

Why is the far-right benefiting from the crisis of capitalism?

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Sunday's election in Germany saw the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and collapse of the official left party, the Social Democratic Party. With more than 90 deputies in the incoming parliament, the entry of the AfD will mark the first time since the end of the Third Reich that outright fascists and racists participate in the national legislature.

Far from an exception, the electoral triumph of the neo-fascist party in Germany is part of a pattern being repeated again and again throughout Europe and internationally.

In Britain, the far-right, anti-immigrant UK Independence Party (UKIP) emerged as the leading political force in last year's referendum vote to exit the European Union. In France, National Front leader Marine Le Pen made it to the runoff in this year's presidential election and captured 34 percent of the vote, doubling the result obtained by her father in 2002. The neo-fascist Freedom Party is expected to enter the national government following next month's elections in Austria.

In the United States, the fascistic billionaire real estate speculator and TV personality Donald Trump won the 2016 election, bringing to power the most right-wing government in American history.

These developments raise a critical question: Why has the decade following the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s, which nearly brought down the entire financial system and ushered in policies of brutal austerity and militarism internationally, seen a steady strengthening of far-right parties? Why have the social democratic and labor parties and the Democratic Party in the US not only failed to win support as a result of the gutting of social programs and impoverishment of broad sections of the working class, but have suffered defeat after defeat?

For the past decade—and beyond that, the past four decades, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union—there has been a complete dissociation of what is

presented as left politics from any opposition to capitalism. The British Labour Party, the Australian Labor Party, the French Socialist Party, the German Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Party have all abandoned any orientation to the working class or concern with the social issues workers face. They have substituted an orientation to racial and gender identity for class questions, a false and reactionary basis for politics.

The most reactionary political forces have exploited the vacuum created by the absence of any challenge to the capitalist system to come forward as the representatives of the masses. They have worked to divert social discontent along right-wing, nationalist channels. Their populist posturing is completely cynical. These same forces demand even more savage social cuts and bigger tax windfalls for the corporate elite.

It is not that the masses of workers support racist and fascistic policies. The votes for these parties have largely been protest votes against the established parties, which have provided no progressive outlet for social discontent. Moreover, the masses know full well that the “left” parties are directly implicated in imposing the austerity measures demanded by the banks and corporations.

In Britain, the Labour Party under Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown continued and expanded the policy of social cuts and anti-strike “reforms” launched by Margaret Thatcher and her Tory successor John Major.

In France, the Socialist Party government of Francois Hollande imposed the first round of labor “reforms” attacking workers' rights and protections, cut taxes for the wealthy and put in place a permanent state of emergency. His successor, Emmanuel Macron, who has imposed a more far-reaching labor law “reform” by decree and is demanding deeper social cuts, was a minister in Hollande's government.

In Germany, it was the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition government of 1998-2005 that began the destruction of the post-World War II welfare state with its

Agenda 2010 and Hartz laws. In this election, the Social Democratic Party, far from offering an alternative to the AfD, sought to outdo the neo-fascists in calling for military rearmament, sharper attacks on immigrants and the strengthening of the police. The SPD focused its attacks not on the far-right, but on what it called “left-wing extremism.”

The model for the imposition of savage austerity by the “left” is the Syriza government in Greece, which came to power in 2015 promising to defy the European Union’s austerity diktats and promptly rubber-stamped the austerity regime. Next it overrode a popular referendum vote against the cuts and imposed measures more brutal than those of the previous conservative and social democratic governments.

In the US, the Democratic Obama administration, which came to power promising “change you can believe in,” expanded the bailout of Wall Street, attacked social services and health care and oversaw the biggest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history.

Now, the Democrats have abandoned any defense of immigrants from Trump’s onslaught, remaining silent on his new and expanded travel ban. They have declared their readiness to work with Trump on economic policies, including tax cuts for the rich and new attacks on health care.

As the White House threatens nuclear genocide against North Korea and war against Iran, the Democratic Party is focused obsessively on its McCarthyite campaign against Russia. In this it is allied with the dominant factions of the military/intelligence “deep state,” which demand that Trump pursue a more aggressive policy against Moscow.

Despite mass demonstrations in the US and around the world that greeted Trump’s inauguration (which the Democrats worked to suppress and channel behind their war-mongering anti-Russia crusade), the political initiative today rests with the most right-wing forces in and around the Republican Party.

Trump and his former White House adviser Stephen Bannon of *Breitbart News* are working in tandem to create a base for a fascist movement in America.

This week, in a campaign speech for the far-right Christian fundamentalist Roy Moore, who won Tuesday’s Republican primary for a US Senate seat from Alabama, Bannon gave a fascistic speech in which he appealed to the social grievances of workers and other oppressed layers. The multi-millionaire former Goldman Sachs investment banker denounced the “corporatist, donor, consultant, K Street lobbyist, influence peddler,

politician class” and the “economic hate crimes done to working men and women in this country.”

“They’ve gutted this country,” he declared. “They’ve gutted the manufacturing jobs and shipped them overseas.” He linked the opioid addiction crisis to “factories and jobs shipped to China and workers left behind in total despair.”

To the extent that the working class remains subordinated to the Democrats and the two-party system in the US—and to the social democratic and “left” nationalist parties in Europe, Asia and Latin America—there is a real danger of the rise of fascism.

The growth of the far-right demonstrates that the separation of the fight against Trump from the mobilization of the working class in opposition to capitalism is bankrupt. In every country, the same issues are posed with enormous urgency.

Nothing short of a revolutionary socialist movement of the working class can stop the growth of the right wing. One hundred years after the October Revolution in Russia, the perspective that guided that historic event must be revived. The Bolsheviks insisted that the only answer to the imperialist war and the social crisis was a direct assault on capitalism.

Today, as then, the working class must seize the wealth of the financial elite and use it to dramatically reduce social inequality. The major industries and banks must be placed under public ownership and democratic control to provide good-paying jobs, education, housing, health care and a secure retirement for all.

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