

# Germany's ruling parties move further to the right after defeats in September state elections

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The heavy losses suffered by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the three state elections in September have plunged the federal government, a grand coalition of both parties, into a deep crisis.

The CDU lost its claim to the post of head of government in Saxony-Anhalt and Berlin, and in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania it was ejected from a state parliament for the first time in its history, having failed to clear the five percent hurdle required for representation. In Berlin, once a Social Democratic stronghold, the SPD finished fifth, behind Die Linke (Left Party), the CDU, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Greens; and in Saxony-Anhalt it remained below 10 percent.

The results of the state elections are a clear vote against rearmament, war and social cuts, which are at the heart of the federal government's policies. The planned or already agreed cuts to pensions, healthcare, long-term care and social benefits are destroying the livelihoods of countless people, while the escalation of the war against Russia and support for the genocide in Gaza encounter broad rejection among the population.

But the CDU and SPD are not responding to the electoral debacle by making concessions to voters and scaling back their plans for war and sweeping cuts. They are unwilling to budge a millimetre from their political course. Instead, they are taking further steps towards war and dictatorship.

Their reaction shows that it is no longer possible to influence government policy by means of the ballot paper or pressure from the streets, owing to the insoluble crisis of global capitalism. The defence of profits and fortunes worth billions, and the bitter international struggle for raw materials, cheap labour and markets, require that every area of society be subordinated to the drive for profits and to preparing for war.

The German ruling class was forced to make social concessions because of its crimes in the Second World War and the great class struggles of the 1960s and 70s. Such concessions are no longer compatible with the capitalist profit system. All the parties that defend capitalism bow to this dictate—not only the CDU and SPD but also the Greens and Die Linke. The AfD and its role model Donald Trump embody the interests of capital in their sharpest form.

The necessary conclusions must be drawn from this. The fight against war, mass layoffs and sweeping social cuts requires the independent mobilisation of the international working class on the basis of a socialist programme aimed at the abolition of capitalism.

All other methods are doomed to failure.

## CDU: closing ranks with the AfD and accelerating social cuts

Voices are multiplying within the CDU calling for a political rapprochement with the AfD in order to suppress the growing social resistance.

The CDU state branch in Saxony-Anhalt is split over the question. Some members of the state parliament advocate partial cooperation with the AfD and strictly reject working with Die Linke, which would be needed to form a majority against the AfD.

In the election of the president of the state parliament, the AfD candidate Tobias Rausch—whom the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) had also backed—received four more votes than the AfD and BSW have between them. The four votes most probably came from the CDU. The far-right ideologue Hans-Thomas Tillschneider was also elected vice-president of the state parliament with five more votes than the AfD has. The chances that Ulrich Siegmund will become the first AfD State Premier in mid-December have thus risen considerably.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz has so far publicly rejected cooperation with the AfD, but this is solely for foreign policy reasons, as some AfD politicians maintain close relations with Russia. On domestic policy, the CDU and AfD have long been in agreement. The Merz government is putting into practice the far right's inhumane refugee policy and building a police state.

There are now also weighty voices in the CDU at federal level advocating a rapprochement with the AfD. Hesse State Premier Boris Rhein, for example, distanced himself from the term “firewall”—the CDU's formal refusal to cooperate with the AfD. Instead, the AfD should be “demystified” on the issues by being integrated into parliamentary routines.

Manfred Weber, deputy leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU), has also spoken out for abolishing the “firewall.” It was a “huge burden” on the CDU/CSU, he said, because it forced the party in state parliaments to coordinate with left-wing parties. As chairman of the European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament, Weber has long worked with far-right parties. He maintains close relations with the Italian government of the neo-fascist Giorgia Meloni, whom he has supported in her

election campaign.

On the eve of the Saxony-Anhalt election, Merz himself had already declared he would not be influenced by election results and would accelerate social cuts, something he has repeated several times since.

Last Sunday, the CDU executive met for a two-day closed-door retreat to draw conclusions from the election defeats and to fend off calls for Merz's resignation. It adopted a multi-page paper, "What must happen now," which engages in self-criticism in its preamble and promises change.

A large part of the population had the impression that things were no longer fair in Germany, Merz said. But the CDU's plans make the injustice worse. At the centre of the paper are "improving competitiveness," the "future viability of social security" and "order and security"—the usual stock phrases for speed-ups and lower wages, the dismantling of social benefits and the building of a police state.

The only "concession" mentioned in the paper is a cut of two cents per kilowatt hour in the electricity tax for private households. This had already been promised in the coalition agreement before the CDU and SPD entered office, but was then scrapped owing to a shortage of funds. For a three-person household with average electricity consumption, this amounts to a saving of €70 [\$US78] a year! That is barely enough to offset the higher price of a tank of petrol.

On Tuesday, Merz then spoke to his real clientele at the Employers' Day conference. Urged by Rainer Dulger, president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), to move faster on the "reforms" and to "strengthen the economy," Merz agreed.

The chancellor promised that the option of retiring on a full pension two years before the statutory age (i.e. at 65) after 45 years paying contributions would be abolished, the introduction of a capital-funded pension accelerated, and protections against dismissal loosened. New possibilities for fixed-term contracts would be created, working hours made more flexible, the eight-hour day abolished and replaced by a weekly maximum working time, and long-term care made increasingly reliant on private provision.

### **SPD: the retreat of Bärbel Bas**

The SPD, too, is responding to its election defeats in Saxony-Anhalt and Berlin with a further lurch to the right. With the defence, finance and labour portfolios, it holds the key ministries for rearmament and social cuts in the Merz government. It is now reorganising itself in order to play this role more effectively. After the surprise resignation of co-leader and Labour Minister Bärbel Bas, the party has called a special party conference for December or January to elect an entirely new leadership.

Bas was appointed Labour Minister because of her background in a working-class family in Duisburg and her occasional criticism of social cuts. She was thought most capable of pushing through

the social cuts decided by the coalition—which she herself supports without reservation—against resistance in the working class.

To appear more credible, Bas occasionally criticised the chancellor. She publicly called Merz's assertion that Germany could no longer afford the welfare state "bullshit," for example, and questioned individual cuts such as the abolition of retirement on a full pension after 45 contribution years. This led to growing tensions with the CDU, which accused her of delaying tactics.

With her resignation, Bas has now cleared the way for the pension reform to be carried out without any concessions. She justified her resignation by reference to a bereavement in her immediate family that she said she had to come to terms with, but at the same time accused the CDU of having "further intensified" the attacks on her "at this difficult time for me personally." She wanted a successor who would "push ahead with the forthcoming laws and reform projects with full force." Her successor, the former Rhineland-Palatinate State Premier Alexander Schweitzer, has already pledged he will do exactly that.

The government also receives support in this from Die Linke, which is doing all it can to ensure that resistance to social cuts and war comes to nothing. In the two eastern German states where Die Linke has played a role in propping up the state for decades, it was mainly the far-right AfD that benefited from anger at the federal government in the absence of a left alternative. In Berlin, Die Linke became the strongest party for the first time.

Die Linke was elected because it campaigned against the "rent sharks" and called for expropriations, yet it is now preparing to lead a coalition with the SPD and the Greens that will continue the policies of the previous CDU-led Senate (Berlin's state government). To be acceptable to the SPD and the Greens as a coalition partner, Die Linke has already shredded large parts of its election programme and committed itself to expelling opponents of Israel's genocide in Gaza from its parliamentary group.



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