

The extreme right in the European elections

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Forecasts predict that far-right parties will make considerable gains in this month's European elections.

According to opinion polls, the right-wing extremist group in the European parliament, Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), could increase its seats from 37 to 63. The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group could win around 40 seats, and the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR), which has shrunk from 70 to 54 during the current legislative period, could win 58 seats. The Hungarian Fidesz of Viktor Orbán, which was recently suspended by the Conservative European People's Party (EPP), is expected to win 14 seats.

In total, openly right-wing extremist parties can expect to win up to 175 seats in the European Parliament, whose size shrinks from 751 to 705 in the case that Britain leaves the European Union (EU) before the election.

The ENF includes the French Rassemblement National (National Rally) of Marine Le Pen, the Italian Lega of Matteo Salvini, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) of Heinz-Christian Strache, the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) of Geert Wilders and several minor far-right parties. The EFDD, which initially also included the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), previously led by Nigel Farage, and the Italian Five-star Movement of Beppe Grillo, is now dominated by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). In addition to the Polish governing party PiS of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the ECR also includes the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia and, to date, the British Tories.

The growth of right-wing extremist parties does not reflect a move to the right in broader sections of working people and youth. The mood among these layers tends more to the left, and is manifesting itself in a growing number of protests and strikes.

For the first time in a long while, strikes for better wages and working conditions have hit not only western European countries but also large parts of eastern Europe. In Hungary, for example, there were mass protests against the "slave law" of the Orbán government, and in Poland, 300,000 teachers went on strike for weeks against starvation wages and the PiS government. In Germany, the number of days lost due to strikes increased fourfold to around 1 million last year and the number of those participating in strikes rose tenfold to 1.2 million. In addition, there were mass protests against high rents, Internet

censorship and xenophobia.

The growth of the extreme right is the response of the ruling classes to this increasing militancy. It is the result of the systematic political, ideological and organisational support provided to right-wing extremists by the media, the establishment parties and the state. This is particularly evident in the European election campaign.

The core demands of the right-wing extremists—the hermetic sealing off of Europe's external borders against refugees, their detention in camps, the establishment of an all-embracing surveillance and security apparatus, the censorship of the press and the Internet, the massive increase in armaments for the military—have become the official policies of the EU.

In the book, "Why are they back?," the vice-chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), Christoph Vandreier, demonstrates in detail how in Germany, the rise of the AfD was systematically prepared and promoted at the universities, in the editorial offices and in the state apparatus. Today, this far-right party sets the tone in German politics, despite receiving only 13.6 percent of the vote. It heads the official opposition in the Bundestag (parliament), where it chairs important committees and is omnipresent in the media. The secret service has labelled the critics of the right-wing extremist party as "left-wing extremists," placing them under surveillance, while giving the AfD and its neo-Nazi periphery a clean bill of health.

Similar books could be written about every other European country. Everywhere, the right-wing extremists owe their entry into parliament and their rise to leading state and government offices to the support they receive from the ruling class. They now sit in government in 10 out of 28 EU member states. Not only conservative, but supposedly left-wing parties have allied themselves with them. For example, in Greece, after their election victory in January 2015, Syriza immediately formed an alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks, in order to push through the EU's austerity diktats against the working class.

Right-wing extremists now systematically use their access to the state apparatus to push forward their agenda.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (Fidesz) and Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini (Lega) met in Hungary last Thursday to forge a pact for a "new Europe." Orbán celebrated Salvini as a "hero who has stopped immigration across the sea." Salvini called Orbán "a point of focus for Europe." Both

vowed to work closely together to stop immigration, described by Orbán as “the greatest challenge history presents us.”

On Monday, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) leader and vice-chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache, is expected in Budapest for the same purpose, and on May 13, Orbán will be received in Washington by President Donald Trump.

Orbán and Fidesz are the product of capitalist restoration in Hungary and the decades-long efforts of the Western powers to suppress any opposition to its devastating consequences.

Fidesz was founded in 1988 as a liberal student organisation with massive help from the West. At that time, Orbán’s patrons also included the American-Hungarian billionaire George Soros, whom Orbán has since declared to be the main enemy of the state in an anti-Semitic campaign. Fidesz played an important role in the fall of the Stalinist regime in the fall of 1989.

After a first period in office from 1998 to 2002, Orbán only succeeded in coming to power again in 2010. He owed this primarily to the right-wing policies of the post-Stalinist Socialist Party, which had been completely discredited by a corruption scandal. Since then, he has been trying to establish a dictatorial regime by suppressing any social opposition through ultranationalist policies and closing down any independent press and judiciary.

Orbán received support from the European People’s Party (EPP), of which Fidesz remains a member till today. Especially the German Christian Democrats (CSU/CDU) and the Austrian People’s Party have regarded Orbán as a welcome guest, even when his dictatorial inclinations were obvious. For years, Chancellor Angela Merkel resisted demands to exclude Fidesz from the EPP. It was only when Orbán organised a poster campaign against EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, himself a member of the EPP, that relations cooled and Fidesz was suspended by the EPP.

But Orbán insists on staying in the EPP. He responded to Salvini’s calls to join the far-right ENF by proposing to include the Lega in the EPP, to which Salvini said he was not averse. If the EPP embraced Orbán’s views, it would be a pleasure to work with it, Salvini responded.

The proposal is not outlandish. After some initial hesitation, the EPP included Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia in its ranks. The media czar, with his close ties to the underworld, ruled together with neo-fascists and the then regional party Lega Nord, which he helped gain national influence by including them in his government.

In Austria, which borders Hungary, the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) has been governing for one and a half years together with the right-wing extremist FPÖ, which heads the Interior, European, Defence and Labour ministries.

Here, too, the FPÖ uses its power systematically to bring the media and justice system into line and propagate right-wing extremist views. This is underscored by the outrage on the right surrounding Austria’s most famous television presenter, Armin

Wolf, which has dominated the headlines for days.

In news programme ZIB2 on the public broadcaster ORF, Wolf had confronted the FPÖ’s lead candidate for the European elections, Harald Vilimsky, with neo-Nazi statements from his party—a poem by the mayor of Braunau (Hitler’s birthplace), equating immigrants with rats, and a xenophobic poster of the FPÖ youth organisation, which Wolf compared with an anti-Semitic caricature from the Nazi rag *Der Stürmer*. Vilimsky subsequently demanded Wolf be fired and taken off the air.

FPÖ leader Strache, the chairman of ORF’s Foundation Council Norbert Steger, and other high-ranking FPÖ politicians called the interview “disgusting,” “perverted” or compared it with the infamous People’s Court of the Nazis. Steger advised Wolf to “take a break.” Strache had previously published a picture of Wolf on Facebook with the headline, “There is a place where lies become news. That’s ORF.”

As usual in such cases, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz practiced the wisdom of Solomon. “Such a dispute serves Armin Wolf, perhaps also the Freedom Party.” However, it was “not good for the country,” he said, and continued his alliance with the FPÖ regardless.

The promotion of the extreme right by the state and the establishment parties shows that only an independent movement of the working class can halt the real danger. The fight against right-wing extremism and fascism is inextricably linked to the struggle for a socialist programme against its cause, capitalism.

This is what the Socialist Equality Party is fighting for in the European elections. In our election manifesto, we say that the SGP is “participating in the European elections to counter the rise of the extreme right, growing militarism and glaring social inequality. Together with our sister parties in the Fourth International, we are fighting across Europe against the EU and to unite the continent on a socialist basis. Only in this way, can the relapse into fascist barbarism and war be prevented.”



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