

Germany's 2025 federal elections: A turning point in post-war German history

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Sunday's federal elections mark a decisive turning point in German and European post-war history. For the first time since the fall of the Third Reich 80 years ago, there is a real possibility that a party with direct ideological continuity with the Nazis will enter government.

Polling at 21 percent, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) trails only the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) at 28 percent, while the ruling Social Democrats (SPD) have collapsed to 16 percent. The Greens are at 14 percent, and the Left Party is at 8 percent.

Even if the AfD remains outside the next government, its rise reflects the broader shift of the entire political establishment to the right. During the campaign, all Bundestag parties competed in anti-immigrant agitation, calls for military rearmament and pandering to the AfD—a party whose honorary chairman, Alexander Gauland, described “Hitler and the Nazis” as merely “bird shit in over a thousand years of successful German history.”

Yet resistance is growing. Hundreds of thousands have protested across Germany against the AfD and the rightward shift of all Bundestag (federal parliament) parties. In the final days of the campaign, tens of thousands of public sector workers staged warning strikes against job and wage cuts.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, provides this opposition with a political voice and historical perspective. The struggle against the return of German militarism and fascism and the accompanying social devastation requires above all a clear understanding of its causes.

The AfD's rise is not an accident, but the outcome of decades of reactionary policies. More than 30 years after reunification, which was celebrated by official propaganda as a triumph of democracy, capitalism's restoration in East Germany has devastated entire regions, creating mass unemployment and social misery.

The devastation of the East German economy and the resulting impoverishment and lack of prospects created a breeding ground for the fascists. This was facilitated by the SPD and the successor parties to the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party—the Party of Democratic Socialism and the Left Party.

They organized the attacks on social programs, in cooperation with the trade unions.

In recent years, all establishment parties and the media have helped legitimize the AfD, especially by adopting its anti-refugee policies. During the campaign, CDU candidate Friedrich Merz secured a Bundestag majority with the AfD to tighten asylum laws, signaling his willingness to govern with the fascists. The SPD and Greens attacked Merz for failing to join them in implementing the right-wing extremists' refugee policy.

Unlike Hitler's Nazi Party, the AfD lacks a fascist mass base. Many workers, particularly in eastern Germany, vote for the party out of anger at the established parties and their anti-worker policies. The government's aggressive push for rearmament and war has created conditions in which even the thoroughly militarist AfD can exploit anti-war sentiment because it criticizes the NATO war against Russia.

These developments shatter the myth of post-war German history: that fascism was a historical anomaly, limited to the crisis before World War II. In reality, the ruling class turns to fascism as a response to the deep crisis of capitalism.

Like its counterpart in the US, the German ruling class is once again turning to fascist forces to enforce rearmament, social cuts and dictatorship. The SGP's election manifesto warns: “Donald Trump... pursues a policy of economic extortion, military conquest and violent repression.”

The German ruling class is following a similar path. Its answer to “Make America Great Again” is “*Deutschland über alles*” (Germany above all), responding to Trump by rearming at a pace not seen since Hitler. All parties represented in the Bundestag are united on this. In the war against Russia, they are willing to risk a nuclear conflagration. In Gaza, they are supporting genocide. The federal election was brought forward to install a government capable of implementing the policies of war and accompanying social cuts more effectively than the discredited coalition government led by the Social Democrats (SPD).

The breakdown of transatlantic relations at the Munich Security Conference, along with US threats to sideline Europe in Ukraine by negotiating directly with Putin, has intensified these developments to the extreme. The ruling class in

Germany is reacting with a veritable frenzy of rearmament and war.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz boasted during the campaign of doubling military spending as part of Germany's "new era" in foreign policy following the NATO-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine. Green candidate Robert Habeck has called for tripling military spending to 3.5 percent of GDP, declaring that the next government must "stand firm" in strengthening Europe's military power.

The Kiel Institute for the World Economy, which aided Wehrmacht rearmament during the Third Reich, recently outlined what Europe would need to replace US military support. Its report estimates that closing capability gaps would require 50 additional brigades, thousands of new tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, and the Bundeswehr mobilizing 100,000 combat troops for NATO in a potential war with Russia.

Merz, who like Habeck has already announced that as chancellor he would deliver long-range Taurus cruise missiles to Kiev that could reach Moscow, left no doubt that German imperialism is once again preparing for war against Russia. It can be "firmly assumed" that Putin "will not shy away" from "violating borders even further," he said on the eve of the election. "NATO territory (is) in his sights, and we have to be prepared for that."

This turns reality on its head. In fact, it is the German ruling class that, despite its barbaric crimes in the 20th century, is once again "violating borders" and pushing eastwards, drawing on its darkest traditions.

The SGP was the only party that predicted and fought against these developments from the outset. Since 2014, it has systematically warned against the return of German militarism and the associated strengthening of the fascists.

When current Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), then foreign minister, declared at the 2014 Munich Security Conference that Germany was "too big and economically too strong for us to only comment on world politics from the sidelines" and the German government subsequently supported the anti-Russian coup in Ukraine, we wrote in a resolution:

History is returning with a vengeance. Almost 70 years after the crimes of the Nazis and its defeat in World War II, the German ruling class is once again adopting the imperialist great power politics of the Kaiser's Empire and Hitler.

Germany's return to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy has gone hand in hand with the trivialization of Nazi crimes. Also in 2014, the far-right Humboldt Professor Jörg Baberowski declared in *Der Spiegel*: "Hitler was not a

psychopath, he was not vicious. He didn't want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table." In the same breath, he compared the Holocaust and shootings in the Russian Civil War, saying: "Basically, it was the same thing: industrialized killing."

All parties defended Baberowski, while the government criminalized the SGP for opposing the rehabilitation of Nazism. It placed the SGP under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the domestic intelligence agency, which is riddled with right-wing extremists. For the German state and ruling elites, the real enemy remains on the left.

The 2025 federal election is a turning point and a warning. In Germany, the horrors of world war and fascism are well known, with memorials to the Nazi crimes—27 million Soviet lives lost in the war of annihilation and the industrialized murder of 6 million Jews—standing as constant reminders. As the ruling class revives the same great power and war policies that produced these crimes, it is preparing for a brutal confrontation with the working class. Workers must respond with a conscious political program.

Appeals to the SPD, Greens, Left Party or the pseudo-left groups of the upper-middle class lead to disaster. These parties and the trade union apparatus are not opponents of the shift to the right, but active participants, enforcing it on behalf of the capitalist state. They represent nothing other than the complete decay of bourgeois democracy and the entire capitalist system. On this basis, the extreme right is growing—not only in Germany, but worldwide.

This development cannot be stopped by moral indignation. The struggle against fascism, militarism and social inequality requires a political break with the entire framework of bourgeois-capitalist politics and the development of an independent workers' movement on a socialist basis.

This is what the SGP is fighting for, together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, which has defended the program of revolutionary Marxism against Stalinism, social democracy and all varieties of petty-bourgeois nationalism. The SGP must now be built as the new leadership of the working class. The only way to stop a relapse into world war and barbarism is a socialist revolution that abolishes capitalism and reorganizes society on a new, egalitarian basis.



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