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Germany

Germany: A new polarisation is needed

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The results of the regional elections in the German states of Saxony and Thuringia on 1 September 2024 indicate a rise in support for the far right which is as overwhelming as in many other countries. What a terrible feeling it is to have to hope that in both Länder a government led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) can somehow be assembled to confront the far right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)!

AfD leaders were able to claim with a mocking smile on election night that the coalition government and CDU/CSU parties had adopted their positions, particularly on refugee policy (but were unable to implement them). They would therefore continue to 'push' the established parties. Indeed, public debate is entirely dominated by the far right. The more the established parties take up their ideas, the more certain it is that more people will vote for the original far right on the next occasion.

The single-digit election results for the government coalition parties are a resounding slap in the face for them and for Chancellor Scholz (for the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, and particularly spectacularly for Lindner's Free Democrats). Can we be happy about this and call for new elections at federal level? The CDU has emerged from these regional elections with the smallest losses, in first or second place. According to the polls, it is almost certain that the Union parties will be the leading force in any government that replaces the Coalition. But this means that we are falling from Charybdis into Scylla.

A crisis of government

The newly formed Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) has succeeded in taking votes from all the other parties, but first and foremost from Die Linke - and lastly from the AfD. Its existence is an expression of the crisis on the left. Its position is rather ambiguous, and it is not only on the issue of refugees and its conservatism in cultural policy that it overlaps with that of the AfD. It is difficult to know to what extent its rather left-wing positions on social policy and distribution can play a positive role.

Insofar as it is a vertical operating model dependent on a charismatic personality, its future is uncertain. What's more, the configuration of forces in the two new regional parliaments will force it to make 'realpolitik' choices. In these times of great political instability, it could easily happen that the BSW quickly loses its credibility and is counted in the collective consciousness among the established parties.

The crisis in the coalition government could only be welcomed if the left - and hence Die Linke in electoral terms - were strengthened as a result. As everyone knows, the opposite is happening. Bodo Ramelow's party, once so proud to lead Thuringia, now finds itself like a plucked chicken. It did Ramelow no good to capitalise on his personal aura and omit his party's name from election posters. In Saxony, Die Linke even fell below the 5% mark and only returned to the Landtag thanks to two direct mandates. In the polls, many people justified their choice to vote for the BSW (or even the AfD) by their disappointment with Die Linke. Of course, there are once again people saying that Die Linke should now be written off for good.

But wait a minute...

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Electoral failures do not make Die Linke more right-wing, more establishment or more bourgeois. What I've already had occasion to say is truer than ever: anyone who is still a member today, or who will become one in the future, and anyone who continues to vote Die Linke, is acting out of conviction. This has great value and should not be compromised lightly. Of course, the Left as a whole, and Die Linke is still the relatively strongest force within it, needs to think about how it can emerge from its crisis and become stronger again.

Die Linke has everything to gain from combating false polarisations in the public debate by opposing them with the class antagonism between labour and capital. No other audible political force in Germany systematically and at every opportunity demands a break with all the policies pursued by the established parties and the AfD in the interests of capital and against the interests of workers, the exploited and the disadvantaged. The absence of such a force weighs like a nightmare on many people, who in their despair turn to the brown rabble-rousers painted blue.

There are no shortcuts. Without deep roots in the workplaces and neighbourhoods, the left will never regain its strength. Solidarity with Palestine rather than *raison d'état*, internationalism and anti-militarism rather than warmongering and pacifism - there are 'many thick planks to pierce' there. But we also need bold political initiatives. Among other things, taking the measure of the combativeness that remains in the trade unions to involve them in a major consultation on how we can confront the danger posed by the extreme right through mass actions that lead to concrete solidarity.