

SPD vote collapses in the Baden-Württemberg state elections

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10 March 2026

The most striking result of the Baden-Württemberg state election on Sunday is the collapse of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The party of Vice Chancellor Lars Klingbeil and Federal Labour Minister Bärbel Bas only just re-entered the Stuttgart state parliament, just clearing the 5 percent hurdle with 5.5 percent of the second votes. One year ago it had achieved 14.2 percent in the federal election in the state, and 11 percent in the state election five years ago.

The collapse of the SPD is all the more remarkable given that the election took place against the backdrop of a catastrophic industrial decline and the criminal US war against Iran. While social crises and wars usually strengthen nominally left-wing parties, the opposite was the case this time. The former workers' party, the SPD, has moved so far to the right that it is no longer perceived as the solution to the problems, but the cause.

The same applies to the Left Party. With 4.4 percent, it once again failed to enter the state parliament. Although its vote slightly improved compared to the last state election, it remained significantly below its Baden-Württemberg federal election result of 6.8 percent. Together, the SPD and the Left Party did not even account for 10 percent of the votes cast.

The issues of war and job losses are impelling millions of voters. Yet the election offered them no opportunity to provide an answer to this. The establishment parties all support the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr (armed forces), the war against Russia in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and the war against Iran. The differences between them on these issues are minimal.

They all give the same answer to the jobs massacre in the car and metal industries: elimination of health and safety at work, more speed-ups and lower taxes to save corporate profits at the expense of jobs. The trade

unions, which are closely linked to the SPD and the Left Party, sabotage and suppress any resistance to dismissals in the factories—as at Bosch in Schwäbisch Gmünd, where they are preventing an influential opposition list from participating in the works council election.

At the federal level, the SPD, together with the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), initiated “special funds” and loans totalling over €1 trillion to upgrade the Bundeswehr into Europe’s strongest armed force, and passed them with the help of the Greens. The Left Party also voted in favour of the war credits in the Bundesrat (second chamber of parliament) to demonstrate that its occasional pacifist phrases are not to be taken seriously.

The aims of the criminal war against Iran are supported by all the establishment parties. Left Party leader Jan van Aken welcomed the treacherous assassination of Iranian head of state Khamenei with the words: “May he rot in hell.” A different attitude prevails among the population. According to the latest ARD-DeutschlandTrend poll, 58 percent of respondents oppose the war against Iran, with only 25 percent considering it justified. Seventy-seven percent view the political situation in the world with concern.

Little wonder that no one who is worried about their job, rejects the criminal wars of the federal government and the Trump administration, is angry and wants to fight, votes for the SPD or the Left Party.

The only party that was able to profit from the growing frustration and suppressed indignation is the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD). It received over 1 million votes in Baden-Württemberg for the first time and, with 18.8 percent, was able to almost double its result from the last state election. According to pollsters *infratest dimap*, the AfD

achieved its highest share of the vote among workers, at 37 percent. The comparable figure for the SPD was only 5 percent, and for the Left Party 4 percent.

The AfD and its lead candidate Markus Frohnmaier undoubtedly bear fascist traits, but they do not lead a mass fascist movement as Hitler and Mussolini did. The votes for the AfD are an expression of widespread frustration, which manifests itself in reactionary forms because it cannot find a progressive avenue. The dissatisfaction is much broader than the AfD's voter base. Many despise the right-wing extremists and hold their noses to vote for an establishment party because they see no other way to keep the AfD out of government.

This explains the election result in Baden-Württemberg, which ostensibly leaves everything as it was. As in the past 10 years, the Greens and the CDU will govern the state together. They even have a two-thirds majority in the state parliament, since numerous parties—including, for the first time, the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP)—failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle. Almost 16 percent of the votes cast are therefore unrepresented in the state parliament.

The only unknown question was whether Green candidate Cem Özdemir or CDU candidate Manuel Hagel would succeed the outgoing Green Minister President Winfried Kretschmann. The Greens, who were still trailing by over 10 percent in the polls half a year ago, ultimately won with a half-percent lead, receiving 30.2 percent of the vote to the CDU's 29.7 percent.

Many press commentaries, as well as the CDU itself, attributed the successful catch-up to an eight-year-old video that was widely circulated on social media before the election. It shows the then 29-year-old Hagel making a sexist remark about an underage schoolgirl during a public appearance.

In fact, the surprising success of the Greens, who are in opposition at federal level, is a slap in the face for Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU), whose policies are meeting with broad rejection. According to ARD-DeutschlandTrend, to date, only 18 percent are convinced by the policies of the Merz government, a coalition with the SPD; 79 percent are dissatisfied.

Politically, however, it makes no difference whether Özdemir or Hagel governs the state. Özdemir, who has always belonged to the right-wing "Realo" ("realists")

wing of the Greens, went out of his way to distance himself from the—likewise right-wing—course of the federal party.

His election posters did not mention the party name. On the phasing out of combustion engines, climate targets and migration, he advocated a different line to his party nationally. The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which is not among the Greens' fan base, commented: "As the lead candidate, Cem Özdemir transformed himself into a CDU politician."

Özdemir also brought Boris Palmer into his campaign team, who had been forced to leave the Greens in 2023 due to his AfD-style agitation against migrants. The day after the election, Palmer, who is being discussed as a possible state minister in Özdemir's cabinet, advocated economic reforms at the expense of workers. "There is a great willingness to make sacrifices oneself in order to maintain prosperity for all. Most people know that this is necessary," he told *The Pioneer*.

The Özdemir government in Stuttgart is inevitably heading for a confrontation with the working class. But the latter needs a progressive perspective. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) has consistently warned against the illusion that the Left Party, the trade unions or even the SPD could be moved to adopt policies in the interests of the working class. This illusion, propagated by pseudo-left organisations, leads to a dead end. The result of the state election in Baden-Württemberg has demonstrated this once again.

What is necessary is the building of an independent movement of the international working class that fights against social inequality, war, dictatorship and capitalism, and for the building of a socialist society. This is the perspective of the SGP and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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