

20% are fascist, but 80% aren't

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The far-right has doubled its support in Germany. But they're no more popular than the left, and 80% did not vote for fascists. What are the lessons to learn, especially in the UK?

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This is the transcript:

Twenty per cent of people voted fascist in Germany last weekend. And that sounds really profoundly worrying. And I think it really is deeply concerning. But before we get too alarmed, let me offer you some other statistics.

At least 20 per cent of people in Germany voted for parties from the left, whether that be the Greens or Die Linke, which is literally the Left party in Germany.

They will have together almost exactly the same number of seats as the AfD, the Allianz for Germany, which is going to have around 150 seats, just as those two left wing parties will.

In between the two, there has been a switch from the sort of left-of-centre SPD - which is, frankly, in my opinion, to the right of centre - to the CDU, which is the Christian Democrats, who are more like the Conservatives in the UK.

So the neoliberals won around 50 per cent, or just over of the vote in Germany. The far-right won 20%. The left won 20%, and a few other parties picked up some votes as well.

But let's just look at that point. The far right are getting all the attention for winning 20%, but properly left-wing parties also 20%.

There isn't, therefore, the imbalance that one would think from the media that exists within German society.

What we're actually seeing is that at least 40 per cent of people in Germany know that neoliberalism is not delivering for them.

Those people are mainly on lower incomes or they're the young. And both groups in German society are right. Neoliberalism isn't delivering for them.

The old model of a safe party that tries to support industry and wealth and lets everybody trail along behind it is leaving a lot of people trailing in its wake. Sufficient in the middle class will still vote for stability to allow the leadership in the Grand Coalition, which is going to be governing Germany yet again between the CDU and the SPD. That coalition is going to continue because enough comfortable people will still vote for it.

But there's discomfort. And the discomfort is genuine, and it's with that single transferable party, which the CDU and the SPD represent because both of them are neoliberal to their core. They are trying to maintain a status quo that is all about a power structure that basically says bankers should rule, big business should dominate the scene, and everybody else should accept whatever they get.

And people aren't willing to do that, and I don't blame them. Because this is an unfair society that creates inequality and has no desire to do anything about it.

But let's be clear: the AFD in Germany is deeply unpopular. Now, I'm not pretending that Die Linke is that popular, and the Greens have been in and out of favour with the German population over time because they have sometimes held some rather odd positions, particularly when taking part in government coalitions.

But my point is that the disquiet is real. The number of people voting for the centrist coalition is declining. It may have swapped its leadership at present. But the need for real reform is absolute. But at the same time, that real reform is by no means necessarily what the AFD, the right-wing fascist party of Germany, is wanting, desiring, or proposing, because there are alternatives.

The great advantage that Germany has over a country, for example, like the UK, is that in Germany, there is a left-of-centre alternative. Precisely because they have proportional representation, they are in the situation that parties who are genuinely across the political spectrum can be heard.

Now, I'm not opposed to that. I will always oppose fascists. I hate what they stand for. I hate their indifference to people. The fact that they deliberately make not caring into a political ideology. To me that is the antithesis of what civilization is all about. But because Germany has a proportional representation system where they get a voice, those on the left who want a voice get one as well. And that is important.

And it's important for me in a very particular context. Because if I bring this to the UK, there is no such choice. In the UK, we have three mainstream parties, plus maybe another fourth, okay, Scottish based party. But if we look at those four parties together, be they Labour in the lead at present, and then the Tories next, and then the Liberal Democrats, and quite possibly the SNP, whose membership is very definitely not neoliberal, but whose leadership has been for some time, then if we look at them together, they represent that centre ground coalition, which is very much where the Christian Democrats and the SPD, the Social Democrats in Germany, are, offering an almost perpetual single transferable party, where nothing really changes despite an election and the bankers continue to rule, money continues to get its way, the wealthy continue to get wealthier, and everybody else trails in their wake.

We have that problem in British politics and Nigel Farage is, in his latest incarnation, and who knows how many more there might be, challenging that consensus from the right, and up to 25 per cent of people in the UK are expressing a willingness to vote for Farage, but that figure is actually bigger than the number who are willing to vote for the fascists in Germany.

And why is that? Well, it's literally because there is no left wing alternative to the centrist coalition of Tories, Labour, Liberal Democrats and maybe SNP in this country. They are making sure that the left is entirely eliminated from UK politics.

And that is our problem, because there is no narrative that is actually capable of appealing to people who want an alternative to what they offer, but which comes from a dimension of caring, which is what the left are offering in Germany. They're having to move to the right to try to oppose this narrative, which is that bankers must continue to rule.

And that is the UK political problem. Without proportional representation, without the willingness of any party to go towards the left at all in pursuit of votes, there are just very large numbers of people in this country who have literally no political representation at all. And some of them are therefore resorting to voting for Farage, not because they do necessarily agree with him, because I think some don't really, but because they want to get rid of the mainstream parties who are clearly failing them.

And without proportional representation, this is going to continue because none of those parties are showing any willingness whatsoever to move towards the left to find any political solution or to win votes. They all seem to think that their goal is to take votes from Farage, and that is absolutely ludicrous because he's going to win up to 20 per cent, come what may.

But he won't win more than 20 per cent because, frankly, that form of extremism cannot secure more votes than that. And yet they won't go out into the decent majority of people in the UK who are so alienated by what all of these parties are talking about, and in particular what Labour and the Tories are talking about when they say there's no money left and we can't have decent public services and we've got to lock up people who do protests, unless they're farmers of course, when it's just fine, and they're really fed up with them. But there's no chance of saying that.

So, which country is in a worse political position? Germany, which has now got 20 per cent of fascists in its parliament, balanced by 20 per cent of motivated left-wingers, and a centre ground which has very little more idea to go on now than it had last week, or the UK where there is no left option available at all, in any real sense, because the Greens do not appear to have the capacity to turn themselves into anything like a viable mainstream political party.

It's the UK that's in deepest trouble. And we need to do something about it, and we need to have that voice on the left, the moderate left, not hard left, but a place where people who care can actually express that fact, because none of our politicians do. And without that option, I have no idea where British politics is going.