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Germany

European Election in Germany: Right wing success, stagnation of the left

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The traditionally low participation to the European elections is often seen by radical left people as proof of the low legitimacy of the European Union's institutions. But things are not so simple. Many people in Germany underestimate the weight of EU-decisions on national legislation, and also the weight of the European Parliament (even if it has not at all the rights of national parliaments like the Bundestag in Germany) in EU-decision-making. Secondly, many people in Germany are simply not interested in what happens politically in other european countries.

These are in no way progressive attitudes. But this time, the participation in the European elections went from 43% in 2009 to 47.6%. One explanation for that is, that this time in 2014 the European election was in many regions (Bundesländer) combined with local elections. Another explanation was the existence of two main candidates aiming to become president of the EU-Commission: the conservative Jean-Claude Juncker and the social democrat Martin Schulz, whose campaign both promised more democratic EU-institutions and more social European politics. And the third explanation is the success of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany) with its reactionary nationalist criticisms of the EU and the Troika-politics.

The Christian Conservatives (CDU/CSU) of Angela Merkel got only 35.3% compared to 37.9% five years ago. This is less than the roughly 40% given to this party in the opinion polls for federal German elections. It is to be noted that Merkel said "the EU is not a social union" shortly before the elections, and that she – and this is the mainstream politics for the capitalist class in Germany – defends the building of the EU and at the same time the Troika-austerity politics against the interests of working people, unemployed and youth in the economically weaker countries of the EU. The liberals of the FDP, recently failing to enter the Bundestag because of the 5% barrier, got only 3.4% compared to 11% 2009! But the AfD – which got 4.8% when it stood for the first time in the last federal elections in 2013 – got 7%. And the AfD is not only ultra-neoliberal, but also chauvinistic, nationalist and elitist. It campaigned strongly against "giving money to the Greeks" and other European losers and for keeping a maximum of autonomy of the German state and leaving the common euro-zone. Their leading personnel traditionally argues in favour of an elitist reform of the political system, systematically reducing the rights of the "unproductive people" like the unemployed and organising plebiscites and direct elections of MPs, chancellor and/or the president, to get an authoritarian regime capable of combatting effectively the unions and the social movements.

The political and cultural values defended by this party are ultra-conservative and right-wing-populistic; they campaigned against the "migration in our social protecting systems" (and the Merkel government is preparing severe restrictions on inner-EU-migration to Germany), and they claim "normality" against gays, lesbians, transgender and "clear speaking" against political correctness. The AfD is supported by the lower layer of the bourgeoisie - not the big bosses, but for example entrepreneurs of family-run businesses, university professors, managers etc.

The social democrat SPD performed well with 27.3% (2009: 20.8%) and succeeded in articulating a more social course, even if it is the junior partner of the great coalition under Merkel and co-responsible for the brutal Troika politics.

The Greens, opposition party in the Bundestag, got 10.7% (2009: 12,1%).

The Left Party (Die Linke) got 7.4% compared to 7.5% in the year 2009. Because of the higher participation to the elections, it had to collect more votes than five years before to get more or less the same result. But it is clear, that this result is not a victory, but expresses more or less a stagnation of the electoral influence of The Left. In opinion

polls for federal elections, the Left Party turns around 10%, and in the federal elections 2009 it got 11.9%.

The AfD succeeded in expressing a reactionary protest against the EU and its mainstream politics, but Die Linke failed to articulate a radical alternative not only to the troÅka-politics, but also to the non-democratic nature of the EU institutions, an alternative based on international class-solidarity and seeking to realize international mass action from below in order to generate at least embryonal forms of self-organization of the masses, which could evolve to an alternative, democratic way of ruling the society. Linked to that would be the demand for an elected constitutional assembly and a new constitution submitted to a general vote to create a new political federal European union based on the values of solidarity, participation in decision-making, ecologic sustainability, social justice and quality. But Die Linke, even if it criticised the pseudo-constitutional Lisbon-bases of the actual EU, in its electoral campaign only argued for some reforms of the existing EU-institutions (first of all: more rights for the EU Parliament), and this was not far away from the position articulated by the SPD.

If we see the desperate situation of millions of people for instance in Greece, precipitated in misery by the troÅka-politics, Die Linke failed also to put this in the center of its electoral campaign and to point out systematically its scandalous nature, in close cooperation with the Greek left.

In the generally deepened polarization, the populist and extremely right-wing forces got in general much stronger than the forces of the radical left. But there are important exceptions, and the Greek one is the most important with Syriza getting the electoral strength to beat all other parties. A government led by Syriza is now the hope of broad masses in Greece, but it also would be the most important instrument to bring together in action the radical left forces, the social movements and the class-struggle currents of the unions to counter not only the troÅka-politics and the undemocratic EU, but also the emerged or strengthened right-wing currents which are the forces of counter-revolutionary despair.

In Germany our most important tasks are to win majorities in the Left Party for a clearly internationalist orientation and to bring together all anticapitalist forces inside and outside of the party.