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Germany

# Regional defeat heralds early general election

- News from around the world -

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**The big defeat suffered by premier Schroeder and his Social Democratic Party (SPD) in North Rhine-Westphalia on May 22nd 2005 has triggered off an earthquake in the German capital, Berlin. In the most populous and most industrially important region of Germany, which has been firmly in the hands of the SPD since 1966, the Social Democrats lost practically every constituency to the Christian Democrats. The relationship of forces between the two main parties was reversed: the SPD crashed from 44.8 per cent in 2000 to 37.1 per cent in 2005; the CDU shot up from 37 per cent in 2000 to 44.8 per cent in 2005.**

The Greens and the liberals of the FPD are at the same level, 6.2 per cent. The PDS lost almost 7,000 votes and got 0.92 per cent; the new party, the Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG), which was standing in an election for the first time, won 2.23 per cent, 181,886 votes (compared to 72,982 votes for the PDS).

What makes the result a catastrophe is the fact that, unlike in other elections, the CDU didn't win because the level of abstention had risen, it won because it massively mobilized the electorate. It won in relative terms, but especially in absolute numbers.

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/SchroederFischer\\_copy.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/SchroederFischer_copy.jpg)]

On the way out? - Schroeder (right) with foreign minister Oskar Fischer

The SPD only lost 84,105 votes (which made it drop by nearly 8 per cent). But the CDU won almost a million extra votes. Half of them came from other parties, but the other half came from winning back the abstentionists. Its result is a real electoral victory. Its main slogan was: 39 years is enough, we have to give the region a new chance.

The SPD lost especially among workers (down 13.8 per cent) and the unemployed (down 15.3 per cent). It is quite possible that a good number of them voted for the CDU. But we don't have more detailed analyses that could confirm that.

The Red-Green model has run out of steam. North Rhine-Westphalia was the last region with a Red-Green coalition. There remain only two regions which are not governed by the Right, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, both of which are run by SPD-PDS coalitions. It seems fairly certain that Berlin at least will have a change of government next year.

The Chancellor's proposal to call a general election in the autumn (a year early) comes from the recognition that the government is now trapped between the advance of the Right, which has also limited its room for manoeuvre in the institutions of state, and the loss of support on the left, not to mention the growing discontent in the SPD itself. Before the elections the newspapers were speculating about the loyalty of certain SPD parliamentarians who might no longer respect party discipline.

At most, the debate launched by the president of the party, Franz Müntefering, on capitalism, which in the form of finance capital (mostly American) was descending on certain enterprises (healthy German ones) like a horde of grasshoppers in order to destroy them, has revived fresh hopes in the party that a certain change of direction might be possible. The Chancellor was faced with the risk that the opposition within the SPD would grow and would ask him to take parliamentary initiatives to correct his previous policy - something he was not disposed to accept.

The results of the WASG and the PDS suggest the following interpretation: the PDS can no longer expect to win over

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a significant part of the West German electorate. The WASG, for its part, has had a relative success, but it is very far from the goal proclaimed when it was founded, to become the force on the left that would absorb those who were turning their backs on the SPD.

With its own forces the WASG will not be able to win in the autumn general election (by getting past the 5 per cent barrier in order to be represented in parliament). It seems imperative to propose a joint list with the PDS. In the leadership of the WASG there persists a certain sectarianism towards the PDS, which is not justified, at least from a programmatic point of view: on paper the WASG is sometimes to the right of the PDS.

What emerges quite clearly from these elections is the fact that a project which confines itself to building an alternative on the electoral level can only fail.

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