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Austria

# Creating an alternative

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**The main results in Austria were victory for the social democrats and greens, despite their right wing orientation. The Conservatives came second and there was a total defeat for the right populist FPÖ of Haider. A new “moderate” populist list won 14% of the vote while the left wing “LINKE” won a modest 0.8%.**

Austria experienced a huge wave of struggles against the so-called pension reform of the black-blue government in May 2003. For the first time since 1950 (!) there were mass strikes, factory meetings, street blockades and a demonstration of 200,000 people. Altogether one million people were involved in the protests.

But neither the social democratic party nor the majority of the Austrian Trade Union Congress (ÖGB) went further. Important strikes by the railway workers remained isolated. On the international day of action against social cuts on April 2-3, 2004 the ÖGB “organized” a discussion in Vienna with 200 participants...

The social democratic leadership's only interest was gaining power - by any means. In Carinthia a coalition with right populist leader Haider was built. During the European elections Haider attacked the main social democratic candidate Hannes Swoboda - in openly fascist language - as “Vaterlandsverräter” (“traitor to the country”). But even then the horrible coalition was not dissolved!

In such a context of setbacks it was not easy for LINKE to gain ground (the two Austrian Social Forums held this year faced similar problems). There were other difficulties too: the decision to participate in the elections came very late; under big pressure we had to collect signatures to be on the voting paper, develop a political programme, select candidates and so on. So there was not enough time for discussions or to broaden the political project - though we got the support of the son of the former Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky and some representatives of the left wing of the Greens.

On July 3 LINKE held a meeting to draw its first balance sheet. The central conclusions were:

- it was correct to build a pluralistic left platform
- this platform was not - as in the past - “CP plus ...” but the start of the working together of the “open” part of the CP, the SOAL (Austrian section of the Fourth International) and people from the different movements. The “hardliners” within the CP made an active boycott of the LINKE. This will lead to further differentiations within the CP, on the basis of common positive experiences and not only statements from outside.
- only the LINKE had a clear position to the so-called “constitution” of the EU, or questions like privatization or the entry of Turkey into the EU
- it was possible to create structures, which organized the campaign on a decentralized basis.

There was broad consensus that the LINKE should continue its activity and will have its first “working conference” in October where some decisions on how to proceed concretely will be made.

The SOAL played an important role in the campaign concerning the political content, candidates, meetings, activities

## Creating an alternative

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and so on. In Graz and Innsbruck the comrades of the SOAL took the initiative to create local structures and were the backbone of the political activity.

LINKE is one of several attempts to create a left, anti-capitalist alternative to social democratic, Green or post-Communist "realpolitik" in Europe. When I attended the conference of the "Wahlalternative" ("election alternative") in Berlin the atmosphere there was very similar to our discussions and activities.