

Despite decline in vote

Far-right Alternative for Germany wins European election in eastern Germany

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Voters in eastern Germany showed their strong opposition to the established political parties in the European elections held May 26. Although the media emphasised the significant growth of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) compared to the 2014 European elections, the party actually lost votes compared to the last federal election in 2017.

Due to the significant growth in voter participation (13 percent higher than 2014), the European elections, which are usually characterised by disinterest, had almost the same turnout as the last federal election. For example, 2.1 million voters went to the polls this time around in Saxony, compared to 2.5 million at the last federal election. In Brandenburg, the comparison was 1.2 million to 1.5 million, and in Thuringia 1 million to 1.3 million.

This made the major losses of all parties, from the AfD to the Left Party, all the more remarkable. In Saxony, the Christian Democrats (CDU) lost over 200,000 votes, the Left Party around 150,000, the Social Democrats 100,000, the Free Democrats around 80,000, and the AfD 150,000. Only the Greens managed to increase their vote by 100,000. As a whole, the established parties lost some 580,000 votes. The main beneficiaries were a collection of small parties, which gained more than 150,000 votes compared to 2017.

The supposed success of the AfD, trumpeted by the media and the AfD itself, thus turns out to be a thoroughly distorted picture. However, in spite of the losses, the share of the vote for the AfD remains high and represents a real danger for which the entire political establishment bears responsibility. The AfD has not emerged as the largest party due to widespread support among the population, but due to the widespread contempt for all of the old parties.

This applies above all to the CDU, which has governed uninterrupted in Saxony for the past 30 years, including five years in coalition with the FDP and the last ten years with the SPD. The Left Party, formerly known as the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) and the Stalinist state party in the German Democratic Republic, has been the largest

opposition party over the same period, and sits in government in many municipalities.

In Brandenburg the loss of votes for the establishment parties was similarly drastic. There the SPD has led a series of coalition governments over the past 30 years, including with the Greens, CDU, FDP, and currently the Left Party. In the 30 years since the reintroduction of capitalism, these parties have organised an unprecedented deindustrialisation of the region, which has forced large numbers of people to leave.

On the economic ruins of the once highly-industrialised Saxony, which was not by mere coincidence the birthplace of the workers' movement, a low-wage sector dominated by small businesses based on high levels of exploitation has emerged. The downward pressure on the already low wages of eastern Germany has been increased still further by the eastward expansion of the European Union, and the processes of deregulation and privatisations imposed by EU, federal, and regional officials.

This has created the social environment for the growth of right-wing extremist and fascist organisations. The toleration and support for these organisations by state governments led as early as 2004 to a record result for the neo-Nazi NPD of 9.2 percent.

There was no firm opposition within the political establishment to this development. Quite the contrary. Anti-fascism was criminalised, and even targeted with fabricated prosecutions, for example in the case of the pastor Lothar König. Indeed, the police force is itself a bastion of far-right politics. The association of members of the intelligence agencies with right-wing terrorist groups, like the National Socialist Underground, Freital Group, and Revolution Chemnitz, is well known and shielded by the major parties. Only recently, police powers were further expanded in a law adopted by the CDU and SPD.

Last year's events in Chemnitz were symptomatic of the cross-party support for the right-wing extremists.

After several thousand neo-Nazis marched through Chemnitz in late August 2018, attacking left-wing protesters, refugees, and a Jewish restaurant, Minister President Michael Kretschmer trivialised the actions of the fascist mobs and the attacks against journalists by police officers. He was supported by federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, head of the federal Secret Service, Hans-Georg Maassen, and the retired political science professor Werner Patzelt from Dresden.

In March this year, a commemoration took place at Chemnitz's football stadium for the well-known right-wing extremist Thomas Haller with the approval of the SPD group on the city council. Several prominent AfD figures, including Evo Teichmann and Jens Maier, began their political careers in the SPD.

The Left Party is no less implicated. Many former PDS members in the state parliament or city councils have been active in the far-right Pegida movement since its founding in 2014, including Ronald Weckesser, Christine Ostrowski, Monika Aigner, and Barbara Lässig.

When they don't openly call for a vote for the AfD, like Ostrowski, they function as part of the Free Voters Dresden list, which includes several prominent Pegida supporters, including the party's co-founder, Rene Jahn. Also included in this crowd is the former long-term leader of the Greens in Saxony, Antje Hermenau, who is now operational director for the Free Voters Saxony.

Wherever they hold power, the allegedly left-wing parties embrace the AfD's policies. The Left Party in Thuringia and Brandenburg, and the Social Democrats in Saxony are enforcing AfD policies in practice. Detention camps for asylum seekers and the strengthening of police powers are only the tip of the iceberg.

The Left Party's mayor of Frankfurt (Oder), Rene Wilke, appeals to racist stereotypes and has also called for illegal deportations to war zones. The Left Party's only Minister President, Bodo Ramelow in Thuringia, has the second highest proportional rate of deportations of all German states.

The same questions as those posed across Germany, Europe, and internationally confront the population in eastern Germany. Due to its specific history as the German Democratic Republic, the social anger towards the never-ending austerity measures and strengthening of the repressive state apparatus is especially intense. The traditional parties of government, which in eastern Germany includes the Left Party, are falling apart and seeking their salvation by standing shoulder-to-shoulder with fascistic forces.

It is no coincidence that the far-right former chief adviser to Donald Trump, Stephen Bannon, has vowed to visit

Saxony in order to witness the AfD in a full election campaign. He will find himself in good company.

Maassen, the former Secret Service president, is planning to campaign for the CDU in Saxony and Brandenburg later this year. Maassen blamed "left-wing radicals" in the SPD for him losing his job. In the Secret Service report for which he was responsible, neither the AfD nor Pegida or its right-wing extremist associate parties were mentioned as threats. By contrast, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei was defamed as a left-wing extremist party.

In the Secret Service report for Saxony released last month, Gordian Meyer, Maassen's colleague in Dresden, advances a similar ideological outlook. The AfD is merely mentioned as a potential target for "left-wing extremists." On the other hand, the "anti-statist" punk rock band Feine Sahne Fischilet was branded as left-wing extremists.

The Secret Service report for Saxony accused the organisers of the largest anti-Nazi concert in years, with 70,000 attendees, which took place in Chemnitz last year, of offering a platform to "left-wing extremists" to use their "extremist ideology" to influence non-extremists. As evidence, the report cited shouts of "Alerta, alerta antifascista" from the crowd.

The Left Party's and Greens' demand for the dissolution of Saxony's Secret Service is a fraud. Wherever these parties are in government, they work closely with the intelligence agencies, and strengthen their powers. Just last month in Brandenburg, the Left Party passed a measure to strengthen the state's Secret Service's powers.

All factions of the political establishment are responding to the capitalist crisis by turning sharply to the right. The differences between the AfD and the other bourgeois parties are beginning to disappear. This will be confirmed in the state elections due in eastern Germany later this year.



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