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AN INTERVIEW WITH

[LI ANDERSSON](#)

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In Finland, the Left Alliance Just Trounced the Far Right

Europe's elections saw gains for anti-immigration parties — but the breakthrough act in Finland was the Left Alliance, with 17% support. Its leader, Li Andersson, told *Jacobin* about why it did so well and how it defeated the far right.



Li Andersson at the Left Alliance's European parliament election reception in Helsinki, Finland, on June 9, 2024. (Roni Rekomaa / Lehtikuva / AFP via Getty Images)

INTERVIEW BY

[CHRIS DITE](#)

Last weekend's elections to the European Parliament saw anti-immigration forces advance across much of the EU. Far-right parties are now set to collectively control roughly one quarter of all seats, including ones with neo-Nazi connections like Germany's Alternative für Deutschland ([AfD](#)) and Cyprus's National Popular Front ([ELAM](#)).

In general, northern Europe bucked this grim trend — and the news from Finland was particularly bright. While the far-right Finns Party has been part of the government for the last year, in Sunday’s vote the big winner was on the other end of the political spectrum. The socialist Left Alliance [won 17.3 percent](#) of the vote and elected three MEPs, putting it in second place behind the center-right National Coalition. The Finns Party lost a seat as its vote tumbled from 13.8 to 7.6 percent.

At the head of the Left Alliance’s charge was party leader Li Andersson, who personally won 247,600 votes — one in seven of all ballots cast in Finland. It’s the most votes a Finnish legislative candidate has ever received — and the best vote for the Finnish far left [since 1979](#). Perhaps unsurprisingly for a left-wing candidate, she firmly rejected the ongoing attacks on workers and immigrants in Finland and across Europe. But her victorious campaign also [called for](#) sanctions against Israel over its war on Gaza, restrictions on nuclear weapons, and for nuance in international relations. Despite making calls that have [enraged](#) the right-wing press — such as allowing Left Alliance MPs [a free vote](#) in Parliament on whether Finland should join NATO — 25 percent of all Finnish voters have come to view her as the most competent [party leader](#) in the country.

Jacobin’s Chris Dite spoke with Li Andersson about the Left Alliance’s challenge to the far right, the threat of war, and building an international left-wing alternative.

CHRIS DITE

Many people across Europe will be looking enviously at your results. How did you do it?

LI ANDERSSON

There were very good results for all of the red-green parties in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. A lot of work has been done in the Nordic countries to create and build modern parties that combine ambitious environmental and climate policy with the traditional themes of the Left: workers’ rights, investment in welfare services, equal distribution of income, and so on. You can really see the Left is changing. These parties are emerging as real power players in their own right, not just support parties for the Social Democrats. In both Finland and Denmark, red-green parties got a bigger vote than the traditional Social Democratic parties. This shows they are becoming for many voters a kind of “first alternative” on the Left.

CHRIS DITE

The vote for the Finnish far right collapsed in these elections. Are voters punishing the [Finns Party](#) for their austerity measures while in power?

LI ANDERSSON

Far-right parties are currently in power in Finland and Sweden, working with the traditional right and influencing politics. Voters have actually seen what they do when they win power. In Finland, they have betrayed almost all of the electoral promises they campaigned on. The economic policies they implement are exactly the same as, or even worse than, the traditional right-wing parties. We have seen historic cuts in income and social security for many low-income earners, and historic attacks against trade unions and workers' rights.

Throughout our campaign, our message to voters was that we needed to make sure this same type of political shift doesn't happen on the European level. And so, because voters know what it means when the far right and the traditional right work together, they abandoned the far right. The Finns Party had a very bad election, and the [Sweden Democrats](#) also lost big.

CHRIS DITE

Some of the parties you'll be interacting with in the European Parliament have barely hidden their neo-Nazi connections. Has your experience dealing with the [Finns Party](#) prepared you for this? What is the best way to counter the appeal of the far right?

LI ANDERSSON

These parties may call themselves "nationalist," but the Finnish experience shows that the far right gaining power has terrible consequences for ordinary people. The Finns Party sold out all the ordinary people that voted for them, on every issue related to their rights and everyday lives. In government, the only issue the Finns Party cared about when they were negotiating with their coalition partners was migration. They wanted Finland's already very restrictive migration policy to become even more restrictive. And they were willing to sell out on everything else: workers, low-income earners, people who need social and health care services. An important part of the strategy to counter the far right involves raising this Finnish experience.

The far right gains a lot from cynicism about the future. They drag the political atmosphere in a direction where it's so terrible that a lot of people don't want to go into politics anymore. It has a negative, real effect on democracy, especially for people from minority groups. And so, my other takeaway from the election results in the Nordic countries is that to counter the far right, we need a red-green politics that creates hope. We need to show people that we are able to respond to the big ecological crisis that affects all our futures, that we haven't lost this race, that there is a possibility to change the situation.

The other crucial thing is the "red" part. On the European and the national levels, we can drain fuel from the far-right parties by taking social issues seriously and adopting a

progressive agenda to address the cost of living, housing, workers' rights, social and health care services. We need to show that when the Left is in power, we can make changes that impact the everyday lives of ordinary people.

CHRIS DITE

Young people [organizing](#) in Finland against the war in Gaza have won [some of their demands](#) recently. The Left Alliance has been a [consistent voice](#) against the war in Gaza and Finnish profiteering from Israeli violence. Do you think the younger generation is shifting the wider debate on Palestine?

LI ANDERSSON

I absolutely do. For many younger voters in Finland, Gaza has been one of the most important issues. From what I understand, the same goes for the other Nordic countries. Many young people have been shocked that the world is so incapable of stopping human suffering on the scale that we have seen in Gaza. For many young people the double standard has been incomprehensible.

The Left Alliance has talked a lot about the implications this will have for the so-called "Western bloc" in their relations with the Global South and the rest of the world. It's such an illogical way of acting: first demanding that everybody jumps on board condemning Russia, but then refusing to do the same when it comes to Israel. The same way that we all should condemn Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, we should be able to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza, which are also in stark breach of international law. The Left Alliance has called for sanctions against Israel, and also for freezing the free trade agreement between the EU and Israel as a way to put pressure on Israel to stop.

CHRIS DITE

During your campaign, you advocated for a renewed discussion around nuclear weapons in Finland. Last year as party leader, you allowed your MPs a free vote on the question of NATO membership. What are some of the complexities in the Finnish debate about war and peace in Europe?

LI ANDERSSON

For people in Finland, situated where it is, war and peace is not something theoretical. War is something that people in all families have real experiences of just a few generations back. We also have a general conscription army, which means ordinary citizens do military service. They know that if there were to be a war, it would mean engagement for everybody. It's not like in the US where it's usually only the working class that pays the price.

For these reasons, security policy is something that engages a wide range of Finnish voters. You can see it in how Finland has been very supportive of Ukraine: a lot of Finns identify with their situation based on our own historical experiences. You can also see it in how attitudes changed toward NATO membership. For Finnish people it really hit home that our neighbor was willing to start a large-scale invasion of another independent country. The shared opinion was that we need to be a part of something that's bigger than us, to reduce the likelihood of that ever happening to our own country. That was what made many voters on the Left change their attitudes toward NATO membership. I would have liked there to be a European option for Finland to achieve that security guarantee, but there really wasn't any. At the same time, there's also strong public support for the ongoing stand against nuclear weapons. The current law in Finland forbids the import and storage of nuclear weapons on Finnish soil. Not changing this law remains our party line. In terms of the decision to allow a free vote on NATO membership: we saw then how opinion was divided within both the party, the parliamentary group, and our voter base. If there really is a split view within the party, it's sometimes better leadership to create an atmosphere where you can constructively disagree, rather than forcing everybody to vote unanimously.

CHRIS DITE

You're currently the most popular politician in Finland, but you've resigned the party leadership to take up your role in the European Parliament. Does that leave the Left Alliance in a tricky position in terms of the upcoming municipal elections?

LI ANDERSSON

No, I don't think so. It's good to change leadership when the party is in a good position. It's always worse if you have to leave because there was a crisis, or you lost an election or something like that. The Left Alliance's party membership is higher than it's been in fifteen years, and we've had a lot of new members join since election day. In the national polls we're consistently higher than we were in the last parliamentary election. We've got a lot of very good new parliamentarians, but we also have experienced parliamentarians sitting there for their third or fourth term.

We've been able to maintain our support at this higher level, and now we're getting three members into the European Parliament. We have a chance to engage in the debates at the European level, on a much wider scale than we have had so far. Of course, we can also use this influence and resources on a national level in Finland. All of this puts us in a good place for the future.