

SHADOWS OF THE WALL – THE POSTCOMMUNIST PDS AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT IN GERMANY¹

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On October 16, 1994, the former Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic, the PDS, joined its postcommunist comrades in other Central and Eastern European countries to celebrate a remarkable electoral comeback. Although its total showings throughout Germany are not so impressive,² the very fact that it gained entrance to the *Bundestag*, the Federal Parliament, was something only a few political observers could have predicted a year or two ago. One has to agree with Timothy Garten Ash's remark that the PDS was the most interesting phenomenon in these elections.³

The former communist parties of Eastern and Central Europe today have at least one major feature in common: they are much more successful than any observer would have expected five years ago. In the case of the PDS, one must bear in mind the peculiarities of East Germany after 1989. Thus two parallel perspectives of comparison should be taken into consideration: the fate of other postcommunist parties in Eastern and Central Europe as well as the fate of communist parties in other Western democracies during the last five years.

Table 1: Results German Elections, October 16, 1994⁴

	1994		1990	
	Total	in %	Total	in %
Entitled to vote	60,452,009		60,436,560	
Voters	47,737,999	79,0	46,995,915	77,8
SPD	17,140,354	36,4	15,545,366	33,5
CDU	16,089,960	34,2	17,055,166	36,7
CSU	3,427,196	7,3	3,302,980	7,1
Grüne/Bündnis 90	3,424,315	7,3	1,788,200	3,8
FDP	3,258,407	6,9	5,123,233	11,0
PDS	2,066,176	4,4	1,129,578	2,4
REP	875,239	1,9	987,269	2,1
Bündnis 90	–	–	559,207	1,2

Table 2: Distribution of Seats in the German Bundestag⁵

	1994	1990
SPD	252	239
CDU	244	268
CSU	50	51
Grüne/Bündnis 90	49	—
FDP	47	79
PDS	30	17
Bündnis 90		8
REP	—	—

1. From Unification to Incorporation: The Point of Departure of German Postcommunism

1. The collapse of the communist regimes in the East reads like a textbook case of Hannah Arendt's theory of political power and violence. Some countries even tried to pursue her work a lecture further: They attempted a democratic-revolutionary foundation of a new political order – with mixed results, as we now know. The case of the GDR, however, was different than either that of the Czech Republic's revolutionary inauguration of a new political order or that of Hungary's slow politics of constitutional amendments. Instead, what happened in East Germany was the rapid integration of one country into another. Strictly speaking, the term '*Vereinigung*' (unification, some conservative politicians even use the term '*Wiedervereinigung*,' re-unification) is misleading when it comes to describing accurately what has happened since 1989. Not only concerning constitutional procedure, but to cover the whole range of economic, social, political and cultural levels, the term '*Beitritt*' (incorporation) fits much better. Against this procedure, left-wing commentators like Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich K. Preuss had made a case for accomplishing unification by founding the German Republic anew. They advocated the application of paragraph 146, according to which a new constitution would be written and approved through a nationwide referendum.⁶ But conservatives, liberals, and even some social democrats (in both countries) wanted to employ paragraph 23 of the Basic Law, which had already been used in the fifties to integrate the state of Saarland, and to absorb the East into the Federal Republic.

2. The paragraph 23 solution was completed on October 3, 1990. A media debate ensued concerning what GDR bequest could be counted as a worthy contribution to the Federal Republic.⁷ Nothing characterizes the extent of the Western takeover more than the simple fact that only two elements⁸ from the East were successful in the West: a sandman-TV-show for kids and

a new law on traffic lights. This traffic-law, incidentally, makes it easier for cars to turn right at crossroads. Easy right turns became a kind of symbol for the general tendency of German society as a whole after 1989. Economically, the disciples of market-economy were on the rise again (at least in the beginning); socially, the formerly closed and egalitarian society of the East became individualized and polarized; politically, the first elections after 1990 gave the conservative CDU crushing victories on both the state and federal levels; and, on the cultural level, right-wing youth movements sprang up, anti-semitism saw a comeback and the dominant political discourse switched to topics like the nation and 'normalization' of German history.

West German left-wing intellectuals reacted ambiguously to the change in political culture after 1989. Their reactions no doubt alienated them from their East German colleagues and therefore prepared the ground for the persistent attractiveness of the PDS among Eastern intellectuals. The example of Jürgen Habermas may provide an illustration. Since the early sixties, Habermas has criticized the Federal Republic's political system and political culture. Furthermore, amid the euphoria around the democratic mass-mobilization of the East German Bürgerbewegungen (civil-movements), he was even willing to sacrifice the Federal Republic in order to found a new German constitution. After the conservative turn around 1990, however, it didn't take long for him to become a melancholic advocate of the good old Federal Republic.

Historians like Arnulf Baring and conservative political scientists like Hans-Peter Schwarz have chosen the slogan 'From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland' as their interpretative matrix for the political and cultural transformations in Germany. Factual developments, however, in the economic, political and social spheres indicate just the opposite – a Western takeover of the former GDR. Together, the new conservative discourse on the cultural level, with its melancholic reception by Western left-wing intellectuals, plus the expansion of the Western order over the economic, social and political spheres in the East set the conditions for the resurgence of the postcommunist PDS.

II. The PDS in the 1994 Election: Ironies of Electoral Laws

1. The figures for the October 16, 1994 election indicate a remarkable difference between West and East. The PDS remains overwhelmingly an East German party. It picked up more than 1.7 million votes in the East, but only slightly over 300,000 among the four-times larger electorate of the West. The former GDR's northern states, Brandenburg, (former) East-Berlin, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, constitute its strongholds.

Table 3: Votes for the PDS⁹ by percentage

German Total:	4.4
Former FRG	0.9
Former GDR	19.8
Berlin (East)	34.7
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	23.6
Brandenburg	19.3
Sachsen-Anhalt	18.0

The invisible wall dividing Western and Eastern electorates appears most striking in Berlin.

Table 4: The 1994 Elections for the Bundestag in Berlin by percentage¹⁰

	Berlin	West Berlin	East Berlin
SPD	34.0	34.6	33.1
CDU	31.4	38.7	19.5
PDS	14.8	2.6	34.7
Bündnis/Grüne	10.2	12.3	6.9
FDP	5.2	6.3	1.9

2. Already in 1990, the PDS's representation in the Bundestag was due solely to an extraordinary provision in German electoral law. It is rather ironic that the very party which did everything in its power to suppress free elections over the previous forty years later took a free-ride on some particular aspects of the West German electoral law written in the fifties. According to this law, a party must win at least five percent of the votes in order to be represented in parliament. Applying this rule to the enlarged Federal Republic's first election, however, would have meant that the very political movement which had spearheaded the downfall of communism would probably fail to enter the Bundestag. With the former GDR comprising only one-fifth of the total German electorate, they would have needed more than 25 percent of the Eastern votes to pass the five percent threshold. With the intention of ensuring parliamentary representation for the East German Bürgerbewegung, the hurdle was leapt in a modified way. Originally initiated by the constitutional court, a special rule – valid only for the first German election after the 'Beitritt' – was written. It split Germany in two main constituencies, namely the old West and the old East, each with respective five percent thresholds.

The outcome of this election was ironic in more than one way. In West Germany, the Green party fell short by a margin of 1.2 percent. They would

have done substantially better if they had been counted together with their East German counterpart, which met the requirement. Yet the most ironic consequence of this unique law was that the PDS cleared the margin and entered the Bundestag.

3. The PDS, in 1990 a lucky beneficiary of the peculiar electoral law stipulations, experienced a repeat performance four years later. One peculiar paragraph of the electoral law drafted in the fifties states that an exception to the five-percent margin can be made in the event that a party wins least three voting constituencies. For the PDS, this regulation became an anchor in their struggle to reenter the Bundestag. What the party needed to do was to focus all its energy on a few constituencies. Winning three of them would mean staying in the parliamentary game, since all the votes for the PDS would be counted as well.

The strategical competence and cleverness of the PDS leadership came to full potency when it came to preparing the election. The PDS focussed its resources on its strongholds in East Berlin, hoping that the majority of the voters in these constituencies would be split between the CDU, the SPD and Bündnis 90. Appropriate candidates for these districts were carefully grouped on the ticket. They came up with a kind of the PDS dream-team: Gregor Gysi, the charismatic party leader; Christa Luft, a former secretary of economic affairs in the last reform SED-cabinet of Modrow; Manfred Müller, a labor-union leader from the West who ran in an East Berlin constituency; and, finally – and this was the most decisive strategic move – the PDS convinced the 81 year old writer Stefan Heym to run for office in Berlin-Mitte, the famous constituency between the Brandenburger Tor and Friedrichstrasse. As came out during the campaign, Heym had not even made an effort to read the PDS program. His candidacy, however, became crucial for the PDS since his appearance gave the successors to the SED the moral-cleanliness certificate they needed. Heym had suffered during the Nazi-years and later on emigrated to Prague and the U.S. He fought in the American army to free Germany, but as a convinced socialist, he clashed with American authorities and decided to move to the newly founded GDR. Here he became for more than thirty years one of the most respected voices of the political opposition. Most of his books were banned in the GDR and published only in the West. He supported Biermann and in the end became one of the key speakers at the mass demonstrations during the final autumn of the communist regime. His moving autobiography already written and published, he felt ready for a final spectacular chapter. It became a kind of personal dream of his to follow in the steps of Clara Zetkin and Willy Brandt and to give the opening speech as the elder chairman of the Bundestag. Used to political deals of all kinds, the PDS helped make this personal ambition possible.

III. The PDS Between Communism and Becoming a Regional 'Volkspartei' (Catch-all-Party)

1. After surviving fierce attacks from all the other political parties, the PDS campaign finally made it: Out of a total of five Bundestag-constituencies in East Berlin, their dream-team emerged as strongest in four of them, which meant gaining a total of 30 seats in the Bundestag. As already argued above, it is misleading to interpret the success of the PDS within the context of its fellow postcommunist parties in Central and East Europe alone. After having lost power in 1989, the SED was in an even more hopeless position than any of its former sister-parties. First, the communist parties in Central and Eastern European countries had at least a shot at becoming some sort of social democrats in the newly emerging party-system. This niche, in contrast, was already filled in Germany by the social democratic SPD of the Federal Republic. Second, in other postcommunist countries, members of the old communist elites were – due to their formerly monopolistic status as skilled technicians, scholars or administrators – still needed for the rebuilding of their societies. Only a few experts from the West were found to replace them. By contrast, the reconstruction in East Germany was a project left entirely in the hands of Western experts.

It took the PDS some time to stabilize. Membership in the SED dropped soon after the revolution from 2.3 million in October 1989 to 1.4 million in December 1989. In an attempt to keep up with the political developments, the party renamed itself the "Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus" (PDS, Party of Democratic Socialism) on December 17, 1990. But the crisis continued.¹¹ More members turned their backs on the PDS. Left with about 146,000 members in December 1992, the PDS struggled to define its role in the new political realm, both programmatically and on the organizational level.

In order to understand the recovery of the PDS, it is useful to distinguish between the following levels: the party officials, the party members, and those who voted for the PDS. Looking at the party this way, it has some similarities to a hamburger: On the top are the cadres who act pragmatically; in the middle exists a membership still stuck to the old regime and the old ideology; and on the bottom are the voters who voted for the PDS for other reasons.

2. Cadres. On the level of the party officials, the former ruling SED suffered a tremendous loss of full-time cadres during its change to the postcommunist PDS. Already in the few months between November 1989 and February 1990, the party reduced the apparatus from 45,000 to 14,000. Today, the party has about 400 full-time cadres in the apparatus. Most of the party work has to be done by volunteers. Thus the PDS leaders are dependent on the activities of the party members.

The leadership of the PDS today consists of five groups: First, the advocates of a "third way" socialism, falling between communism and social-democracy. In the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg, they are trying to become the leftist-conscience of the SPD,¹² with Gregor Gysi as their leading spokesman. Second, party officials like the new party leader Lothar Bisky, who want to develop the PDS into a left-wing regional party of the former GDR. The third group consists mainly of parliament members or officials on the state or the community level. Since most of the older party members retreated from these positions soon after 1989, a younger generation took their place. They are in their thirties or forties and received their political socialization during the glory days of the GDR, the first years after Erich Honecker assumed leadership. Most of them are pure pragmatists like Rolf Kutzmutz, who nearly became mayor of Potsdam in spring 1994 and is now the main political force in Potsdam's city-hall. Faced with the day-to-day problems of politics, these pragmatists when in power even opt for privatization and dismissal of employees when they see it as useful for their city. The last two groups within PDS are much weaker, but receive a lot of media coverage. One such group is the Communist Platform. They are a kind of neo-Stalinist faction within the party, containing no more than a few hundred members and claiming only a few of the party cadres. They are led by Sarah Wagenknecht, a twenty-four year old philosophy student who became a member of the party only after 1989. Nevertheless, this group and their obscure defense of Stalinism is attracting overwhelming publicity in the German media. The fifth group consists of a few Western party activists who are former members of the diverse communist sects and other groups belonging to the radical left of the old FRG. They are without any influence in the party.

3. Members. After 1989, the 2.3 million person membership of the party declined drastically. It was only in 1993 that the party stabilized at a membership of 130,000.¹³ At this level, the PDS looks much more like a direct continuation of the old SED. The PDS gained only a few new members since 1989. Ninety-five percent of its members were in the old SED. Empirical studies show that the party members are still very close to the old GDR and reluctant to discuss the past. To some extent this is due to the distribution of old and young members in the party. Only 10 percent of the party members are younger than thirty, and more than 40 percent are older than sixty.¹⁴ According to an internal party research report, the PDS is mainly a solidary community for its rank and file. The party has become some kind of 'Heimat' (home) for those who feel insecure under the new social and political conditions.¹⁵ Party members meet not only to discuss political issues, but also to convey their experiences with the new order and to help each other fill out retirement-forms, tax-forms or new rental contracts. For most of the members, the party is a necessary element

of social integration. Empirical studies also indicate that such PDS members are among the least interested in coping with their past. Instead, they have melancholic feelings for the former GDR and retrospectively idealize it. Attempts by the PDS leadership to eliminate former StaSi agents from office are strongly opposed by this party base.

4. Voters. In contrast to the membership, those who vote for the PDS are by no means defenders of the old regime. In elections on the community, state, federal, and European level, the party receives a fairly constant 20 percent vote in East Germany, with more voter support in the north than in the south. It seems to be common knowledge that postcommunist parties receive most of their support from those left behind by capitalist modernization. In the case of the PDS, however, this holds true only in a broader, cultural sense. Certainly, those who vote for the PDS view themselves as losing out in the German unification. But they do so more in the cultural than in the economic sense.¹⁶ No country in postcommunist Europe has undergone a more deep and sudden change than the former GDR. In addition to the political, social and legal system, nearly every aspect of daily life has changed: the system of mail delivery, the cars, the bank system, a lot of street names, social insurance, the school system, the atmosphere at the workplace, the way to dress and express yourself, even food and cigarettes are no longer the same.

According to empirical studies, most people who vote for the PDS earn more than the average GDR citizen. With regard to the social strata of its supporters, the PDS is chosen by people who suffered less than the average GDR citizen. They feel, however, that they are victims of a cultural colonization that threatens their identity. Even though people who vote for the PDS share a certain profile (predominately male, older, atheistic, highly educated, high income), the PDS is the only true 'Volkspartei' (catch-all-party) in East Germany.¹⁷ The electorate encompasses all ages and social groups. The only singular phenomenon is that the former working class party is doing better with intellectuals and less well with workers.

During the election campaigns, the PDS stressed resentment toward the West and presented itself as the only advocate of East German self-respect. To vote PDS was to contribute to the fight against West German colonization. Concerning concrete issues such as unemployment or housing, the party represented a radical populist opposition. This populist propaganda contrasted, however, with the pragmatic politics of the PDS party officials on the community level. Despite such contradictions and the lack of a coherent program, the majority of PDS supporters cast their ballot for one main reason: to express their disgust with the West.

Some observers view the PDS as the party of democratic "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" (coping with the past) of the communist years. Until now, the PDS has only made small steps in this direction. The party

Table 5: The Social Structure of Voters for PDS¹⁸

	Total East citizens	PDS voters
Gender:		
male	47%	54%
female	53%	46%
Age:		
18-29	22.6%	19.9%
30-49	39.8%	38.1%
50 and older	37.5%	42.0%
Religion:		
protestant	29%	13%
catholic	6%	1%
atheist	62%	85%
Education:		
elementary	50%	31%
middle	22%	19%
high	27%	47%
Job:		
worker	36%	26%
craftsmen	5%	5%
white collar	48%	63%
entrepreneur	6%	4%
Net income (per month):		
less than DM 2000:	28%	23%
less than DM 3000:	35%	37%
more than DM 3000:	37%	40%

leadership's attempts to do so were obstructed by the rank and file. In addition, the party is gaining strength from the recent "Ostalgie" (nostalgia for the East) which claims that the economic breakdown after 1989 was the fault of the West and not the result of forty years of communism.

Thus far, the PDS has established itself as a kind of regional protest party on the left wing of the political agenda in East Germany. Looking forward, two main options are open to the PDS. First, the party could maintain itself as a "shadow-of-the-wall" party in which every decisive attempt to cope with the communist past will be blocked by the rank and file. Or, second, the pragmatists and the regionalists could prevail and shift the party into a correlate of Schleswig-Holstein's Danish minority party SSW or the Bavarian CSU. In this case, the PDS would become a regional catch-all-party on the political left. Even in its current state, the PDS is certainly no real threat to German democracy. It is rather a question of choosing between moral reliability and moral corruption when the SPD and the Greens come to decide how to deal with the PDS.

IV. From 'Bürgerbewegung' to the Greens

1. While the PDS was celebrating its place in German politics after the 1990 elections, the parliamentarian wings of both the Bürgerbewegung in the East and the new social movements in the West were licking their wounds. In the East, the Bürgerbewegung had joined under an umbrella organization and had run under the name of 'Bündnis 90' (Alliance 1990). Its candidates had been key players in the events of fall 1989. Certainly, most of them were highly idealistic. They campaigned as some kind of alternative to both the despised old GDR regime as well as to the glittering West. After learning the difficulties of institutional alternatives like 'Runder Tisch' (round-table) in spring 1990, the electoral outcome that fall tore the ground from under their feet. With 1.2 percent of the vote, Bündnis 90 was heartened merely to be represented in the parliament with its eight seats. The elections to state parliaments in the Neue Bundesländer held the same day proved to be an additional source of deep disappointment. Bündnis 90 didn't even make it into all of the Eastern state parliaments. Just one year after being the central force behind the "Runde Tisch," the Bürgerbewegungen's political influence was confined to serving as one of two SPD junior partners in the single state of Brandenburg.

Not surprisingly, this disaster had a dramatic impact on all civil society advocates in East Germany. Quite a few activists publicly complained about the ingratitude of their fellow citizens – who preferred Helmut Kohl's economic promises to a chance to fashion an alternative to Western consumer society. As a consequence, many repudiated political activism altogether and became the first Generation X of the new East German politics. Those who remained in the political arena were faced with the question of how to proceed. Remembering their close ties to the West German Greens, dating back to Petra Kelly's support of the Eastern opposition in the eighties, many decided to merge with the Greens.

For the Greens, November 1990 had turned out even worse. Used to their reputation as a Green party stronghold in Western Europe, the German Greens failed at home to meet the five-percent hurdle. Although the Greens were always critical of growth, the fact that they themselves should one day become the subject of decrease nonetheless took them by surprise. In 1987, the Greens were up by 8.3 percent. This time around they lost nearly 50 percent of their votes. After the shift in West German political discourse after 1989, which diverted attention from environmental issues, nobody expected the Greens to do better than they had in 1987. But the scale of the disaster came as a complete surprise.

2. Given a deprived Bündnis 90 and a Western Green party stripped of its presence in the Bundestag, their merger was not expected to be an easy one. In the East, the decline of Bündnis 90 was due to a large extent to the

inability of its leadership to make the shift from moral opposition against a communist regime to building a constructive politics within the framework of a Western democracy. Even today, famous 'Wende' political actors like Bärbel Boley still prefer to offer moral pronouncements on TV talk-shows than to enter into the fray of real politics. Others, like Wolfgang Ullmann or Wolfgang Templin, know what they fought against, but still have no clear and positive idea now of what they are fighting for. While the first proposes a return to some kind of medieval corporatist society, the other becomes more and more involved with the nationalistic ideology of the New German Right.

The PDS contributed strongly to twisting the fate of the eastern Bürgerbewegung into a tragic example of political decline. Even after the 1990 elections, Bündnis 90 retained the capacity to play a promising new role in the emerging political scene. Viewed as independent from the West, they were the most likely voice for the interests of the East German population after the Beitritt. Upon closer inspection, however, the interests of the critics of and those disaffected by the German unification turned out to be too diverse to be represented by Bündnis 90 alone. The politics on which Bündnis 90 focused during the years following the 1990 election moved them into an even more marginalized political position than before. The case of the state of Brandenburg is a striking example in this context. After 1990, Brandenburg was the only state in the former GDR where Bündnis 90 took part in the government through a coalition with the Social Democrats and the liberal party. Brandenburg's social democratic prime minister, Manfred Stolpe, was formerly a leading official of the East German church and was known to shelter members of the opposition. In 1991 he was accused of having been closely involved with the StaSi (former State Security) before 1989. Today these accusations have still not been fully cleared. When the first documents and testimonies against Stolpe were disclosed, Bündnis 90 concentrated their entire political energy on this issue alone. They called for Stolpe's resignation and argued that post-1989 Germans should not act in the same forgetful way they had after 1945. To demonstrate their moral conviction, Bündnis 90 finally left the coalition. However, instead of being rewarded for their moral insistence, they ended up falling short of the five-percent threshold at the next election. Opinion polls indicated that an overwhelming majority of the citizens of Brandenburg simply didn't want to hear any more about the moral entanglements of their past.

Bündnis 90 actually had no choice but to act this way. Hannah Arendt had experienced a similar situation the first time she visited Germany after the fall of the Nazi-regime. In a country that becomes more and more apathetic, if not cynical, when it comes to coping with the moral challenge of its past, one ends up being stifled by strategic party politics. For Bündnis

90, of course, this position is deeply rooted in its history. Bündnis 90 is viewed as a party with lofty moral concerns. But today they must act in a constellation where, first, only a minority of the Eastern population cares to come to terms with their past, and where, second, daily politics for the most part lacks spectacular moral dignity. Because of their insistence on moral concerns, Bündnis 90 is viewed as a party that is more interested in solving questions of the past than in facing actual political problems. And Bündnis 90 cannot easily get rid of its "look-back-in-anger attitude" since to do so would destroy the motivational basis of its political activists. Not surprisingly, though, this focus on the past opened space for the PDS to intensify their propaganda and to raise issues speaking to the unease of the present situation. To fulfil their moral obligation to prosecute injustices committed under the old regime, Bündnis 90 needed to rely on Western assistance. For the PDS, this offered the opportunity to present itself as the only advocate of the critics, losers and victims of Western colonization.

3. For Western Greens, the blow of the 1990 election turned out to provide the start of shock therapy. Party leaders with a strong standing at the state level, like the charismatic Joschka Fischer or the highly respected Antje Vollmer, tied their personal political fortunes to successful party reform. They aimed to rebuild the party on organizational, programmatic and strategic levels. Organizationally, the Greens took the advice of social scientists like Claus Offe and created a more professional institutional structure. Programmatically, the party drew a clear boundary with traditional Marxism; it accepted the basic political framework of Western democracies; and, facing the cruelties of the Yugoslav civil-war next door, the party even became willing to abandon its fundamentally pacifist approach. Strategically, the Green party gave up its attitude of radical opposition and defined itself on the Federal level as a prospective SPD partner in a so called "red-green coalition."

Years before, reforms like these had failed. This time it was the PDS that, although unintentionally, helped "Fischer's Friends" succeed. Most opponents of Fischer's reforms were exponents of a more traditional Marxist approach. They – like the one time chairman of the Greens in the Bundestag, Jürgen Reents – left the party to become members of the Western branch of the PDS. For others, a job in the Green party ended for more spectacular reasons. Some party officials – like the long-time party speaker for questions of inter-German relations and the central opponent of Petra Kelly's protest against the GDR regime in the eighties, Dirk Schneider – were exposed as having worked as agents for the StaSi and were forced to step down from Green politics. They too found a new political home in the PDS.

Four years after suffering their harshest defeat, the Western Greens presented themselves with a clear-cut and unique political profile. Having

begun ten years ago as a parliamentary group which unsystematically collected widespread elements of protest, they emerged as a party representing the postmaterialist left. The Greens stand for a multicultural political environment with a programmatic emphasis on ecological issues. They have finally succeeded the liberal FDP in the public eye as the main defenders of civil and minority rights.

4. For the German left, the electoral law provided many ironic consequences, as already mentioned. Enacted in order to preserve the oligopolistic party system, the five-percent hurdle basically twice worked like a midwife to Green party formation. At the close of the seventies, the aim to meet the magic five-percent hurdle forced a broad alliance of all the Green grass-root movements which, despite their conflicts, stayed together in some kind of Green "Schicksalsgemeinschaft." Twelve years later, facing defeat in the West and a weak showing in the East, the hurdle forced both parties to agree to a merger. Competition would prove too risky for them both. The process, however, of uniting the Greens and Bündnis 90 turned out to be difficult for both sides. The merger was meant to be an outstanding alternative model to the Western dominated integration performed by the other parties at the expense of their political counterparts from the East. Criticizing the West German takeover of the former GDR as a colonizing act, the Greens and Bündnis 90 wanted to follow the plea of Habermas and Preuss, at least when it came to uniting themselves.

Following this highly ambitious approach, both parties were supposed to treat each other like equal partners and to learn from each other. Through an exhaustive process of conflicts, vetos, tears, and compromises, a new party was founded with the name "Bündnis 90/Grüne." The predominant aim of the Western Greens was to prevent their Eastern counterpart from splitting the project. Thus they compromised when it came to symbolic questions like who should appear first in the new party name or the party-symbol.

The process to unify on an equal basis turned out to be difficult not only because the Western party was larger, had more strategically competent officials, or were forced to accept that they were to be represented in the Bundestag by a handful of ideologically disoriented Bündnis 90 parliamentarians – these tensions reflect on a deeper level the general suspicions concerning the real contribution of the Eastern Bürgerbewegung to an enlarged Federal Republic. For Green politicians, it was simple rhetoric when they proclaimed that both sides should enrich each other with their respective political experiences. It became increasingly unclear what lessons Western Greens and the new party were supposed to learn from their Eastern companions. Certainly, they had the merit of having taken moral stands and having initiated the peaceful revolution. And they remained passionate about fundamental questions involving political and social

injustice. But that was it, at least according to most Western party members. In retrospect, the party unification appears to have nearly replicated the whole process of German unification. There is no particularly Eastern contribution left, either on the programmatic or the organizational level. The Greens/Alliance 90 did poorly in the elections in East Germany. Excluding East-Berlin, they gained no more than between two and three percent. Only five of the total of forty-nine Green members in the Bundestag are from the East.

V. A Strategically Trapped SPD

1. Shortly after the events of 1989, political analysts unanimously predicted the beginning of a new and long lasting social democratic era in Germany. Not just opinion polls, but history as well seemed to point to this conclusion. The GDR embodied the homeland of the foundation of the SPD in the last century; social democrats and communists had been the strongest parties in East Germany after 1945; and it was the politics of détente which made former West German chancellor Willy Brandt the most popular Western politician in the GDR. In addition to this tradition, actual social and cultural facts seemed to favor the social democrats. With respect to its social structure, East Germany contained a much higher quantity of working class people than any country in Western Europe. Culturally, citizens of the former GDR were expected to subscribe to values like welfare and solidarity.

The defeat of the Social Democrats in 1990 was not only due to the fact that the leading social democrat at that time, Oskar Lafontaine, and the late state leader of the GDR before the 'Wende', Erich Honecker, shared the same regional background. In pointing to the difficulties of a quick economic transformation throughout the campaign, he and his party opted for a gradual integration of the GDR. In contrast, the conservatives favored immediate integration into the FRG and promised that in only a few years the former GDR would attain the same high standard of living enjoyed in the West. The SPD was blamed for not being a true advocate of German unification. In a political atmosphere which Habermas aptly labelled "DM-nationalism," the SPD lost to the CDU in the East.

Since then, the Social Democrats have failed to regain their old strength in the East. They do well in Brandenburg, the state surrounding Berlin (45.1 percent of the vote, a gain of 12.2 percent), are comparatively strong in the former Eastern sector of Berlin, (33.1 percent of the vote) but won only a few percentage points in the other Eastern states.

2. From a strategic point of view, the East German SPD is trapped between the CDU and the PDS. Even though most of Lafontaine's warnings about the difficulties of rapid transformation have proved true, it

is striking how weak the SPD remains in the East. It has many fewer members than the PDS (e.g. only 2,600 in East Berlin, compared to the 23,000 person membership of the PDS).¹⁹ Obviously, for the majority of the Eastern population the reasons to vote for the SPD are not compelling. According to recent opinion polls, more than seventy percent of the East German population say that they are better off today than before 1989, either economically or with a view to individual freedom. Most of these supporters are "winners" in the unification who now have higher-paying jobs. These "winners" feel well represented by the Kohl government, and therefore voted conservative again in 1994. On the other side is the minority, although still numbering in the millions, of "losers" in the unification. This group contains the unemployed – to a high degree, female – the former executives of the old regime, and all those who feel culturally disaffected by the unification. To win their votes is a tough task even for the SPD, since they are the ideal target of the PDS's leftist populism. Squeezed in between the winners and losers of the unification, the East SPD acts like someone torn between two lovers.

VI. Towards a New Left Triangle in Germany?

1. Regardless of which extension and for how long elements of a special political identity will remain in East Germany, the dominant trend is toward further integration into the Western economic, social, political and cultural systems. The PDS must face this fact and decide how long it will continue to base its political identity upon resentment against the West. But at the same time, the two left Western parties must face the fact that there is a new challenger whose mere existence changes the practiced structure of the German left. In this sense, unification has deeply affected the internal constellation of left wing politics in Germany. Traditionally, the German left had a dominant twofold structure of conflict that dates back to Ferdinand Lasalle's Liberal Socialists vs. the Marxist Social Democrats (like Bebel and Liebknecht) in the 1860s. Twenty years later, pragmatic and reformist Social Democrats (like Bernstein) argued with left-wing Social Democrats (of the so called "Die Jungen," the youngsters). During World War I, the pro-war majority of the SPD struggled against Luxemburg's group. During the Weimar Republic, the SPD and the communist KPD fought each other. The battle continued with new fortresses in Bonn and East-Berlin after 1945. West Germany even mustered two additional sequels of left wing bi-polarism – the conflict between the SPD and the New Left in the sixties, which finally led to the tussles between a materialist Social Democratic left and the postmaterialist left of the Green party.

Unlike the Federal Republic, other Western democracies like Italy, France and Spain had strong communist parties after World War II, and

Table 6: The Left-Wing Triangle

New:	Traditional:
Greens	Social Democrats/Socialist
	Communists/Postcommunists

thus a new triangle-structure of the left was established there much earlier, accompanying the appearance of the Green parties.

Upon closer inspection, however, the left-triangle in these countries turns out to be unstable and tends to fall back into a bi-polar structure. But even though communist parties in the West have fallen upon hard times since 1989, re-bi-polarization does not mean the communist parties will be the automatic losers in this game. Empirically, re-bi-polarization shows different outcomes, depending on the specific politics of all three parties.²⁰

2. To make matters even more unpredictable in Germany, the process of re-bi-polarization takes different routes in the East and West. In the West, the PDS had definitely failed to establish a powerful party organization. Communism and post-communism obviously remain unattractive to voters in the old Federal Republic. In contrast, in the East the PDS was able to capture former domains of the Bürgerbewegungen and the Social Democrats, as described above. The interaction of the three parties has become a complicated matter. The PDS sees itself as occupying a comparatively good position. Following traditional communist tactics, the group around Gisy is accusing the Social Democrats of not following through on its principles and in its plea for a 'Volksfront' (peoples alliance) of the left against the CDU/FDP government. The PDS wants to be viewed as some kind of left-corrective of corrupt Social Democratism. From the point of view of the PDS, they can only win by these tactics: either the Social Democrats collaborate and thus help the PDS obtain power, or they demonstrate reluctance. In the second case, they deserve to be unmasked by the PDS, which only underscores the PDS's importance.

3. For the Social Democrats, the PDS represents their historical trauma. In 1946, the SPD was forced by the Russians to merge with the KPD and form the SED. Communists were placed in all the relevant positions, while Social Democrats had to suffer in jail or were brought (for some of them returned) to former Nazi-concentration camps, by that time operated by the communist regime. Hundreds were killed, thousands escaped to the West. On the other hand, the PDS is not completely identical with the old SED. In addition, the other possible coalition partner in the East, the CDU, also has strong personal continuities with their Eastern forerunner and the sister-party of the SED, the East-CDU. And finally, opinion polls show

that voters in the East to a large extent expect the Social Democrats to collaborate with the PDS rather than to form a so called Grand-Coalition with the CDU. Thus the Social Democrats are forced to choose between three strategies in their relationship to PDS: isolation, integration, or an attempt to divide the PDS. Western Social Democrats reacted outrageously when their East German party mates ended the "veil of ignorance" and began talks with the PDS. Since the image of the PDS in the West is so bad, they fear losing all hope to regain votes in the West. Squeezed between questions of moral, programmatic and simply strategic means, the SPD is divided about how to deal with the PDS. Party leader Rudolf Scharping has taken an uncompromising stand against any closer contact to the PDS.²¹ Meanwhile Egon Bahr, the founder of Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik," argues that closer connections would encourage many members of the PDS to switch to the SPD.²² The debate has just begun to reach the party journals²³ and it is expected to last some time. Unfortunately, for the SPD, time is pressing.

The first constellation in which Social Democrats had to deal seriously with this problem occurred after the elections in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt in June 1994. The Christian Democrats had lost, but were still the strongest party in parliament; the SPD and Bündnis 90 together were stronger, but failed to gain the majority as well. Instead of accepting the CDU invitation to participate in a Grand-Coalition, the Social Democratic leader ran for prime minister in the parliament and formed a minority government with Bündnis 90. To gain majority in the assembly, the government needs either the support of the CDU or of the PDS.

An even more difficult situation arose four months later in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a poor state in the extreme north of East Germany. Here, Bündnis 90/Grüne failed to enter parliament, which left the CDU, the SPD, and the PDS as the three nearly equal parties in parliament. The PDS invited the SPD to build a coalition against the CDU. The way the SPD reacted to this challenge can probably serve as a model of how to deal with the "unmasking-strategy" of the PDS and is worthy of further description. Under certain circumstances, they declared, they would be happy to join the PDS in a coalition. They presented the PDS with a statement containing four general points for the party to agree to in advance, before embarking on any coalition negotiations. First, the PDS was to apologize for all crimes against humanity suffered by the Social Democrats under the GDR regime; second, the PDS was to agree to the German constitution in every point; third, the PDS leadership was to assume responsibility lest traditional communist groups, like the Communist Platform mentioned above, try to influence the general politics of the party; and, finally, the party was to get rid of members who were deeply involved in the StaSi. It quickly turned out that this potato was too hot in the hands

of the PDS. Due to its internal diversity, the party was unable to subscribe to the statement. Many voters were disturbed by this fact. The SPD and Bündnis 90/Greens can hope to win these people back in the next elections. The elections in the city of Berlin in summer 1995 will be the next crucial test in this direction. With the SPD expecting to be the strongest party with about 35 percent, followed by the CDU with 30 percent and the PDS and Greens each with around 15 percent, there will most likely be an overwhelming majority, comprising more than two-thirds of the city electorate, voting for the three left parties. For the future of the democratic left, much depends on whether the SPD and Greens in Berlin will be able to resist moral corruption and avoid entering into too close negotiations with the PDS, which has yet to come to terms with its past.

4. The identity of both the Greens and the SPD forbids too cozy a connection with the PDS. By following the Social Democratic approach in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and attacking the PDS, both the Greens and the SPD have a good shot at regaining some lost ground. In the long run, two possible PDS reactions must be taken into consideration.

First, the PDS, due to internal conflicts, might be unable to respond in a satisfying way to basic democratic demands. How long and how well the PDS can survive in such an isolated position, representing "the shadow of the wall" in German politics, depends on the moral strength of the SPD and Greens.

It could turn out, however, that the postcommunist PDS would be able to accept democratic demands like the four mentioned above. In this case, the party would have to distance itself even more from its communist past than it has thus far, both in its program and regarding its membership. The PDS would, then, finally end up being a pragmatic party representing some special regional interests of East Germans. The left triangle would in fact dissolve into a new quadruple of the SPD, the Greens, a regional, left wing 'Volkspartei' (the PDS), and finally, (though marginalized) their former communist fractions.

Table 7: The New Left-Wing Quadruple

	New:	Traditional:
Western parties:	Greens	Social Democrats
Postcomm. part.:	Regional East Party	New Old Communists

Undoubtedly, such a constellation would enable the Social Democrats as well as the Greens to garner the moral trust they require in their campaign for a democratic left alternative in Germany.

NOTES

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2. Compared to the results of postcommunist parties in Poland (20%), Hungary (33%) and Bulgaria (42%).

3. Timothy Garton Ash, "Kohl's Germany – The Beginning of the End," *The New York Review of Books* (December 1, 1994): 20–27.

4. "Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Bulletin 146" (December 19, 1990): 1531, and "Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Bulletin 102" (November 7, 1994): 937.

5. "Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Bulletin 102" (November 7, 1994): 937.

6. See Bill Scheuermann, "A Missed Opportunity? The German Constitutional Debate," *German Politics and Society* 31 (Spring 1994): 109–119.

7. See Helga A. Welsh, "The Divided Past and The Difficulties of German Unification," *German Politics and Society* 30 (Fall 1993): 75–86. And Lothar Probst, "German Pasts, German's Future – Intellectual Controversies Since Reunification," *German Politics and Society* 30 (Fall 1993): 21–33.

8. With the one possible exception of the former GDR's more liberal abortion law. The Bundestag must decide again after the constitutional court rejected a law which was a kind of compromise between the East German and the more rigid West German law.

9. "Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Bulletin 102" (November 7, 1994): 942/943 and *Die Zeit* (October 28, 1994): 6.

10. *Die Tageszeitung* (October 18, 1994 [Berlin edition]): 23.

11. Heinrich Bortfeldt, "The German Communists in Disarray," *The Journal of Communist Studies* (December 1991): 522–532.

12. For an analysis of the historical tradition of this criticism see: Heinrich August Winkler, "Von den eigenen Sünden ablenken," *Die Zeit* (November 11, 1994): 7.

13. Table: Membership of SED/PDS

1989, October	2,300,000
1989, December	1,464,000
1990, February	700,000
1990, June	350,000
1991, June	242,000
1991, December	172,000
1992, December	146,000
1993, December	131,000
1994, June	132,000

See: Patrick Moreau/Jürgen Lang, "Was will die PDS?" (Berlin, 1994): 15.

14. ISDA, Institut für Sozialdatenanalyse. Strukturen, Politische Aktivitäten und Motivationen in der PDS (Berlin 1991): 8.

15. ISDA, Institut für Sozialdatenanalyse. Strukturen, Politische Aktivitäten und Motivationen in der PDS (Berlin 1991): 6–9, 39–41.

16. A view which even Gregor Gysi supports. See his interview in *Der Spiegel* 31 (1994).

17. See the analysis of PDS party strategist Michael Brie, "PDS ante portas," *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik* 8 (1994): 935–940.

18. Pertaining to the elections to the European Parliament in June 1994. For more details see: Berichte der Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. Mannheim 61 and 71; and Patrick Moreau/Viola Neu, "Die PDS zwischen Linksextremismus und Linkspopulismus" (Bonn, 1994): 74.

For analysis of the 'Bundestag' elections, see: J. W. Falter/M. Kleim, "Die Wähler der PDS bei der Bundestagswahl," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 51 (December 23, 1994): 22-34.

19. See: *Der Spiegel* 41 (1994): 23.

20. The outcome of the Spanish case followed for some years the common expectation about this game, with communism losing support. In the case of Italy, the communist party was easily able to enter the social democratic realm, the socialist party is close to extinction and there exists a small but firm ecological movement. The French case provides an example of how the bi-polarization even affects the Greens negatively. They lose a lot of their power to a socialist umbrella organization which desperately seeks new supporters and is eager to appear modern and include ecological issues.

21. See: *Die Zeit* (November 4, 1994): 3.

22. See: *Der Spiegel* 43 (1994): 21.

23. See the controversies in: Special Issue of 'Die Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte' 8 (1994).

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