
After the Election

Germany faces the same priorities as it did in 1989

by Rainer Apel

Two weeks after the Oct. 16 elections for the national Parliament, Germans were not even sure whether the new cabinet would be headed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl—in spite of the fact that his three-party coalition holds a 10-seat majority. The uncertainty was based on two facts: First of all, Kohl needs an absolute majority of parliamentary seats for his re-election, meaning that he needs 337 out of a total of 672 votes. His own three-party bloc (Christian Democratic Union/CDU, Christian Social Union/CSU, Free Democratic Party/FDP) controls 341 votes—a majority of only four votes. None of the postwar chancellors of Germany has been elected with all the votes that his favored coalition nominally commanded—there has always been some “slippage” when the final vote is cast; because of that “tradition,” Kohl’s re-election, although likely, is not automatically secured.

The second fact that poses question marks over the exact shape of the new government is the uncertainty spread by the inner-party instability of the small FDP. That party, whose chairman is Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, is seated in the newly elected national Parliament with 7.3% of the national vote, but it has been voted out of nine state parliaments (there are 16 altogether), and it has lost parliamentary status on the municipal level in many parts of Germany, over the past two years. The FDP is, therefore, portrayed by many as a very fragile affair, a constant source of crisis and of vicious inner-party factional warfare that will infect a new Kohl coalition government with the bacillus of instability.

Developments over the first two weeks after the elections have amply documented this structural weakness of the FDP. Open factional warfare, coming close to actual splits, has broken out among the party members, culminating in the spectacular collective resignation, late in the night of Oct. 24, of the entire party executive of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany’s biggest state (and the FDP section with the biggest percentage of national party membership as well). A collective resignation was considered the only way to prevent the state party apparatus from falling apart completely. The German nation is becoming eyewitness to the method of making some heads roll, in order to prevent other

heads from rolling. But so many knives are out, so much stabbing is still going on, with vows of bloody revenge by either of the defeated sides in the FDP’s domestic confrontations, that the party’s future calculability is at stake.

For Chancellor Kohl, this is not a good base from which to govern, and the crisis of his minor coalition partner may well deprive him of the four votes he depends on to secure the absolute majority of 337 votes which he requires for re-election.

Kohl’s opportunity

The first official session of the new Parliament is scheduled to take place in Berlin on Nov. 10. As of this writing, it is not yet clear when the re-election of Kohl is supposed to occur; it will take place, leaks in Bonn have it these hectic days, some day between Nov. 11 and the first national party convention of Kohl’s CDU after the elections, which is scheduled to be held in Bonn on Nov. 28.

The latter date is a very important one, and Kohl has it in his hands to give it great historic significance: Five years ago, on Nov. 28, 1989 (three weeks after the Berlin Wall was opened, at the peak of the East German regime’s disintegration crisis), Kohl presented a sensational 10-point program for the reunification of the two Germanys and the reconstruction of both the eastern German and the east European economies. Delivering this 10-point program in a parliamentary address that day, Kohl specifically referred to the project of restoring the old, pre-war rail link from Paris to Moscow, running through Berlin and Warsaw.

That 10-point platform seemed to reflect the programmatic impact of what had by that time been a year-long political lobbying campaign by the LaRouche movement, after the speech given by Lyndon LaRouche on Oct. 12, 1988, in the western part of Berlin, on that subject of developing the continental European infrastructure as a joint East-West project (see text on p. 24). Kohl’s platform also seemed to reflect the input of similar ideas which the chairman of Deutsche Bank, Alfred Herrhausen, had worked out during a process of distancing himself from the monetaristic outlooks of, spe-



Chancellor Helmut Kohl (center) campaigns in Günzburg on Oct. 9, during the national election campaign. Five years ago, Kohl's 10-point program for German reunification and reconstruction included an excellent proposal for restoring rail ties from Paris to Moscow, via Berlin and Warsaw. That proposal, which was never implemented, is all the more vital today.

cifically, the Anglo-American world of banking.

A car-bomb killed Herrhausen on Nov. 30, two days after Kohl's parliamentary address, in an assassination attack that was instantly evaluated by those in the know as a message from the extremist free-market faction among British-dominated bankers, to Germany's elites, not to intervene in the ailing and rapidly disintegrating Soviet bloc on their own, but rather to leave the field open to cutthroat "western interests."

It is said in Bonn that Kohl was blackmailed by those "interests" (which were personified by Margaret Thatcher and George Bush) to either play by the rules and forget his 10-point program, or forget the reunification of Germany.

Meanwhile, Germany was reunified—in October 1990—and U.S. President Bill Clinton, who visited Germany in mid-July this year, has stated his support for a bigger German role in the economic development of the East. Moreover, Britain's political elites are absorbed, even paralyzed, by the disintegration of their foremost national symbol, the Royal House of Windsor, these autumn days of 1994.

There should, therefore, be no reason at all for any German chancellor in this favorable international constellation not to do what was originally planned in late 1989. And the chances of succeeding now are good, especially since the extremist free-market methods applied on the former Soviet bloc by such shining lights of British economic theories as Jeffrey Sachs, have proven insane and outrightly

catastrophic. The situation in Russia is the best documentation of that.

The Russian connection

It was a Russian, actually, who reminded Kohl of that old proposal for a grand Berlin-Moscow rail project: none other than President Boris Yeltsin, during his May 1994 visit to Germany. Kohl told Yeltsin at that time that he viewed the project as one of "the highest priority," and that it would be realized after his re-election as German chancellor.

The new German government also has no other choice but to push ahead with grand infrastructure development programs, if it wants to take seriously its promise to fight against a jobless rate of more than 7 million Germans. Only a bundle of big technology projects, backed by the state through long-term, low-interest investment loans, can offer the perspective of reducing the joblessness significantly.

The envisioned Berlin-Moscow rail link is exactly that type of project. Even the most conservative prognoses (by those who say the Germans should only build "their" own section of the rail track, the Poles and Russians "theirs") speak of an immediate investment incentive of 20-plus billion deutschemarks and an employment effect of 250,000 new jobs, which the realization of that 1,900-kilometer rail link from Berlin to Moscow would have on the German economy. It is about time that Kohl delivers on his old promises.