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By Ulrich Rippert

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European elections: German voters register strong opposition to grand coalition

Many voters in Germany used their ballot in the European elections to express their rejection of the grand coalition's right-wing policies. But the anger over unbearable working conditions, rising rents and the growth of militarism could find no conscious political expression within the framework of the EU elections. Instead, it resulted in the strengthening the Greens and a number of small parties.

The Christian Democrats (CDU) and Social Democrats (SPD) together lost 18 percent of the vote, as both parties recorded their worst ever result. Compared to the European elections five years ago, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) lost 6.4 percentage points and dropped to 28.9 percent. The SPD lost 11.5 percentage points, securing just 15.8 percent of the vote. Compared with the 2017 federal election, the SPD lost 3.6 million votes, while the CDU/CSU lost 4.5 million.

The mobilisation against the grand coalition's right-wing policies was also reflected in the 13.3 percent increase in turnout to 61.4 percent.

Among young voters, opposition to the government was even more pronounced. In the 18-29 age group, the SPD won a mere 9 percent, while the CDU/CSU secured 13 percent. Even among those aged 30 to 44, the SPD got just 12 percent.

The Left Party failed to profit in any way from the opposition to the government. Instead, it was punished. The Left Party is not seen as an oppositional force, but as part of the political establishment. The party won 5.5 percent of the vote, almost 2 percent less than in the last European elections and some 3.7 percent less than in the last federal election.

In regions where the Left Party holds governmental responsibility, such as in Thuringia, where its minister president, Bodo Ramelow, leads a government committed to pro-capitalist and anti-worker measures, the drop in support was even greater, at 8.7 percent.

The state election in Bremen, which was held simultaneously with the European elections, provided a similar picture. For the past 74 years, since the end of World War II, the SPD held power in Bremen and was the largest party there. But the SPD lost 8.2 percent of the vote in its stronghold, falling back to second place behind the CDU, with just 23.9 percent. This was the price for a ruthless austerity programme imposed by the SPD in collaboration with the Greens over the past four years.

The vote against the grand coalition was also directed against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The right-wing extremist party was able to improve its result from the 7.1 percent it obtained in its first European election in 2014, winning 11 percent. But it received 1.7 million fewer votes than in the 2017 federal elections, when it polled 12.7 percent. This despite the fact that the media deliberately hyped the right-wing extremists and predicted that they would make massive gains.

The main beneficiaries of the anti-grand coalition vote were the Greens, who almost doubled their share of the vote to 20.5 percent. Among voters under 30 years of age, the Greens won 29 percent. In this age group, a series of small parties not represented in the federal parliament took 27 percent of the vote. Overall, these parties won 13 percent. For example, the satirical party called “The Party” won two seats. It focused its criticism during the election campaign chiefly on refugee policy and the EU’s military rearmament.

Many people voted for the Greens because they placed central focus on the issue of climate change and were perceived to be a left-wing alternative. But this is an illusion. In recent years, the Greens have emerged as the party of German militarism, supporting all foreign military interventions and demanding increased defence spending. It is involved in nine out of the 16 German state governments, and a Green Party member is minister president in Baden-Württemberg. The record of the Greens wherever they are in government shows that they are just as committed as all the other parties to social spending cuts, military rearmament and the deportation of refugees.

On election night, Green Party lead candidate Meike Schaefer stressed that in Bremen, the Greens would continue with their right-wing policies. “We want to maintain the debt break, we want to get rid of debt,” she told public broadcaster ARD.

The grand coalition parties also announced on election night their intention to continue the hated policies for which they were punished at the ballot box. This was stated most explicitly by former SPD leader and former Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel. Speaking on the “Anne Will” talk show, he argued that the SPD should have placed more emphasis on its aggressive foreign policy during the election campaign.

The key issue is “Europe’s sovereignty in the world,” he said. This involves “Europe asserting itself in a totally crazy world.” Europe cannot allow America and China to talk among themselves and manage everything on their own, he added, but must instead intervene and make sure that instead of a G-2, “at least a G-3, including us, exists.”

CDU leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer called for the restriction of free speech during a Monday press conference. She accused a group of YouTubers who published critical comments on the CDU prior to the election of engaging in “spin,” and demanded as a consequence new regulations for the “digital sphere.”

The entire ruling elite is responding to the growth of social and political opposition, particularly among young workers and students, with a further shift to the right and an intensification of their policies of militarism, social spending cuts and the strengthening of the state apparatus at home and abroad.

This will only intensify the conflict with the vast majority of the working population. Already during the election campaign, 40,000 people demonstrated in Berlin against increasing rents and demanded the nationalisation of property companies and hedge funds. Earlier this year, tens of thousands of public-sector workers struck as part of the latest round of collective bargaining to protest against the terrible conditions in schools, unbearable working conditions and low wages. In March, thousands of transport workers struck in Berlin, shutting down the city.

This growing radicalisation is part of a European and global trend. In France, the “yellow vest” movement shows no signs of abating. Tens of thousands have protested week after week against low wages, social inequality and the Macron government, in spite of police brutality and a hostile media campaign.

In Poland, over 300,000 teachers went on strike against the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government’s policies. It was the first national strike in Poland for decades. In addition, strikes have been launched by autoworkers and other industrial workers in Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Kosovo, and mass protests have

occurred in Hungary against the right-wing government's so-called "slave law," which forces employees to work overtime and is supported by German companies.

These strikes and protests are only the beginning. Given the government's right-wing policies, they will inevitably expand and come into conflict not only with the grand coalition, but the entire German ruling elite.

To prepare these struggles and arm it with a revolutionary programme, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) participated in the election campaign. At a series of election meetings in Germany and across Europe, the SGP, together with its European sister parties, advanced an international socialist programme, which now assumes decisive significance. On this basis, and despite a media blackout and efforts to censor the *World Socialist Web Site* and social media, the SGP won 5,300 votes and gained important new **contacts** and members.

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