

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Communists wave 'anti-fascist' flag

The PDS party is taking advantage of the latest "neo-Nazi provocations" in its electoral campaign.

In the early morning hours of March 18, an anonymous arson attack struck the synagogue in Lübeck; fortunately, the fire died out before it could reach sections of the building where a number of Jewish families were living. The incident caused a national and international shock: It recalled the Nazi pogroms of November 1938, and it was certainly the last thing that Germany needed in an election year, with 19 different campaigns between now and October.

Such "neo-Nazi provocations" are not the spontaneous actions of grassroots groups or individuals, but are steered for political purposes, including by subterranean networks of the old East German communist intelligence service, the Stasi. It was no surprise that among the first people to blame the arson attack on Chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservative government, was Gregor Gysi, the national vice-chairman of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialists), the old communist party of East Germany under a new flag. Gysi warned against a "Grand Coalition" of Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) with the Social Democratic Party (SPD); this, he said, would open the door to a return of the Nazis to power in Germany. A strong PDS, Gysi said, was the only alternative to that.

It is not only Gysi who is electioneering on a phony "anti-fascist" bandwagon. Leftist Social Democrats are also charging Kohl with "creating the atmosphere in which such attacks can occur." They too want to prevent a Grand Coalition from shaping up after the October parliamentary elections, although with influential sections of

the SPD leadership endorsing such a coalition, the view of these leftists is pretty much irrelevant.

But the role of the PDS should not be underrated, because it has managed to become the second-largest party in the five eastern states of Germany, and is attracting leftist SPD members. In terms of organizational strength, membership activity, and "projection of power" (based on insider knowledge of Germany's east), the PDS ranks first in the eastern states. The party holds an average 16-20% of votes there, but in some cases, it has been able to challenge all the rest of the "Bonn parties."

For example, in Potsdam, the state capital of Brandenburg, one of the five states in Germany's east: In the Dec. 5, 1993, municipal elections, the PDS candidate, Rolf Kutzmutz, won 45% against an all-party alliance which was lucky to secure the other 55%. The PDS secured a first-party status also in Frankfurt on the Oder, and failed to gain the same status in the city of Cottbus by a tiny margin of 0.3%.

This means that in three out of four big cities in Brandenburg, the PDS is strong enough to win a majority of votes in the 1994 elections for the national parliament, the Bundestag. This is a very important fact under German election laws: Once a party gains three election districts in a direct vote, it is automatically seated in the Bundestag, and doesn't even need to cross the mandatory national 5% threshold for parliamentary status.

The Dec. 5 vote for the PDS signaled that a considerable percentage of the east German population that had

voted against the communists in 1990, after the collapse of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime, is fed up with the established Bonn politicians' inaction on the pressing economic and social problems. This became the more visible when the SPD tried to destroy the PDS candidate for mayor in Potsdam, Rolf Kutzmutz, three days before the elections, by releasing a document revealing that he had worked with the political police of the communist SED regime between 1971 and 1974. Kutzmutz responded by saying, "So what?" and almost became mayor.

Kutzmutz has meanwhile been nominated as a PDS candidate for a seat in the national parliament. Gysi himself will run in Marzahn, a district of eastern Berlin populated by many old SED cadre who are now PDS supporters and voters. Gysi gained this district in the 1990 elections for the first all-German Bundestag, and wants to gain it again. With one more district in its pocket, the PDS will be seated in the Bundestag in October.

But there is a fly in the ointment: The alarming resurgence of Great Russian imperialists in Moscow may backfire against all the election hopes of the leftists in Germany, causing a majority of voters to vote conservative.

There are also a number of people whose memories are not short, and who recall how Gysi in January 1990 brandished the "new brown threat" and warned against Germany's reunification. At that time, a mysterious pattern of swastika-paintings on Soviet military cemeteries occurred. Even more mysterious was that when hints appeared in the media that those incidents had been staged by networks of the old regime in order to promote Gysi's project of turning the SED into the PDS, the incidents ceased abruptly.