

Lower Saxony state election and the strengthening of the far-right Alternative for Germany

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13 October 2022

Last Sunday's Lower Saxony state election took place amid the deepest crisis since the end of World War II. The results saw the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) almost double its vote to 10.9 percent. Horrendous energy and food inflation is decimating real wages and driving millions of workers into poverty. The NATO powers are escalating their proxy war against Russia ever further towards a nuclear world war, and Germany wants to make its army the strongest military force on the continent.

But these issues hardly played a role in the election campaign, because all the establishment parties agree on the essential questions. They are organizing social devastation and pushing militarism. That is why many voters stayed home and why the election results were determined by secondary issues.

Voter turnout was 60.3 percent, down 3 points from the last state election five years ago. The Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU), which had governed together since then, lost a combined 9 percentage points—the SPD 3.5 and the CDU 5.5.

Although the SPD saw one of its worst results, 33.4 percent, it enthusiastically celebrated its "election victory." In 1998, the party had achieved 47.9 percent under Gerhard Schröder, who became chancellor a few months later.

SPD State Premier Stephan Weil can now continue to govern in an alliance with the Greens, who gained popularity especially among younger voters and increased their result from 8.7 to 14.5 percent. The Liberal Democrats (FDP) lost 2.8 percentage points with 4.7 percent, failing to clear the 5 percent hurdle for representation in the state parliament, which is likely to

increase tensions in the federal coalition of the SPD-FDP-Greens.

The Left Party, which had only made it into the Lower Saxony state parliament once, in 2008, continued its nosedive from the state elections in Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia, ending up far behind with 2.7 percent. In the last election, it had achieved 4.6 percent.

The Left Party had focused its election campaign on asserting its reliability on the war issue and distancing itself from Dieter Dehm, a supporter of the Wagenknecht wing that had dominated the state association for 20 years. Prominent war supporters—Janine Wissler, Martin Schirdewan, Dietmar Bartsch, Amira Mohamed Ali and Gregor Gysi—appeared at numerous campaign events, while Sahra Wagenknecht, who criticizes NATO's war against Russia from a nationalist standpoint, was not invited to make a single appearance.

The "oppositional" role of the Left Party was limited to a "100-day program" with hollow social demands that the state parliamentary group wanted to lobby the future government to implement.

Under these conditions, the AfD is deliberately being built up as a fascist party in order to suppress opposition to the war and social devastation, which no longer finds any expression in the official political establishment. The gains made by the far-right party reverses a pattern of losses in all state elections since 2019. It won support primarily from former CDU and FDP voters.

This is the result of the fascist party being systematically courted and normalized by establishment politicians and the media. Hans-Georg Maassen, who

from 2012 to 2018 headed the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as Germany's Secret Service is called, advised the party and, as a CDU politician, advances positions that are identical to those of the AfD. During the Lower Saxony election campaign, CDU Chairman Friedrich Merz sent an unmistakable signal in the direction of the AfD with his attack on Ukrainian refugees, whom he denounced as "social tourists."

In the Bundestag (federal parliament) and in the state parliaments, the AfD is seamlessly integrated into the work of the committees and its policies such as allowing the coronavirus to run wild, avid militarism and the anti-refugee program put into action by all the other parties. When the fascist party carted its members from all over Germany to Berlin by the thousands on Saturday under the slogan "Germany first," there was no serious protest from the establishment parties and trade unions.

Against this background, the AfD has succeeded to a certain extent in mobilizing desperate layers for its reactionary and militaristic program. It had placed criticism of the Russia sanctions and price increases at the centre of its election campaign in Lower Saxony and linked them to its xenophobic and nationalist demagogic.

The AfD is an ardent advocate of German militarism. When SPD Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced his "turn of the times" and a tripling of the arms budget three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the AfD was pleased that its policy was now being implemented and called for even greater rearmament and the reintroduction of compulsory military service because—according to AfD defence policy expert and retired colonel Rüdiger Lucassen—too few Germans were willing to defend their country.

When the party criticizes the Russia sanctions, it does so from the standpoint of the interests of German imperialism, in addition to any electoral considerations. For example, fascist Björn Höcke, who de facto leads the party, spoke out at a German Unity Day rally in Gera in favour of using Russian raw materials for the German economy, to reject the US "global claim to power." The director of the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Michael Espendiller, had already stated in parliament in September that the necessary rearmament of the Bundeswehr could only be

implemented with Russian energy supplies.

The strengthening of this fascist and militarist party is a serious warning. In nationwide polls, it now stands at 15 percent, in the eastern states even at 27 percent, where it is the strongest party.

Faced with massive opposition to its policy of nuclear war and social devastation, the ruling class is responding as it did in the 1930s by turning to authoritarian and fascist forms of rule. The fascist and far-right elements that the AfD gathers together and organizes are to be used to intimidate and oppress workers.

Yet the promotion of these forces is an international phenomenon. In the US, the Republicans under Donald Trump are turning into a fascist party without the slightest resistance from the Democrats, the party of Wall Street and the military. In Italy, the fascist Giorgia Meloni is set to become the next prime minister, and in Sweden, the far-right Sweden Democrats are to join the government.

The ruthlessness with which the NATO powers are provoking a nuclear world war and the scale of social devastation are incompatible with democratic rights for working people. Therefore, the struggle against the fascist danger is inseparable from the struggle against war and its root, capitalism. Only an international movement of the working class can prevent a catastrophe and stop the development of fascist and authoritarian forms of rule.



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