

Berlin recall election: The decline of the SPD

Ulrich Rippert
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The most striking thing about the results of the partial re-run of the federal election in Berlin last Sunday is the heavy losses suffered by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party. The Social Democrats (SPD) lost 7.8 points, receiving only 14.6 percent of the votes cast. Compared to the original federal election in September 2021, in which they had already achieved a poor result, with 23.5 percent, the Social Democrats once again lost more than a third of their votes.

The re-run had become necessary because the Supreme Court ruled at the end of last year that the serious shortcomings in the conduct of the original election made a by-election necessary in 455 of 2,256 constituencies.

A year earlier, the Berlin State Supreme Court had ruled that the principles of universality, equality and freedom of the vote had been so seriously violated in the Berlin House of Representatives (state assembly) election, which took place on the same day in the same polling stations, that the entire election had to be repeated. This happened exactly one year ago.

By deciding to repeat the Bundestag (federal) election in only 455 constituencies, the Berlin State Supreme Court tried to provide some protection to the federal government and prevent a political earthquake. Nevertheless, the rerun election result is very revealing and shows how strong the opposition to the government is.

Around 550,000 Berliners were eligible to vote, but only half went to the polls. Voter turnout fell from 75.4 percent to 51 percent. This may not come as a surprise in a repeat election, but it is also an expression of the rejection of all the parties in the federal government—SPD, Greens, Liberal Democrats (FDP).

Due to the low voter turnout, all but one of the parties lost votes in the 455 constituencies, even those that made relative percentage gains. The SPD received 54,000 fewer votes than in September 2021, the Greens 38,000 and the FDP 29,000 fewer. Only 3.3 percent voted for the Liberals, well below the 5 percent threshold required for parliamentary representation. The Christian Democrats (CDU), which gained 6.9 points to reach 20.6 percent,

also lost 552 votes. And the Left Party, which received 12.6 percent in its Berlin stronghold (up 0.7), lost more than 15,000 voters.

Despite a low turnout, only the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) gained votes, with an additional 5,300, and increased its percentage share by 5.6 points to 12.6 percent.

The growth of the fascists is a direct result of the policies of all the parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament), which have adopted their reactionary and racist programme and integrated them into parliamentary work and all committees. The October 2023 cover page of *Der Spiegel*, which depicted the chancellor with the slogan “We must finally deport more!” is still well remembered. In mid-January, the Bundestag passed a law on accelerated deportation to the applause of the AfD.

The AfD's increase in votes shows that the mass movement against the fascist party can only be successful if it is irreconcilably opposed to the right-wing policies of the coalition government and is made the starting point for a political mobilisation of the working class against the capitalist system.

The massive loss of votes suffered by the SPD is the price paid for its right-wing policies of military rearmament, war preparations, xenophobia and social cuts since the coalition came to power.

Two years ago, on February 27, 2022, Scholz gave his infamous “New Era” speech. He exploited Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which NATO had provoked with its constant eastward expansion, for a proxy war against Russia, the biggest rearmament offensive since Hitler and the stationing of Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) units in Eastern Europe.

With €22 billion in direct aid and a share of €19 billion in EU aid since the start of the war, Germany has become the largest financier of the war and donor to Ukraine after the US. The official list of German military support for Ukraine is getting longer and longer and shows the extent to which Berlin is involved in the Ukraine war against Russia. The list already includes 105 main battle tanks, 30

infantry fighting vehicles, 42 armoured personnel carriers, 15 anti-aircraft tanks and 9 air defence systems. In addition, there are armoured recovery vehicles, armoured bridge-laying vehicles, armoured mine-clearing vehicles and half a million rounds of ammunition for all types of weapons.

A few days before the re-run Berlin elections, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) openly threatened Russia with war. In several interviews, he stated that Germany would have to prepare for war with the nuclear power Russia in “a period of five to eight years.” For weeks, he has been calling for Germany to become “ready for war” and expand its leading role in NATO.

At the same time, the NATO powers have opened a second front in the Middle East. The German government unconditionally supports the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians and denounces and suppresses any opposition to it as “antisemitic.”

If anyone thought that the massive loss of votes in the “small Bundestag election”—as the Berlin election rerun was often called—would persuade the SPD to appear less bellicose and scale back its rearmament propaganda, they were proved wrong on Monday.

The morning after the election, in front of television cameras, Scholz laid the foundation stone for an expansion of the Rheinmetall ammunition factory in Lower Saxony, Germany’s second-largest arms manufacturer. Finance daily *Handelsblatt* quoted him saying, “We are not living in peacetime,” and gleefully reported how the SPD chancellor praised the importance of the defence industry and stood in front of tanks and ammunition boxes for “more than an hour” for a photo shoot.

On Tuesday, the SPD’s lead candidate for the European elections, Katarina Barley, brought Germany’s nuclear armament into play. Now that Donald Trump has called into question the NATO defence obligation, we needed to think about “our own nuclear bombs,” said Barley. On Wednesday, SPD foreign affairs expert Michael Roth followed up and demanded: “We must stop Russian imperialism—even without the USA if necessary.”

The war cries from SPD HQ at Willy Brandt House are becoming increasingly aggressive and irrational. One hundred ten years after it agreed to the Kaiser’s war credits in August 1914 and led millions of workers to the slaughter of the First World War, the SPD today is once again playing a key role in pushing through the predatory interests of German imperialism against the resistance of the working class.

But unlike then, the SPD has long since lost its influence in the working class. After the monstrous crimes of German militarism in two world wars, the war cries from SPD headquarters and the chancellery are met with disgust, anger and growing resistance.

The decline of the SPD comes as no surprise and is to be welcomed. The turn away from the party that Rosa Luxemburg had already described as a stinking corpse in 1914 must be made the prelude to a conscious turn towards a socialist programme.

This is the significance of the European election campaign of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which is fighting together with its sister parties throughout Europe and internationally to mobilise the working class against war and fascism.

The SGP’s election statement reads:

The only legitimate conclusion that can be drawn from Nazi Germany’s war of extermination and the Holocaust, the worst crimes in human history, is this: The working class must never again permit war and fascism, and must eliminate once and for all the root of this horror, capitalism.

- Stop the NATO war in Ukraine! No sanctions or arms deliveries!

- Two world wars are enough! Stop the warmongers!

- €100 billion for daycare centers, schools and hospitals, instead of for armaments and war!



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