

Election in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany reveals bankruptcy of Left Party and Social Democrats

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7 June 2021

Sunday's state election in Saxony-Anhalt exposed the bankruptcy of the parties calling themselves "left-wing." The Left Party, Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens together received only a quarter of the votes. In a deindustrialised state characterized by high levels of emigration and unemployment and low living standards, these parties left the field open to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The CDU emerged as the clear winner, with 37.1 percent of the party-list votes and 40 out of 41 direct parliamentary mandates. It gained 7.4 points and took back from the AfD all 15 direct mandates the latter had won in 2016. Voter turnout was almost the same as five years ago, just over 60 percent.

The AfD lost 3.5 points but remains the second strongest party, having won 20.8 percent of the vote. Although it is dominated by the völkisch-nationalist "Flügel" ("wing") and repeatedly makes a name for itself with Nazi slogans, one in five voters cast their ballots for this extreme right-wing organization. Whereas five years ago, the AfD had mainly campaigned on the basis of anti-refugee propaganda, this time, it also took up issues such as pensions and health and propagated the slogans of the coronavirus deniers.

The media and pollsters tried to conjure up a better result for the AfD, predicting a neck-and-neck race between it and the CDU. On election day the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper ran the headline "Germany faces an earthquake on Sunday," claiming that the CDU was only one point ahead of the AfD.

The CDU's clear election victory is being attributed above all to Minister-President Reiner Haseloff. He

managed the feat of adopting the AfD's policies to a large extent, and—as in the case of preventing higher broadcasting charges to be paid by most citizens—openly cooperating with them, while at the same time giving assurances that there would never be a government coalition with the AfD.

Many voters apparently voted for the CDU to prevent the AfD, which according to polls is rejected by an overwhelming majority, from joining the government. The Left Party lost 10 percent and the SPD lost 18 percent of its voters to the CDU.

These two parties bear primary responsibility for the rise of the far right. Through their decades-long support for social cuts and deindustrialisation at the federal and state levels, they have driven desperate elements into the arms of the far-right demagogues.

In the 1990s, the SPD was the strongest party in Saxony-Anhalt. In 1998 it achieved its best election result, winning 35.9 percent of the vote. From 1994 to 2002, Prime Minister Reinhard Höppner led an SPD minority government supported by the Left Party's predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Under this so-called "Magdeburg Model," the PDS participated in a state government for the first time.

The result was a social disaster. After eight years of the Magdeburg Model, the state had the highest unemployment rate in the country, 21.4 percent. Hardly anything remained of one of Germany's largest industrial areas. Large chemical plants in Bitterfeld, Halle and Leuna, mechanical engineering facilities in Magdeburg and copper mines in Mansfelder Land were shuttered. Youth and leisure facilities, sports facilities and educational institutions were also closed down en masse and budgets for day cares, kindergartens and

afterschool care were cut by a third. Several thousand educator positions were eliminated.

In 2002, the SPD was voted out of office. It lost almost two-thirds of its vote and, with a drastic decline in voter turnout, only got 20 percent of the ballots. Now, with just 8.4 percent of the vote, it has achieved the worst result in its history.

The PDS/Left Party managed to hold on for a few more years. In 2006, it even became the second strongest party in Saxony-Anhalt with 24.1 percent of the vote. But it has also been discredited by its anti-working class policies in numerous municipalities and state governments. Winning just 11 percent of the vote, it has now had its worst election result since the federal state was founded following German reunification in 1990.

The Greens were also unable to meet the expectations placed on them before the election. Although they increased their share of the vote by 0.8 percent, with just 5.9 percent of the total they remained far behind forecasts.

The Left Party, SPD and Greens did best in affluent urban areas where there was above average turnout, while they found little support in poorer and rural areas.

The result in Halle, next to Magdeburg, the largest city in the state with 240,000 inhabitants each, is typical. In constituency III, home to some of the most expensive residential areas, turnout was 72.6 percent. The Greens achieved 23.6, the Left Party 14.3, the SPD 9.3 and the AfD 9.1 percent of the vote. In constituency I, where conditions are poorer, only 52.4 percent went to the polls. The AfD won 22.3, the Left Party 12.7, the SPD 8.1 and the Greens 6.2 percent.

The high share of votes for “other” parties, which had no chance of clearing the 5 percent hurdle needed to enter the state legislature, demonstrates that people are searching for alternatives. Collectively these organizations scored a total of 10.4 percent of the vote, 3.7 percent more than five years ago. Among first-time voters aged 18 to 24, as many as 21 percent voted for them.

These parties reflect the general confusion. Among them there are three animal rights parties, which together won 2.5 percent, Free Voters (3.1), Pirate Party (0.4), the satirical group Die Partei (0.7) and right-wing extremists. While the German National Party (NPD) vote fell from 1.9 to 0.3 percent, the coronavirus

denier party DieBasis (theBase) gained 1.5 percent.

The Saxony-Anhalt election is regarded as a dress rehearsal for the federal election on September 26 and the state elections in Berlin, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Thuringia happening at the same time. It reveals how urgent it is to build a political alternative that unites the working class across all borders based on a socialist programme.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is taking part in the federal election to build such an alternative. Support our electoral participation with your signature and a donation! Get involved in the SGP’s election campaign and become a member!



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