newly founded movement “Stand Up” is nothing other than a right-wing and nationalist movement aimed at opposing the growing resistance to racism and xenophobia.

Wagenknecht and the Left Party are worried about the growth of social and political opposition and have adopted the right-wing, xenophobic propaganda of the AfD. She promptly won the acclaim of AfD leader Alexander Gauland. Gauland, who just a few days ago published an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* largely based on a speech by Hitler in 1933, praised Wagenknecht as a “courageous voice for reason.”

Although the ruling elites in Germany and their leading media and parties systematically promote the AfD and legitimise its noxious policies, the right-wing extremists received fewer votes than expected. The AfD result of around 10 percent was lower than its total in Bavaria for the federal election in September 2017 (12.4 percent).

This is no reason for complacency, however. No matter which government is formed in Bavaria, it will invariably shift further to the right and orient itself even more to the program of the AfD. The threat from the right can only be stopped by the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. The building of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is therefore of crucial importance.



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