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QI Panel:

The Transformation of German Politics

September 25, 2024

12:00-1:00 PM ET

Anatol Lieven 0:39

Hello, everyone. I'm Anatol Lieven, Director of the Eurasia program here at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. And today, we will be discussing the results of the state elections in Eastern Germany and their implications for German and European policy and the future of European politics. Before we begin, if you have questions, please put them in the Q and A at the bottom of your screen, and I will pass on as many of them as I can to the participants. So today to discuss this issue, it's a great pleasure and honor to be joined by two speakers. The third, I'm sorry to say, he sends his apologies. Thomas Fassbender of the Berliner Zeitung couldn't make it. He has an emergency, unfortunately, and which meant that he couldn't come. So he says he's very sorry, as I am, but we have two excellent speakers, Professor Wolfgang. Wolfgang Streeck is Director Emeritus of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, and is a member of the British Academy, of the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and of the academia europaea. He's the author of several leading books on international political economy, including critical encounters, capitalism, democracy, ideas. And his next book taking back control states and state systems after globalism, will be appearing in November. And he, as those of you who read the New Left Review will know, he writes frequently for that publication, Dr Molly O'Neal is a Quincy Institute, non resident fellow and a former US Foreign Service officer whose career from 1989 onward was devoted to US relations with Central and Eastern Europe, with Russia and Eurasia, so welcome. Well, the German elections in three East German states have led to a surge in support for the right wing, populist alternative for Deutschland, and the new party, the Sahara Wagenknecht Alliance, which I'm not quite sure how to describe, the mainstream media in Germany describes it as extremists, but I don't think that is accurate, in my view, but this is certainly a radical departure, and of course, this has been accompanied by very heavy defeats for The Greens and the virtual elimination of the Liberal Party, the FDP, the two other coalition partners with the Social Democrats in the governing coalition in Berlin and well, in a state by state basis, very serious defeats, either for the Social Democrats or the Christian Democrats. So I suppose the first question is, I'll go to Wolfgang first. To what extent are these results specific to East the former East Germany, and reflective of attitudes and conditions there? And how far does this represent a radical shift in German politics, in in general.

Wolfgang Streeck 4:23

Okay, okay, yeah, what I was about to say was, is that elections are always very difficult to read. It's like battles in in war, you will never know who is, who's really won and and in this case, there is something there that is common, not just to Germany as a whole, but to Europe as a whole,

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which is the extreme weakening of the of the center, the to the extent and then then we get federal state factors coming. To the extent that we had governors from either the Christian Democratic Party or the Social Democratic Party. Usually, people vote for their sitting governors and and they did that also, not necessarily in the to the same extent, but, but two of two of the three were actually reelected. Otherwise, however, where they didn't have a sitting Prime Minister, especially the Social Democrats, they had the same fate as social democrats have all over Europe. They are almost pulverized in elections, and special conditions help but, but usually it's a very difficult time for them, and and, and then when the center doesn't hold, you get parties on the fringe, marginal parties like like in Spain, you get, you get regional parties. In Germany, you had a regional party, so to speak, which for a long time was the links Bataille, which is now completely disappeared, and now the AfD has to some extent taken its place. So the one question.

Then, of course, of course, this phenomena Zara Banks is herself from East Germany and and she was long a leading figure in the in the links. But I until she left because she thought that the that the policy of the links, but I had become too much dominated by students in West Germany, it had become too much a party that that reflected, so to speak, the life world of of the West, rather than the old eastern parts. And the thing, yeah, that's an interesting party because and in order not to, not to extend this too much, you are asking for the sort of nature of this party political scientists usually now use this sort of four, two dimensional system you have economically progressive, economically liberal one continue, but then you have one going the same direction, which is sort of socially libertarian and socially more sort of conservative or communitarian, if you want. And the wankness party, to me, sits in this quadrant, which is not occupied in the German system, which is where you are economically, not just progressive, but in many ways radical. And at the same time, you're not necessarily happy about the CSD, the six or seven pfcsd parades that that you could attend. They they have a more sort of Yeah. And then in some in some sense patriotic, communitarian, some say nationalist flavor, which which defines them, and which seems to be attractive to quite a few people who have not felt represented by the center of the German system.

Anatol Lieven 8:32

And as far as the AfD is concerned, you raised a very important point in conversation, which is that they are doing so well among young Germans throughout Germany, yeah, which is a young what could be a very important point for the future, right?

Wolfgang Streeck 8:50

Although it's a question whether it's an age thing or a generational thing, sociologists distinguish between the two. If it's generational, then it will last throughout their life. If it's age, it's just among young people, and as they get older, they do something else. Today, party affiliation is more sort of fluid and volatile than it used to be in the past in the United States. Lazarus felt in his way in his voting study of 19, I think 36 he found that once you had voted Democrat, you would vote Democrat for the rest of your of your life. That is not necessarily the case anymore,

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because now voting is about lifestyle rather than about socioeconomic divisions, because these are basically, I mean, the political parties are basically in the same bracket as far as economic policy is concerned. The difference is. Are very, very difficult to find. What I find interesting is that now in quite among quite a few young people, there is a there is a sort of, you can also pubertarian rejection of the moralizing that is imposed on them by the media, by the established parties, by their teachers. 90% are members of the Green Party, or not just 90 but, but very great majority who, who, who actually know what kind of moral sentiment young people have to have in order to be on the right side. And as you do this, you can actually produce the opposite in my own memory, if I if I may add that in the 1950s our teachers were, were basically all former Nazis and and, and the result was the 1960s revolution.

Anatol Lieven 11:06

I always remember a good quote about kids in America who fly the Confederate flag, who, of course, have now moved, or they, or their children, have moved into support for Trump. And, you know, people like that don't much like racial minorities, and they don't much like liberals, but the people they really hate are high school principals. Sums it up pretty well, Molly, what? How far do you see this as a shift in Europe as a whole, and what, what do you see as the implications for the future of the European Union and European policy?

Molly O'Neal 11:52

Well, if I might, I would like to just sketch in a little bit more detail about what happened in these three elections. It's odd, in a sense, that elections in Saxony and Thuringia and in Brandenburg, all of which were in the former GDR or East Germany, are having such a momentous impact on German politics. But I actually am very much of the disposition to believe that this has national it has a national kind of phenomenon, and even more so, perhaps a European one is, as Wolfgang has said, but just strictly it's to know the magnitude of the issue. We saw the AfD in these three elections, Saxony turinga and in Brandenburg win about 30% of the vote in each of these in BSW, a brand new party, a party that's not even a year old and previously had had only one electoral outing, which was in the European elections in June, got more than 10% of the vote in easily over 10% of the vote in all three of these. And so that means that 40 plus percent of the electorate in these three states rejected the status quo in the mainstream political options. So I think this is, you know, incredibly important, and I think it's being understood as such by the National Public politicians in Germany now, because there is a firewall against AFD serving in any coalition, and that's being observed by all parties, including the saravagan Connect Alliance. The results of these elections in these three states result in BSW being an indispensable or unavoidable coalition partner for any for any of these in order to form a government in any of these states, these negotiations, the I see the BSW being fairly tough about their core issue, which is the opposition to the war in Ukraine. And that's where I think we have the obvious European implications BSW is even though state governments don't, evidently, have a lot to do with that kind of matter. The BSW is saying that it can be a means of bringing pressure onto the national government and through the Bundesrat, and also just on public public opinion with respect to what you've written about recently, Anatoly deployment of

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missiles is being proposed by NATO onto German territory. This will they? Will they want to make an issue of it. And so the question will be, can they? Can viable and durable coalitions be formed with BSW, a lot? Of course, they would face a situation where they might be forced to make compromises on their own clarity, ideological or moral clarity, which they might be unwilling to do.

So it's going to be very interesting to look at the CDU. Incumbent governor came through in Saxony. This is Kretschmer, who himself is not been comfortable. And has with the war in Ukraine and the sanctions and not economic implications for the for for Saxony and turinga is going to be quite a mess. There is Wolfgang indicated the outgoing governor is from the links pot I there is a quarantine about allowing them in a coalition which is going to be extremely complicated, and form in the as in forming a government in turinia, which, of course, is a small place, but it's still very interesting to see as a harbinger, because their AFD finished first in the elections, clearly first with almost a third of the vote, very little bit short of a third of the vote, and we'll have a blocking majority on any kind of judicial appointments and other issues in the state. But Brandenburg, of the three is the most important and the most impactful possibly, I guess, because it's around Berlin, the National Capital, and therefore people are, you know, in a capital or much more aware of it, and there, SPD has been governing for 34 years, and the governor, if it had been lost by SPD, even if they had finished narrowly in second place, it would have been an earthquake for the National Coalition headed by Olaf Scholz. So in fact, rumors were circulating, and it was published in the press that if SPD didn't have a first place finish, and Brandenburg Schultz himself would be a fine, would be subject to a palace coup, I suppose, and replaced by Boris Gustorius, Who is the defense minister instead. And of course, because he's much more popular for historians and schol says and polls and another and of course, now that doesn't have to happen, so that's because Boyd care who's the governor of Brandenburg, decided to lay draw a line in the sand and say, we don't finish first. We're not, I will not be the governor, and he's very popular there, and so he pulled votes, I believe, as a result of this gambit from the CDU in particular, who had a very lackluster finish and also is now having soul searching as a result, because their leader, Mertz, is not terribly appealing to public opinion either, even though CDU is by far the most popular party in internet and the national polls, right around 30% lately, even 32% while SPD continues to gently decline, but green continues to rather strikingly decline at national polls.

So that's why today we heard the Green Party leaders, the two green party leaders running the party, you know, not not not ministers, but people who are directors of the party itself, have resigned their positions in citing the poor performance, in particular in Brandenburg, where they didn't even clear the 5% threshold, they don't get any members in the legislature in Brandenburg, which is famous for organic farmers and any other kind of people you know that you would vote for green. So really, they definitely have some soul searching to do as to whether this is national, international or Eastern. I definitely reject the idea that it's strictly Eastern. This, I think, is some sort of complacency on the part of the rest of Germany about the exotic and sort of primitive people who live in former GDR and so I'm dismissed. I think the national polls indicate these tendencies are very evident in across all of Germany, the loss of

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ground by both greens and liberals and the and the languishing and not very impressive leadership that Schultz is bringing to the SPD. So whether this can change, I know that the SPD people think that it can as a result of what happened in Brandenburg, but I don't really see necessarily the relevance of that as a model, but I do think that we've now seen because we're facing elections nationally at the end of September of next year, I think the even the hint of a Pistorius replacing Olaf Scholz, and the really fairly weak result, even though it was a victory in Brandenburg. All of these things suggest to me that the the doors are the process the campaign, I guess, for 2029 and national government elections is, is open, is beginning to really have an impact. And so we're going to see, I think, some further interesting developments. The only thing that AFD and BSW really share, I mean, it's true, they both have a kind of an anti woke stance, which is about they're sick of the moralizing and, you know, finger wagging by, you know, greens and so on and so forth. But, but also, you. They have, they're really substantively, the main area they have in common is the war in Ukraine and the opposition to German support for the war in Ukraine and the desire to promote a diplomatic settlement. This is main, the main issue, really, for Saravagan Connect and her party, and it's always present in the AF day, even though they're foregrounding the migrant issue because that also is a big vote gain, or they're identified with that so Schultz before the Brandenburg election, and maybe a week or two before he actually made a gesture public gesture toward the idea of adopting a more diplomatic kind of approach to ending the war in Ukraine. This was very carefully circumscribed to suggest that it's only it only matters what Zelensky thinks, and it has to be under Zelinsky, so peace formula.

But nevertheless, it was a gesture, and it may indicate that within the SPD, there would be willingness to move a little bit on that issue toward the saravagan Kinect position, because she she has made her the whole raison d'etre for her party is a notion that there's a representation gap in the German politics that she is filling. And I do think that seems to be, that seems to be borne out, at least in these three elections, admittedly, places where she was always going to be strong, but it's going to be the momentum that's been created by these elections, I think, is substantial. So I haven't really answered your question about Europe, but I just wanted to lay down this. And I do think being Germany is a pillar of the European Union, it can't help but affect all kinds of other equities that Europe has. And in particular, again, I come back to the Ukraine war, which I think is the maybe working as a major it may be part, maybe a substantial part, of the explanation for the gains of both if day and and vsW. It's difficult to specify that in a rigorous political science manner, but I do think that that that seems to me and to be going on, that seems to be an important trigger for what's happening.

Anatol Lieven 22:17

Wolfgang - do you think that these election results will lead to serious changes in policy by the existing coalition. Does the resignation of the greens board indicate this? Or do you think we will have to wait until after the next Bundestag elections to cease?

Wolfgang Streeck 22:38

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May not have to wait that long. So if the Pistorius threat was to shorts was real, which I can't really say, it could be that among the deputies, the SPD, members of parliament, there is a sort of panic that none of them will be would be reelected, and as a result, they will want a new leader. But Schultz has one strategic option which should not be underestimated, and this is the FDP and the Liberals having announced that by the end of the year, or towards the end of the year, a number of important decisions, budget and so on, have to be made, and they have sort of indicated that unless the government, the especially the Social Democrats, don't do what they want, they might drop Out of the government. As far as is concerned, he there's a better option for him. He can sort of Stonewall the FDP on important points and then fire the FDP ministers that he can do at that moment, he can ask for a vote of confidence, which you will lose because the FDP will not support him, the greens will be squeezed because, because they don't know. And I think the resignation of the present green leadership may actually indicate that there is an anticipation that this sort of thing is coming and and then the Greens will have to go into an election campaign after their sort of greenish reputation, after Several sort of failed legislative attempts has been seriously blemished, that they will have to go into that election with a new sort of leadership, certainly with the present ministers, I suppose, but but with a new party organization that is able to to move more more towards the and in any case, in any. Guess what I want to say is that more than you would expect in in German, under the German constitution, does have the option to call an election this year, and and if, in my view, if he had to expect that the his party would sort of throw him out in favor of Pistorius, if I was in his in his place, I would call an election and and then they could not change him in on such short notice. What I would also think is that for the BSW, this would be an ideal situation, and I just read in the news that Zara Vangnet has joined the those who are asking for early elections, because for her, as long as the Ukrainian war is sort of a hanging thing, and you don't know where it goes, remember that on October one, there will be a big demonstration in Berlin, a peace demo called by the peace movement, which will also extend to the American plans to put up in 2026 these intermediate range missiles that they now say are not nuclear. But as we know, the Americans, they can change their mind on these things. So no, it's going to be an interesting, very interesting form.

Anatol Lieven 26:50

But would if Sahra Wagenknecht, in fact, becomes the king maker, Queen maker, because it is simply impossible to create a new governing coalition without the PSW, yeah. Could that lead to a radical change in German policies on the Ukraine war, or is the German establishment so dug in by now to its existing positions that it cannot change?

Wolfgang Streeck 27:27

The German foreign policy has always to be seen in the context of American foreign policy and of NATO policy. Now, it is quite unclear to me, and I think also to the specialists in Berlin, where America is going with respect to the war, my impression is that they want to, they want to get out of it. And my impression is also that they wouldn't care if Germany was taking over, sort of the leading role in this, then the Americans could withdraw and go to China, or whatever they want.

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They, I think, have lost interest in this, this, this sort of victory plan by Zelensky, is to me, an indication that there is a feeling also in Ukraine, that American support is eroding. If that is the case, then the Germans can, in all German fashion or, or in post war German fashion, simply say that they are following the lead of the United States and, and, and that would be it. So, yes, there's a possibility. Now, on the other hand, we're talking about coalition, coalition government. Sahra Wagenknecht will not be able to dictate the entire program on the other hand, this is a party that is new, a new party doesn't have many members. That is not that is trivial. But what is not trivial is that there is not a legion of, let's say, 2000 people who who want appointments in ministries in Berlin. They still simply are not there. So, so this sort of pressure to come to an end with coalition negotiations, so that your clientele can move into the positions where which they always wanted to have, that clientele doesn't exist.

So in other words, they can wait for the others to make them offers. It is, it is not that this party absolutely needs to be in the federal government to to my in my view, if you look at the three eastern states in two of them, the the BSW will in one. Way or other, be part of the government and and my instincts tell me that it will be difficult for for such a young party to find enough people to fill all these to fill all these positions, and people on which you can rely that they are not just careerists and that they stand by the party. It's also a party that has to develop its program. Still, it is, it is sort of sketched out. There are certain ideas on Europe, certain ideas on foreign policy that don't underestimate economic expertise. She has written the dissertation on on small and medium sized companies in Germany and their importance for the German economy. If she takes that seriously, and my impression is she does take things seriously, then this has important implications for German economic policy in this period of restructuring that is ahead of us as the the the global world market is sort of fraction, fractioning into maybe two or three or four blocks with China, America, the independence Europe, if you want, and so on. So, so, no, there's a lot of things that that this party can contribute to German politics, but it is not yet a finished party, which may be an advantage because, because the situation is so so open and so on.

Anatol Lieven 31:42

Molly, what do you see as the implications of this for the European Union? I mean, on top, of course, of political developments elsewhere in France and so on. I mean is, is the ground shifting from under the feet of the existing EU leadership and EU policies, including, of course, on Schengen, from which, in one way or another, more and more countries seem to be opting out.

Molly O'Neal 32:10

Yes, I think the short answer is, well, it's not so short, but it's very important. Is that this uncertainty in Germany, which it might be, you know, could be, I think, called a realignment, you know, as fund, a very fundamental shift in the politics in Germany. It can't help but affect the fate of the European Union, especially when you look at France. The other main partner in the whole European project, from the very beginning, is itself really in the same sort of situation, although

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the difference being that the far right, or, I guess we'll call it that That's what people call it, party headed by Le Pen's party, which is a substantial share of the of the legislature and and with a good, good possibility of winning the next presidential election, the in the the survivability, I guess you could say, of a government headed by Bonnie A which is only there because Marine, Le Pen's party, has decided to tolerate it for, you know, For the time being. So that will imply that Barnier, who is on the right anyway, and probably is pretty hawkish, well, hawkish isn't the right word, but tough on the immigration issue. So this will satisfy update to, I mean, sorry, not of the Le Pen party for a while. So so yes. I think a big question for me is, what happens with the if day? A lot of people have suggested that you might see a process get underway in the if day that is similar to what has happened with the Le Pen's party, which is a kind of a purging of its most extreme, racist, anti semitic elements to make it more respectable. And not so much a an extreme right party, but just a right party. So that's already happened when in Italy, as we know, with miloni, the question is, could that potential exist for the if day, if that, if that could happen then, then the realignment would be complete. I mean, if they would simply be the right principal right wing party. And the only basis of principal basis on which it differs with is the right side of the city, you is with the unsavory kind of Nazi nostalgia that some of its uh leaders show, like in particular the lead. Of afte in turingia, Bjorn fuk is a very strange and menacing person, as far as I can tell, and and it seems like, you know, they do a lot better without people like that. And yet they seemingly they don't have any ability to get rid of him. So one of the reasons why saravagan connects party is so small is that she's been incredibly careful not to let strange people who can have a wacky of opinions and can ruin the reputation of the party, and in particular, could be identified as communist or in league with the Russians or anything like that.

So it's a very cautious approach. And I think she's looked at the example, I know she's looked at the example of what happened with if Day, which, of course, has gone through a lot of different iterations. Initially, it was just about not liking the euro and not liking having to flow to Greece and Italy and so on through the euro crisis. So so no, I think the European Union, which is something I've always really, you know, placed a lot of hope, invest a lot of hope and optimism around I think that it's in a very shaky situation. When you have the lead, the two kind of engines of its development are in such a in such uncertainty and and Riven with these deep divisions, and really, of course, getting back to what NATO and the US think, which is what Wolfgang was talking about, very, very interesting. I think that is possibly correct, that the reading of the US position may be at least some consideration being given to consider looking at a diplomatic or a negotiated outcome, but especially if Trump were to be elected, of course, and that is a non zero probability, certainly, so probably about a 50-50, probability. So the Europeans can help but look at that as a signaling, a need of their and what I also would be very interested in whether re armament, kind of drive that has been suggested, you know, by the so called site and vendor And and, you know, especially if you look at NATO us engagement in Europe as declining, whether, whether, whether there is any prospect for the European project to, you know, occupy some of the vacuum that might be left in terms of ability to defend itself, you know, deter any eventual Russian ambitions elsewhere in Europe or something like that. I don't, I don't. I see that your Germans are very bound by their their debt break and their fiscal conservatism. And in the case of France, you know, they're on notice from the European Union that their national debt and their deficit are too high, so they have very little scope to make any decisive rearmament.

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So that's another, another question that I'm very interested in. I don't know the answer as to how that, how that all can play out.

Anatol Lieven 38:14

I mean, I think part of the thing is that, you know, the Biden administration is at least arguing in terms of what's been called military Keynesianism, you know, military support for Ukraine as a way of boosting jobs in the US economy. The problem with much of Europe is, of course, that European industry, including military industry, has declined to such a point that if Europe is going to rearm, it's going to have to buy a lot of the weapons from America, which isn't going to do much for European industry. Yeah, Reinmatal seems to be doing very well on the on the strength of it. Volgan, a question from the floor, yeah, from the audience, how central is my has migration been and opposition to migration, for the shift in Germany, and indeed in in Europe more widely. And is this going to be now the critical, the single most important issue in European politics, and also, I suppose you know, you've clearly seen moves by some of the mainstream parties, including limited degree the SPD, to try to shift their policies and attitudes over this in an effort to hold back the rise of the extreme right. Do you think that they will be successful in this, or is this a, by now, a doomed project?

Anatol Lieven 29:33

Well, a Chinese diplomat said to me years and years ago, unfortunately, it's no longer entirely true of them. But he said then that, you know our our principle is, when you don't know what to do, don't just don't do anything, but don't say anything.

Wolfgang Streeck 39:42

No, they will certainly be trying to change the present. In my view, the effect of irresponsible policy, on on, on migration they see the Germans in in particular, in. Particular, they have no borders where people sort of migrate into Europe. They only have their own borders and and then they had this strange Dublin thing under which other countries have to close their borders, especially Italy and Greece to prevent people coming in into Europe. And the Germans sort of celebrated their openness behind the curtain that the that the Italians had to put up, but didn't, because they they, they thought, If the Germans don't want these immigrants, then they should themselves do something about it, which is quite reasonable. They cannot leave this to us. Now. I think Dublin is breaking apart, and you see all over Europe that rethinking has begun on the question of especially asylum immigration. Now, quite a few people who apply for asylum in Germany are not given asylum but, but the process takes about two or three years sometimes, and during which they not just are being are being sustained by by the German Social Security system. But, but they were married, they have children. They sort of grow, grow into the into the place. Others never grow into it. And and they, they live in, in places for asylum seekers and the people. I mean, the Germans. The Germans are to defend them a little bit. The Germans are the nation that sort of donates most money to sort of if in India or somewhere else there is an earthquake, then the Germans sort of donate money and the citizens, not the government, the

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voluntary, voluntary giving at the same time, if there is an emergency like like in the Syrian war, they are quite willing to take people in. Remember these scenes, but but after a while, when the refugees are housing in their gymnastics, in their communal, communal Gymnastics hall. Yeah, and take away the space. And then then they begin to worry about their about this being unlimited.

See the, the thing is, is the is the setting of limits. After a number of years, people get the feeling that their country has lost control over how many people get in and stay and and then, of course, these people are not statisticians. These people are not specialists in in migration or or labor economy, economics and so on, but, but what they feel is that their way of life has become disrupted and will be increasingly disruptive by more and more such events coming. That's not just a German thing. Denmark is, of course, now Denmark has closed its borders to Sweden there, I mean, I mean inside Scandinavia, yeah, and and Sweden sort of can no longer control the in enclaves of of of immigrants that have not made it into Swedish society. But then us are still staying there and are trying to eke out a living with all sorts of legal and illegal activities that that the Danes are afraid of, and therefore they close the border and and that same thing, I think is going to take back, in my view, BSW was a party that seriously and honestly took up this issue, whereas the AfD used it For demagogic purposes. Zara Val knit party has an interesting number of people with what they call in Germany, migration background and and I those that I know of them, I can quite understand that if they remember how their parents came into the country, and how many others, apart from them, were not able to make it as as as much as they were, then they can raise the question of, is this country capable to take in people in its infrastructure, to give them an education? To give them places to study and to learn. Can we do this in a declining education system, in a declining in a declining virtual state? So I can only urge people to not just discuss this in terms of racists and not racists, but to discuss it in terms of the concrete living experience, then in Germany, to add this, in Germany, it is the mayors of medium sized and big cities that are the most in favor of some sort of numerical limitation, because under our system, the state, the federal, state government, assigns each community a number of immigrants, and then they have to do something for them, and their budgets are not endless

Anatol Lieven 46:00

There's a follow up question there, because at the same time, which seems very strange given the general political trends, the German government has just concluded an agreement with Kenya bringing, I mean legally, of course, but a quarter of a million Kenyan migrant laborers because of German labor shortages. But of course, just because they come in legally doesn't mean that they're any more integratable. You know, if they are going to be directed into the lowest paid areas of the economy.

Wolfgang Streeck 46:39

Yeah, yes. And no, what you what you then, actually, I mean, absolutely you're there is this strange thing that the German labor market absolutely needs immigrants. There's no way you can, you can, sort of operate care, care centers for the agent without foreign workers. It's

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completely impossible. But then, at least on the surface, the idea is that if you can regulate immigration, you can, for example, hire people who give you the impression that they are willing to learn the language, that they are willing to learn the job and and that you can be in some ways selective in the sense of those that you let in are the ones that have a chance actually to get into the German labor market at a level that is not poverty level. Yeah, I'm just reporting this. The that is the that is the, in my view, immigration from the we I've seen an interesting study on the following on the and the those immigrants from countries of the European Union who are free to come in. For example, at some point, Romanians who were working in the in the slaughterhouses of the German pig industry, they had unbelievably bad, unbelievably bad working conditions. And that whole racket was sort of run by gangs in Germany and in Romania bringing these people in. They had no rights whatsoever. Compare this to countries that are not members of the European Union, interestingly, where you can make an agreement as as a government, as the Germans did with the government of that country, to allow for a certain quota of people who then are immediately, sort of employed in an in a decent, decent, deregulated employment regime. In other words, in this study, the situation of people from Eastern Europe in the European Union and others from Eastern Europe outside European was, was, interestingly, exactly the opposite of what you would expect.

Anatol Lieven 49:25

Yeah, it's fascinating. In Russia, of course, especially after the crocus terrorist attack, there is more and more anxiety about unre unregulated Muslim migration from Central Asia. And I heard that in consequence, the Russians are talking to the North Koreans about a highly regulated, of course, on both sides, importation of North Korean labor. But apparently Pyongyang isn't, has not signed on to this yet, because it wasn't that. It. You know, Russia is not extremely liberal, but it's a hell of a lot more liberal than North Korea, and that this will have a bad feedback effect North Korea, but it's, it's so interesting that these are, now, you know, issues that are under consideration in similar ways across so many countries

Wolfgang Streeck 50:18

And and can, I can add this if, if you ask me, then we could really think about some sort of serious and decent religion regime, which would, for example, include that the famous German vocational training system, yeah, that everybody wants, can have transplants in in countries where people want to come to Germany, they can then sort of begin to learn the language, the trade and so on, so that they do not have to arrive at some border post and from there to be to be shipped to some refugee center in a North German City, which is a sort of dead end for them.

Molly O'Neal 51:37

But you know, I see a problem with I mean, I just don't know how you modify the norms in international law that relate to the whole concept political asylum. You know, we're having the same issue in the United States. Many of the entrants are making a claim for political asylum, and we haven't got the infrastructure to manage it at all quickly, and the same process you

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described in Germany happens, except even more so people here for years before they even have a hearing, let alone a determination at the same token. I don't know what the avenue is for defining the concept of political asylum in a more rigorous way, or something like that, you know, in order to, I mean, make it more, you know, to still do justice to people who are actually at risk of persecution.

Wolfgang Streeck 52:31

I don't know either. And the, I think an advantage already would be if this issue came on the agenda, and if it was talked about seriously and honestly and not under this sort of moralizing screen behind which you simply hide the fact that you don't do anything and And in this respect, the politics of these European countries has become so explosive that the center parties can no longer afford to do this. Our view, if I would say as a citizen, would be to tell our governments to do something, but do it in such a way that it is not on the backs of the of those people who are coming here and and and and need help so. So, yes, it's a very tricky, complicated thing, but we at least should not in in the German in German politics. Now, I really think that in many respects, the BSW party is the first to speak openly about things that have far too long been hidden behind a veil of silence. And for example, our limited national sovereignty, when when it comes to defense and and and national security, and the way in which we should sort of work with NATO or not work with NATO, and whether we should develop a serious debate on our national interest, rather than always the interest of the West, where we do what we are being taught.

Anatol Lieven 54:24

That is, I mean, a stronger and stronger narrative in in so many countries, yeah. Um, for me, it's related to, sorry, I often bring this up, but you know, Max Weber and the distinction between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of conviction or sentiment, because, of course, an ethic of responsibility raises the issue of responsibility to whom, and I mean formally, our leaders and officials are still responsible to their national citizenry, although it often becomes highly complicated, because. But you know, so so much of the establishment, officialdom, seems to be responsible by now, chiefly to the European Union, yeah. And the foreign and security establishment is responsible to Washington, yeah. And so there are deep, deep issues here, but I can't help feeling, you know somebody who's worked in several of the places from which you know the migrants are coming, that part of the problem as well is that, compared to previous generations, we've become very bad at accepting tragedy, which is something that the you know, an older generation of realists were rather good at, in other words, that there can be an inescapable clash between two moral goods in which neither is, you know, morally correct and the other is wrong, and that in the end, a Government has to choose that this is the essence of political courage and responsibility. Final. We're almost out of time, unfortunately. But for the two of you, are we gradually heading, in your view, for a revolutionary situation in Europe and the West. In other words, a breakdown, a radical breakdown, of our existing systems. I suppose the answer is a silly question where we can't tell, but I suppose one can imagine developments in the world leading to, you know, radical economic crisis. I mean, just, just, just how bad is the present situation. Start with Wolfgang.

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Wolfgang Streeck 56:54

Yeah, there is no revolutionary movement. What what we what we see, however, is a slow and and in many ways, apparently apparently irresistible breakdown of a number of of systems, institutional arrangements that have been critical For our societies. After that, we have fewer trade unions. The political parties are eroding. Membership is eroding. The fiscal capacity of the state is permanently overcharged. We haven't, we haven't an increase in public debt, which is totally independent of country, of of government, and so the German public, it is only hidden in a few very tricky arrangements. The French are now shooting up. The Americans are shooting up. The British are shooting up the we have a serious crisis of the infrastructure, the physical infrastructure. We have problems with sort of developing our education systems, where on the margins, they split between public and and and private, the exit of of the well to do from the public education systems and so on. And so you can add this one by one, and then you can ask yourself, what in this poly crisis, in this sort of number of crises that exists next to each other, in some way connected to each other? What the centrist governments, a centrist party, should do about it. To me, the we can't, we can't discuss it. To me, the fact that the center is breaking, no longer holding in these democracies, is actually a result of the incapacity of governments to do much about these long term trends of decay, where nobody knows how you can promise to voters that by the next election, you will have repaired the German the German railway system. That is completely impossible. Yes, so, so you cannot promise this anymore. And how do you go into an election without telling your voters that the future will be better than the than the present?

Anatol Lieven 59:30

Indeed, Molly are we in late fourth century Rome?

Molly O'Neal 59:36

Haha, I don't know. I am perhaps maintain American disposition to optimism or something, because I see a potential here for meeting some of these challenges, and in particular for Europe to I think the situation of Europe and its dependency on the United States, especially in defense and security matters, is the. Something that is kind of anachronistic, perhaps now, and perhaps there's a way for Europe actually to pull itself together. I just keep hoping that that that's the case. And perhaps this sort of challenge that's coming from these so called extremes is, you know, something that can produce some positive outcome as well.

Anatol Lieven 1:00:24

God willing. Well, thank you both so much for a fascinating conversation to be continued, no doubt, again and again. And thanks to the audience. I'm sorry I couldn't get to all your questions and see you all again soon. I hope.