



# German elections: Life in the old dog yet

Jaqueline Katherina Singh Tue, 05/10/2021 - 10:09

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The Social Democrats (SPD), led by Olaf Scholz, topped the polls with 25.7 percent in the September 26 German federal elections and will take first shot at forming a coalition government. Negotiations are quite likely to last until Christmas. Over the preceding year, both the conservatives (CDU/CSU) and the Greens took turns in leading in the opinion polls. The Greens did indeed win a record 14.8 percent. Angela Merkel's party, under her successor the colourless and gaffe-prone Armin Laschet, lost nearly 9 percent, falling to 24.1 percent, its worst result ever.

The Liberal FDP, which barely made it into the Bundestag in 2017, increased its vote to 11.5 percent, one of its best results. In the formation of any coalition government, it will play a key role in blocking any serious measures of social redistribution and will push for further austerity, deregulation and attacks on workers' rights. Although it lost votes, the far-right populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) still got 10.3 percent and was able to consolidate its position in the eastern regions of the country.

Although various government coalitions are conceivable, at the moment, two main options are emerging, named from the party colours: the 'traffic light' (SPD/FDP/Greens) and Jamaica (CDU/Greens/FDP) with SPD or CDU/CSU chancellors respectively.

Thus, the SPD, which fell steadily in the polls during its 'grand coalition' with Merkel, proved 'there is life in the old dog yet'. Its stress on job security, increasing the minimum wage to 12 euros, securing pensions and higher taxation on the rich, restored its popularity with trade unionists, reflecting its surviving organic roots in the working class. However, coalition with the FDP would probably give it the excuse to dump its more progressive social measures and put its links to the working class under strain once again.

The biggest loser from the SPD's revival is the Left Party (Die Linke). With a feeble 4.9 percent, it saw a halving of its vote. It could even have failed to get into the Bundestag but because it won three directly elected seats it will retain 39 seats overall. It failed to campaign vigorously for its progressive policies on climate change, the leadership believing it could somehow get into a coalition with the SPD. The party is divided between the so-called Movement Left, which is involved in various social campaigns, and the 'government socialists' plus the anti-immigration faction around Sarha Wagenknecht.

In view of the necessary involvement of both the FDP, which channels the pressure of big capital, and the Greens, in any coalition, it is likely that continued budget controls and austerity measures, meaning further cuts in public services and further privatisations, could be sold as green or social reforms. The crises in education health, social security and especially pensions will continue.

An SPD-led government and chancellor would put renewed illusions in the party to the test but the unions, antiracists, climate change and housing movements should not wait for the SPD leaders' action. They need to continue fighting in the workplaces and on the streets. The Yes vote in the Berlin referendum to expropriate the private housing corporation, German Homes Ltd, by 56.7 percent on a 75 percent turnout, indicates the potential of such struggles which need to be expanded nationwide.

Equally important is the question of political leadership in the unions when it comes to waging upcoming industrial actions. Instead of hoping that others will fight against climate change, austerity or social attacks, against racism and

militarism, we have to take it into our own hands!

Die Linke activists too are faced with an existential struggle; do they want to be a party able to give a lead in these struggles or do they want to try to pose as a responsible party of government or even coquette with anti-migrant chauvinism as Sahra Wagenknecht advocates.

An action conference of all organisations of the working class and left forces is needed in order to prepare for the coming attacks.

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