

Why are the far-right so popular?

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In this morning's video I note that the far-right won an election in Germany last weekend, following on from successes elsewhere.

Why is it so popular? And how can it be contained?

The answers all come down to neoliberalism. It has destroyed faith in existing political parties, undermining the left in the process. Until the left comes up with a plausible way of beating neoliberalism the far-right will be on the ascendant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inB0CyQR3bs&si=sPYI1OY-8AlJw6uX>

The audio version is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=fx9g9-16c1b21-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=c73a3a&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=ff6d00

The transcript is:

Why is the far right so popular in Europe?

I ask the question for very good reason. As many viewers will know, last weekend the AfD party in Germany, which is neo-fascist in my opinion and far right in the opinion of others - and I don't think the difference is worth arguing about - won one of the regional

elections in that country.

There are sixteen regions in Germany and most of those in what was once East Germany are now swinging towards the AfD. Now, in this case, they actually won the vote for the first time ever since 1945, taking 33 per cent of the popular vote, with the chance, therefore, that they will be the biggest party in the local parliament, although not necessarily guaranteeing them power because it is not at all clear that other parties will actually wish to go into coalition with them.

But, the point is that they won, and in another of the German regions, they came very close to winning, and this is a pattern that we are seeing replicated across Europe.

We know it's happening in Sweden.

We know that it happened in France and it was only by some fairly drastic action in the second round of their general election in June that the far right were prevented from winning.

And we've seen it in other countries, not least in the UK. Reform is a far-right party in the sense that it is definitely beyond the Tories, and they are without doubt as right-wing as they have been in generations, and therefore we're seeing this pattern replicated all over the place.

So, what is the appeal of these parties? And my answer to that question is really very straightforward. It is that lots of people feel as though they have suffered badly under neoliberal governments. In the case of Germany, for example, from the Christian Democrats and from the SPD - the Social Democrats - with a bit of Green thrown in every now and again, because they, unfortunately, in Germany, seem to be pretty neoliberal as well.

In the case of the UK, the Tories and Labour. But actually, frankly as well, most of the Liberal Democrats and quite a lot of the SNP have also been pretty neoliberal too.

In the case of France, there is Macron, who is refusing to even appoint a left-wing Prime Minister, even though they won the election. And he's certainly not appointing a right-wing one because his centre group aligned with the left to keep the right-wing out.

We have an apparent hegemony of power being maintained by these centrist neoliberal parties across Europe to exclude anyone on the left.

We're also seeing that in Ireland, by the way, as well, where the two parties that spent a century opposing each other have now gone into coalition to hold out Sinn Fein, who are genuinely more left-wing than either of them are, and we're seeing that in other places as well.

So, we're seeing the centrist parties trying to cling on to power at all cost and maintain

neoliberalism.

But what people know is that neoliberalism has failed them. Working people know that there has been a decline in benefits. They have not seen an improvement in their well-being as a consequence of neoliberalism. For the whole of this century, at least, most people in most countries in Europe who are working on what we might call average earnings have basically seen their pay stagnate. And they're fed up with that.

They're fed up with it because what they are definitely seeing is that those with wealth and those on high earnings are having their position improve. The wealth of the wealthiest people in the UK rose substantially in the decade from 2010 to 2020 but the wealth of ordinary people didn't change at all.

So, there is a backlash, and the backlash is against that neoliberal system that seems to exist to wholly benefit a few in society at cost to most.

Now, is it very surprising that in a democracy, we see a reaction? After all, democracies are there to represent the views of the majority. The majority are losing out, and they want to find a way to express their frustration with that.

Brexit was a very clear way in which that happened in the UK, at considerable cost to us all, I think.

But it is happening now in general elections as well.

And my point is a very simple one. The right are the only people who are really standing up against neoliberalism. In most countries, the left, and I include in this the Labour Party in the UK and the German Social Democrats, and the traditional left in France, have moved towards being decidedly neoliberal.

Keir Starmer: he's further to the right, in my opinion, than David Cameron was when he became Prime Minister.

He's further to the right than Tony Blair was when he was Prime Minister. And I would call Tony Blair an arch-neoliberal.

So, my point is very simple. The left has disappeared from the political stage in most European countries.

Or, where it remains, it is very much the underdog. And it's not attracting attention because it doesn't know how to put forward ideas that will represent ordinary people.

It hasn't got the support of trade unions, or it isn't shouting enough about the support for wages and working conditions and social housing and everything else that people want and feel they're being deprived of by the neoliberal system.

Until it does that, until it is willing to stand up for those people and challenge the economics of neoliberalism, then the only people who are are the populists, who are claiming all sorts of things that aren't true.

I mean, what Nigel Farage has claimed about what he would do if he actually got power is complete nonsense.

And likewise, what the AfD says in Germany is a great deal of stuff that is actually utterly undeliverable in practice but the appeal is there, and we can see it in the USA as well. Of course, it is nonsense that Trump spews all the time. But the far right are at least saying something which is not neoliberal.

So if we are to get rid of the far right, and I most certainly want to, because I hate their misogyny and their racism and their discrimination and all the other things that they promote, we have to have a viable left-of-centre ideology, in the sense of parties committed to change that will put the people of a country at the centre of their thinking.

We haven't got that in the UK right now. Labour's been elected and some of us had hopes. Even I had somewhere deep down a sort of naive hope that we might genuinely see a Labour Party of the sort that I knew when I was young emerge from the wreckage of Starmer's election campaign and that we'd discover he really was a Social Democrat after all. But we haven't. We haven't seen that at all.

We've seen him confirm that he's committed to child poverty.

We've seen him take on pensioners and cause them positive harm.

And we've heard that he's going to inflict pain on ordinary working people.

And why? All to keep financial markets happy.

If that is what the supposed centre-left of politics is offering, there can be no surprise that people are moving to the far right.

We have to have viable, alternative, economic policies that support ordinary people, if we are to get rid of the curse of the far right.

That's what I'm working on, that's what these videos are all going to be about, and that's why I'm working with Danny Blanchflower.

We call ourselves the Mile End Road Economists precisely because the Mile End Road is where ordinary people live outside the city walls of London.

We need to beat the far right, but to do it, we have to succeed on the left.