

Hesse and Bavaria state elections: Anti-refugee agitation strengthens far right

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Just under a quarter of all eligible voters in Germany will be called upon to elect new state parliaments in Bavaria and Hesse next Sunday. But their opportunity to influence political events with their ballot paper is close to zero.

All the major parties have conspired to strengthen the most right-wing political forces in order to intimidate any political opposition to wage and social cuts, war, and rearmament. For weeks, the election campaign has been accompanied by a smear campaign against refugees, fomented by all candidates and amplified to deafening levels by the media. The beneficiary is the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), the only party to gain in the polls.

As is so often the case when it comes to a right-wing campaign, ex-Federal President Joachim Gauck kicked things off. On 17 September, on the ZDF programme “Berlin direkt,” he spoke out in favour of limiting immigration.

In migration policy, one had to “discover the room for manoeuvre that is initially unappealing to us because it sounds inhumane,” preached the trained pastor. It was “morally not at all reprehensible and politically even necessary to pursue a strategy of limitation,” Gauck said and called for more courage and less “fear of a brutal-sounding policy, such as isolation or containment.”

With that, all dams were broken. Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz ranted in AfD style about 300,000 asylum seekers who were having their teeth redone at state expense, while German citizens could not get appointments. Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Markus Söder, who is seeking another term as Bavarian state premier, warned that the country was “completely overburdened” and called for a maximum limit of 200,000 migrants per

year.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) lead candidate in Hesse, Nancy Faeser, who continues to hold her post as federal interior minister, also distinguished herself as a hardliner. She is one of the driving forces behind the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the associated crisis regulation, which she brought about with the help of Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Accordingly, the “standard of care” of refugees can be lowered and they can be held for months in prison-like camps.

<https://youtu.be/PHWcSkB1qjY>

The Greens and the Left Party also joined in the campaign. Even the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which is not necessarily a friend of the Greens, rejoiced: “The Greens are in favour of accelerated asylum procedures; Green local politicians meanwhile oppose the construction of new initial reception facilities. So maybe the Greens are changing their tune like in 1999 when it was about the Kosovo mission.”

In the *Rheinische Post*, Thuringia’s Left Party leader Bodo Ramelow complained that his state and the municipalities were “at the limit.” His state Interior Minister Georg Maier (SPD) declared refugees a Russian weapon in the Ukraine war: “Behind the growing migration figures via Eastern Europe is a targeted campaign by Russia and Belarus,” he told the newspapers of the Funke Media Group. “The autocrats in Moscow and Minsk want to destabilise Germany—and they are also using migration as a means of pressure to do so.”

The talk shows on public television (Maischberger, Lanz, Anne Will, etc.), in which the same politicians and journalists always massage public opinion, focused on the topic for weeks. *Der Spiegel* devoted a front-page story to asylum policy with a cover inspired by an

anti-Semitic caricature from Vienna in 1901.

The demagoguery and lies with which the campaign is being conducted can hardly be surpassed. They constantly invoke the financial burden on the municipalities and the tolerance level of the population, which is said to be overwhelmed by the influx of refugees. But the municipalities' financial problems are not a result of the refugee crisis, but of the austerity policies of successive federal governments, which have bled the municipalities dry and led to the disintegration of schools, day-care centres, clinics and public infrastructure.

Although the number of asylum applications has risen in the first eight months of this year to 204,000 compared to last year, it is far below the 722,000 asylum applications in 2016. In addition, there are around one million refugees who have come from Ukraine since the start of the war and have an automatic right of residence—although it is not known how many have left Germany again in the meantime. They are a victim of the German government's foreign policy, which rejects any negotiated peace and continues to escalate the war despite high casualties on both sides, with the aim of inflicting a devastating military defeat on the nuclear power Russia.

A fraction of the billions spent to “rescue” the banks, drive up share prices and arm the Ukraine war and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) would suffice to remedy the financial shortfalls of the municipalities and provide refugees with decent housing and social integration opportunities.

But that is not what any of the major parties want. They are using the refugee question to divide the working class and mobilise the right-wing dregs of society. Such campaigns against the weakest in society are part of the standard repertoire of every fascist movement.

The strengthening of the AfD is deliberate. The extreme right-wing party, which recruits from former CDU/CSU members and parts of the security apparatus, has been promoted from above from the very beginning. The long-time head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as Germany's domestic secret service is called), Hans-Georg Maassen, advised it and now openly advocates AfD positions. The AfD was courted in the Bundestag and the Länder (federal states) and entrusted with the leadership of important

committees.

The invocation of a “firewall” against the AfD is nothing but deception. At the international level, governments and parties have long been working closely with their kindred spirits, such as the Italian head of government, Giorgia Meloni. The smear campaign against refugees and the systematic suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions create the conditions in which the far-right can grow.

This is clearly evident in the polls for the elections in Bavaria and Hesse. In Bavaria, the AfD, led by two close associates of extreme right-winger Björn Höcke, is at 14 percent, about the same as the Free Voters, who are also far to the right, and the Greens. That is 4 percent more than in the last state election five years ago. The CSU, which has provided Bavaria's state prime minister since 1957, is in the lead and can probably continue its coalition with the Free Voters. By contrast, the SPD, Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP), which together form the federal government, total less than 30 percent.

The situation is similar in Hesse. The AfD is predicted to get 17 percent, 4 percent more than five years ago and 13 percent more than ten years ago. CDU state Prime Minister Boris Rhein will probably be able to continue governing, as before with the Greens or with the SPD. A coalition with the AfD would also be possible.

The AfD's growth is dramatic in eastern Germany, where elections will be held in 2024 in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg. In all three states, the AfD is the strongest party in the polls with around 33 percent, in Thuringia and Brandenburg with a large lead over all other parties, in Saxony just ahead of the CDU.

The dangers posed by the growth of this fascist party are undeniable in Germany with its Nazi past. It can only be overcome by a working class movement that breaks with all the establishment parties and combines the struggle against fascism with the struggle against war and capitalism. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) stands for.



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