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Germany

Electoral breakthrough on the left

- News from around the world -

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Up until Sunday 18th September there were only the opinion polls, now it's a fact: the Left Party, that is the ex-PDS supported by the WASG (Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice), has become a political force in Parliament, with 8.7 per cent of the votes, more than the Greens who got 8.1 per cent (they had got 8.6 per cent in 2002). It is no exaggeration to speak of a small political earthquake.

In 2002, the PDS only won 4 per cent of the vote and did not manage to reach the threshold of 5 per cent (necessary to qualify for seats under proportional representation). Since then the party had only been represented in the Bundestag by two MPs directly elected in their constituencies.

In fact, the PDS was well on the way to becoming an "Eastern" party, and furthermore one with a declining electoral base because of its participation in regional governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania as a junior partner of the SPD, bearing joint responsibility for the implementation of the austerity and anti-social policies of neo-liberalised social democracy.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/GysiLotzerLafontaine.jpg>]

Gregor Gysi, Ulla Löffler, Oskar Lafontaine

Following on the success of the WASG in the regional elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in May (2.2 per cent of the vote, compared to 0.9 per cent for the PDS) and the initiative taken by Oskar Lafontaine in proposing unity and joining the WASG, the possibility of an electoral breakthrough became clear.

Everything had to be done in great haste because of the initiative of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD), who had posed the "question of confidence" while organizing his own "defeat" in the vote in order for there to be early elections on September 18th.

This forward flight, which was supposed to put a stop to social mobilizations, criticism within the SPD and the creation of a new political force on the left, ended in a defeat of the government parties.

It was certainly the unitary dynamic to the left of the SPD and the Greens that changed the political relationship of forces. The SPD and the CDU/CSU (Christian conservatives) had each got 38.5 per cent of the vote in 2002. This time, the SPD went down to 34.3 per cent and the CDU/CSU to 35.2 per cent.

Not long before the elections, in the opinion polls on voting intentions, the SPD's decline had been even more dramatic: it was below 30 per cent and the Left Party was getting up to 11 per cent.

But during the final two weeks before the elections, the leadership of the SPD succeeded in creating a polarization against the CDU/CSU and the liberals of the FDP, by arguing that the SPD, while fighting for "the necessary reforms of the Welfare State", would be the party of social equity, whereas the CDU/CSU and the FDP would be the parties of social injustice and brutality towards ordinary people. In view of what were the real policies of the SPD-Green it was really a masterpiece of demagoguery!

As Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi, the leading candidates of the Left Party, had announced and repeated in the final phase of the electoral battle, the vote to the left of the neo-liberal cartel of the established parties was also a "useful vote" in blocking the road to a "black-yellow" government headed by Angela Merkel, formed by the Christian

conservatives and the liberals.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/DL_youth.jpg]

The SPD and the Greens on their own couldn't have done that. This fact indicates that the political map of Germany is undergoing a lasting change. In addition, the 9.8 per cent for the FDP, which was advocating the most ferocious neo-liberal measures indicates a double polarization, to the right and to the left, to the detriment of the "big parties".

For the moment, it is absolutely unclear what the next government will be. Neither "black-yellow" nor "red-green" has a majority in the Bundestag. All the established parties rule out an alliance with the Left Party, whose representatives, besides, exclude any governmental collaboration with the parties responsible for neo-liberal policies. Gerhard Schröder, right away on Sunday evening, took everyone by surprise by saying that he would continue to head the government. With who?

The leader of the FDP, Guido Westerwelle, on his part ruled out co-governing with the SPD and the Greens. The CDU/CSU has begun to negotiate with the Greens with a perspective of possibly forming a government with them and the FDP. What a spectacle! Nevertheless, the most likely outcome is a "grand coalition" of the CDU/CSU and the SPD, but in that case Schröder couldn't remain Chancellor...

The electoral breakthrough of the Left Party marks a historic date for the workers' movement in Germany. For the working class and the poorest and most exploited layers, what is at stake is the possibility of reconquering class independence on the political level.

To do that requires an adopting an attitude of firm opposition, breaking with any logic of co-government and of co-responsibility, encouraging extra-parliamentary mobilizations and developing an anti-capitalist strategy. Because the new left party that is to be created by a process of fusion between the Left Party and the WASG must avoid at all costs going down the road of adaptation, which could only lead to disappointment and failure.

– Manuel Kellner will be speaking about the Left Party in London on 12 October. Details [here](#).

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