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As Finland joins NATO

Pro-war Social Democrat-led government paves way for right-wing victory in Finnish elections

Finland formally joined NATO in a ceremony at its Brussels headquarters Tuesday, marking a massive escalation of the US-NATO war on Russia. The country's rapid accession to the aggressive military alliance came just two days after the right-wing National Coalition Party triumphed in Sunday's general election, setting the stage for a potential coalition government with the far-right Finns Party.

Underscoring the dominant role played by American imperialism in bringing the Nordic country into the military alliance, Finland's outgoing Foreign Minister, Pekka Haavisto, handed his country's formal commitment to join NATO to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. NATO's border with Russia has more than doubled in length. Finland's 1,300-kilometre border is now part of the front in the imperialist powers' war to subjugate Russia to the status of a semi-colony and seize control of its natural resources.

In a speech at the ceremony, President Sauli Niinistö said, "The era of military nonalignment in our history has come to an end. A new era begins."



Finland's President Sauli Niinistö addresses the media prior to a flag raising ceremony on the sidelines of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Tuesday, April 4, 2023. [AP Photo/Geert Vanden Wijngaert]

It would have been more accurate to have stated that Finland is returning to the position it held in relation to the major imperialist powers in the decades immediately after independence, which was granted by the Bolsheviks shortly after the October Revolution in 1917. Finland first served as a major base of operations for the counterrevolutionary whites in the civil war, before going on to form an alliance with Nazi Germany during World War II as part of Hitler's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. Finland's military nonalignment was a demand made by the Soviet Union in response to the invasion of Finnish troops alongside Nazi forces and their participation in the siege of Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, which lies just 250 kilometres from the Finnish border. The Stalinist bureaucracy feared that Finland could be used by German or American imperialism to launch military operations against the USSR following 1945.

Niinistö also made the improbable claim, "Finland's membership is not targeted against anyone. Nor does it change the foundations or objectives of Finland's foreign and security policy. Finland is a stable and predictable Nordic country that seeks peaceful resolution of disputes."

The reality is that Finland's accession to NATO is being accompanied by a massive military buildup throughout the Nordic and Baltic regions. In March, the US provocatively flew a nuclear-capable B-52 bomber close to the Russian island of Gogland just 40 kilometres off the Finnish coast. NATO troops will massively expand their presence in the region, and the US is seeking its own bilateral defence agreement to provide it with more latitude for military operations on Finnish territory. Helsinki has also started constructing

a border fence with Russia, citing the alleged threat of “hybrid warfare” from immigrants crossing into the country. The ongoing push to bring Sweden into NATO will mean Russia is entirely surrounded by hostile adversaries in the strategically important Baltic Sea.

Finland’s NATO accession was the culmination of the pro-war legacy of the outgoing Social Democratic-led coalition government, which went down to defeat at the elections. Although the Social Democrats under the leadership of Prime Minister Sanna Marin gained three seats in parliament and improved slightly their share of the vote, their coalition partners saw their support plummet. This was particularly true of the Green League, whose representation fell from 20 to 13 deputies, and the ex-Stalinist Left Alliance, which saw its representation fall from 16 to 11. The rural-based Center Party, another coalition partner, also lost ground, dropping from 31 seats to 23.

The main winners were the conservative National Coalition Party, which gained 10 seats to finish with 48, and the far-right Finns Party with an increase of seven to 46 deputies. Since a majority of 101 is required to govern in the 200-seat parliament, the NCP will have to secure backing from a number of parties in order to finalize a new coalition government. Options include a coalition involving the Social Democrats or the Finns Party, which appears most likely. However, some smaller parties, including the Swedish People’s party, have previously indicated their refusal to enter government with the far right, who have ties to right-wing extremist and fascistic forces across Europe.

Whatever the composition of the new government, it will be one of austerity at home for the working class and war as Finland cements its status as a frontline state in NATO’s war with Russia. NCP leader and incoming Prime Minister Petteri Orpo is committed to finding €6 billion in public spending cuts during the next four-year parliamentary term. Orpo argues the savings can be made through public sector “enhancements” and forcing those out of work back into a job.

All of the established parties fully support Finland’s integration into NATO, a move that subordinates the country to the predatory interests of American and European imperialism. While the Social Democrats under Marin intensified the party’s long-standing support for NATO membership, the Finns are no less enthusiastic. In a policy paper released in August 2022, the party advocated a closer alliance with US imperialism to confront Russia and China in the Arctic. The paper also explicitly declared the party’s support for NATO membership.

The fact that the most likely outcome of government talks is a coalition involving the far-right Finns Party is a devastating indictment of the “progressive” politics of the Social Democrats and their allies in the Green League and misnamed Left Alliance. Marin, widely hailed as one of the youngest prime ministers in the world and held up as a symbol of diversity because she was raised by lesbian parents, headed a government that imposed attacks on the working class while arming Finland to the teeth and bringing it into NATO. Marin and the Social Democrats used the election campaign to underscore their support for the US-NATO war in Ukraine. During a visit to Kiev in early March, Marin indicated that Finland would consider supplying Ukraine with its fleet of F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets, which are being replaced by over 60 F-35 fighters built by American company Lockheed Martin. She subsequently backtracked after government officials expressed concern about the impact on Finland’s ability to defend itself. While in Kiev, Marin attended a funeral alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for a Ukrainian military commander killed in Bakhmut.

Marin’s pro-war programme was supported by the Greens, who held the position of Foreign Minister in her government, and the Left Alliance, the successor organisation to the Finnish Communist Party. The ex-Stalinists presented themselves as opponents of war and NATO, going so far in June 2019 as to declare that they would only join the Social Democrat-led coalition if it promised not to join NATO during the next four years. The Left Alliance quickly abandoned this position following the US-instigated Russian invasion of Ukraine. The party leadership voted overwhelmingly to remain in government if a NATO application was filed.

The trade unions were also instrumental in creating the conditions for the right-wing parties to emerge from the election victorious by ensuring that the vote went ahead without the interference of major working-class struggles. Over recent months, militant strikes by different sections of workers, driven by rampant inflation, have erupted. However, all the struggles were suppressed within the framework of the collective bargaining system and kept separated from each other. A two-day nationwide rail strike by train drivers began on 20 March but was sold out when the rail union RAU agreed to a new contract for the next two years with a mere 6 percent wage increase. Earlier in March, a national strike by bus drivers initially scheduled to last 10 days was shut down by the public transport union AKT on the third day on the basis of a miserable 6 percent pay increase as part of a contract running to January 2025.

These settlements followed hot on the heels of the ending of a two-week dock workers' strike with an agreement to increase wages by 6.3 percent over two years and pay a premium of €1,100 to each worker. A two-year deal for workers in the industrial sector was struck in early February containing total wage increases of 7 percent, including a one-off €800 bonus. The agreement averted strikes planned for the middle of the month.

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