

Why is the far-right vote surging in the European elections?

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Sunday's European elections saw a surge in the vote for far-right and neo-fascist parties. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) coalition, led by the Brothers of Italy (FdI), the Identity and Democracy (ID) coalition of France's National Rally and the Alternative for Germany won 146 seats altogether. This is over one-fifth of the EU Parliament's 720 seats and a 28-seat increase from the previous record vote for the far right in the 2019 European elections.

The result is a humiliating disavowal by voters of the current social-democratic and liberal parties that dominate the European Union (EU) and the EU Parliament.

These parties campaigned as defenders of the decades-long EU austerity diktat, supporters of Israel's genocide in Gaza and promoters of a massive escalation of the US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz recently announced plans to bomb Russia with NATO missiles, and French President Emmanuel Macron has moved to send troops to Ukraine to fight Russia.

Scholz's Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) fell to 13.9 percent of the vote. This is its worst election result in 137 years, when the young SPD's activities were largely banned under Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. Their Green coalition partners lost 8.6 percentage points, falling to 11.9 percent. Together with the 5.2 percent of the Free Democratic Party, the German government parties won only 31 percent of the vote. The far-right AfD took 15.9 percent of the vote and 15 seats, coming second behind only the right-wing Christian-Democrats (30 percent).

In France, with 31.4 percent of the vote, Marine Le Pen's neo-fascist RN trounced Macron's party, which collapsed to 14.6 percent of the vote, as well as the Socialist Party (PS, 13.9 percent) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI, 9.9 percent).

Macron reacted Sunday night by suddenly dissolving parliament and calling snap legislative elections for June 30–July 7. The RN is set to make large gains and possibly form France's first-ever neo-fascist government.

What political dynamic has underlain the rapid growth of

the far-right parties? It is not the emergence of mass, middle-class fascist movements like the Nazi "Brown Shirts," the Italian fascist "Black Shirts," or the French Nazi-collaborationist *Milice* units. Europe's far-right wave is not the product of mass fascist sentiment in the working class or in the broader population.

In fact, military aggression and genocide, the policies championed by European fascism, face mass opposition. Polls have found 68 percent in France, 80 percent in Germany and 90 percent in Poland oppose Macron's call to send troops to Ukraine to fight Russia. And popular opposition to the Gaza genocide, which has triggered protests across Europe, is so deep that even EU governments that arm Israel feel compelled to issue a few hypocritical and insincere criticisms of the ongoing mass murder.

The rise of the far right is the product rather of the systematic disenfranchisement of the workers by nationalist, bureaucratic organizations that the media and the ruling class promote as the "left." Unlike the far right—which tries to exploit mass discontent with the existing political system, denouncing it as a conspiracy against the nation and expressing reservations about unrestrained war with Russia—these parties of the affluent middle class exude complacency and self-satisfaction.

Even in the face of war between nuclear-armed powers, genocide and the surge of police state and fascistic forms of rule, these organizations insist that popular opposition must be tied to debilitating alliances with parties of capitalist government and allied union bureaucracies. Whatever criticisms they make of the far right, they are far more hostile to Trotskyism and to building a revolutionary movement in the European working class for socialism.

Yesterday, David North, the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), replied to the complaints of Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister of Greece's SYRIZA ("Coalition of the Radical Left") government, on his "personal defeat."

"Would it not be appropriate for [Varoufakis] to examine his political responsibility, and that of the pseudo-left

tendencies, for the resurgence of the fascistic right? The betrayals of Syriza, Podemos, Corbynism, et al. have provided an opportunity for the extreme right.”

Their treachery is epitomized by SYRIZA, which came to power in 2015, pledging to stop EU austerity policies, only to flagrantly betray its promises. Forming a government alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks (ANEL) party, it adopted a further EU austerity package slashing living standards and built EU prison camps for refugees. After leaving power in disgrace in 2019, SYRIZA is now led, fittingly enough, by former Goldman Sachs banker Stefanos Kasselakis.

Such treachery and fecklessness, repeated in various guises in every country, is opening a path for the far right. For a long time, the German Left Party served the SPD-led government as a left-wing fig leaf. It expressed verbal criticism but supported the war and attacks on the working class. Now, with 2.7 percent, it has achieved its worst result in a European election. Even in the province of Thuringia, where it still has Bodo Ramelow as prime minister, it only achieved 5.7 percent.

From the Left Party there emerged the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW), which combines limited criticisms of the war in Ukraine with xenophobia and social demagoguery and explicitly rejects socialism. It received 6.2 percent of the vote nationwide and as much as 13.9 percent in the former territory of the Stalinist East German regime.

In France, Mélenchon’s LFI lost half its vote in the 2022 presidential elections, when it had 20 percent and a majority in working class districts of almost all France’s largest cities. It consistently rejected making any appeal to mobilize its electorate in strikes and struggles, even during last year’s mass strikes against Macron’s pension cuts, when two-thirds of French people supported blocking the economy with a general strike against Macron. It insisted that protests against the Gaza genocide had to be based on a perspective of supporting LFI members’ maneuvers in parliament.

LFI works entirely within the ever more authoritarian framework of France’s police state. Mélenchon pledged during the 2022 elections to serve as prime minister under either Macron or a neo-fascist president. In these elections, LFI allied with the Stalinist French Communist Party and with pro-Ukraine war PS candidate Raphaël Glucksmann, issuing only verbal complaints even as the Macron government threatened to prosecute its members for statements of solidarity with Gaza.

Critical conclusions must be drawn from this continuing surge of the far right in European politics. In the absence of a Marxist-internationalist revolutionary leadership in the working class, the neo-fascists grow uninterrupted—even amid mass strikes and protests.

The far right enjoys support from powerful sections of the capitalist media and ruling class because it gives the sharpest and clearest expression to the needs of imperialism in a period of war, genocide and capitalist crisis.

Their promotion of nationalism and police-state rule divides workers along national lines, legitimizes militarism, and promotes violent hostility to socialism. As the French RN’s shift on the Russia war—notably its decision not to vote against military aid to Ukraine—makes clear, the neo-fascists do not oppose imperialist war, but are preparing to adjust themselves to the military escalation being prepared by NATO.

Stopping the rise of the far right requires undertaking the struggle to build Marxist-Trotskyist revolutionary parties in countries across Europe, the International Committee of the Fourth International, fighting to unify the working class in a movement against imperialist war and genocide, and for socialism and workers power.

The German section of the ICFI took part in the European elections with its own list to fight for this perspective. In its [election appeal](#), the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) wrote:

It is not possible to prevent a third world war and defend democratic rights and social achievements by appealing to governments. The interests of the vast majority can simply no longer be reconciled with the greed for profits and the imperialist appetites of the ruling class. To end war and inequality, the masses must intervene independently in the political process, break the power of the banks and corporations, and place them under democratic control.

The SGP’s campaign was of great importance in preparing the working class and youth for the inevitable class struggles to come. It has familiarised hundreds of thousands with its socialist programme through rallies, leaflets, WSWS articles and videos on social media. Now it is crucial to actively build the party, and sections of the ICFI across Europe and internationally: this is the only way to successfully lead the struggle against war, exploitation and fascism.



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