

East Germans vote for freedom, against socialism

by Rainer Apel

Contradicting most of the pre-election opinion polls, the majority of East Germans did not vote for the Social Democrats and their platform of “democratic socialism,” but for the anti-socialist bloc of three parties, the Alliance for Germany. March 18, the date of the first free elections in Soviet-occupied East Germany since October 1946, saw a landslide victory of those parties who during the election campaign had been most outspoken in their “yes” to rapid German reunification.

The Christian Democrats (CDU) came out as the strongest party in 12 out of East Germany’s 15 election districts, was the second-strongest in two other districts, and was rated third-largest in the leftist-dominated district of East Berlin. Countrywide, the CDU alone received 40.91%, leaving its main rivals, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Communists (PDS, formerly the SED) far behind, with only 21.84% and 16.3% of the vote respectively. Together with the two other parties of the Alliance bloc, the German Social Union (DSU, 6.32%) and the Democratic Revolution (DA, 0.92%), the CDU came close to an absolute majority of seats in the new parliament, with 48.15%.

Most noteworthy is the fact that half of the votes in all key industrial areas was not cast for the Social Democrats; labor in these historically left-wing strongholds broke with the past and voted for the conservatives. This corroborated the pattern from the preceding mass strike wave and the public protest rallies, where many banners were displayed reading, “No more experiments with socialism!”

The communists of the PDS had a strong showing only where the remains of the bureaucracy of their previous regime were strongest: in East Berlin (29.97%), in Neubrandenburg (25.80%), and in Rostock (23.17%). The SPD was strongest in the centers of the opposition intellectuals, scoring their highest gains in East Berlin (34.95%) and Potsdam (34.32%).

The March 18 vote is the result not only of 44 years of building in-depth opposition to the communist regime among the East Germans; it is also a strong reaction to the recent phony scandal launched by the communist-controlled media against DA chairman Wolfgang Schnur, who had to step down from his party functions and



The Jan. 21 Monday Night demonstration in Leipzig, capital of the democratic revolution. Witty banners say, better Kohl [cabbage in German] than Red beets; they pour disgust on the corrupt, ousted Honecker regime and its drug-running minion Schalck; and they lampoon the communist SED, renamed PDS (Social Democratic Party). A quarter of a million newspaper extras distributed at such rallies by Patriots for Germany and the Schiller Institute, told voters how the West German Social Democrats had supported their hated rulers for a long time.

the slate only a few days before the election. The entire affair, a mixture of anonymous denunciation, half-baked facts and hints, dirty rumors, and political blackmail, reminded too many East Germans of the fact that powerful relics of the old regime are still around and still have a potential for causing damage to the opposition. The affair was less revealing about Schnur himself, than it was about the communists. The vote on March 18 was therefore also a reflex of a spontaneous mass sentiment that said: "Make the conservatives strong, so that this nightmare may end at last."

The communists are much better organized than the Social Democrats, whose potential voters were greatly affected by the public outrage against the scandal-mongers; that is why the SPD's votes got squeezed in this heated back-and-forth on the Schnur case, while the communist vote remained low but stable.

A secondary motive (not the prime one, as most international media falsely reported) behind the vote was the majority feeling that only the conservatives could guarantee the rapid integration of East Germany into the western Federal Republic of Germany, and would make the western deusemark the new currency of the East German sector. The PDS, everybody knew, was against unity and would stop at nothing to sabotage it. The SPD, many suspected, only paid lip-service to reunification and was nothing but a flanking operation for the West German Social Democrats, whose main interest has been to sabotage West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's reunification policy until the December 1990 elections for West German parliament, when the SPD still

hopes to replace him with a social democratic government. This tactic of delay and sabotage is exactly the opposite of what the vast majority of the voters in East Germany wanted.

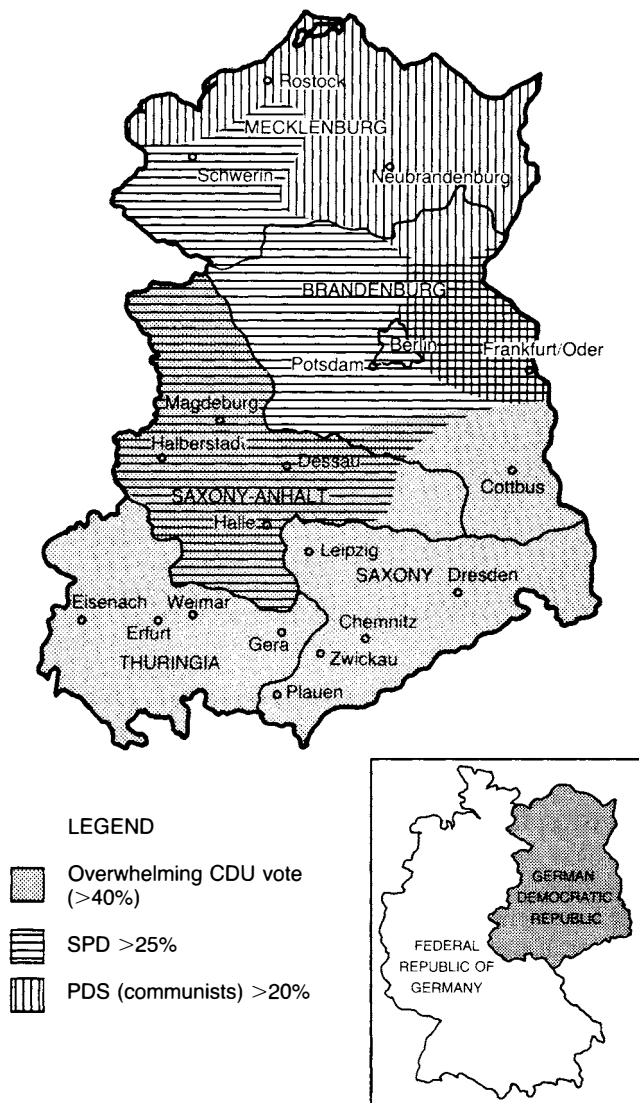
Cutting through the hate propaganda

Most of the international news media, with the Anglo-American media leading the charge, have been portraying the East German population as being guided solely by motives such as greed for cheap Western bananas, or as chauvinists aiming for a "Fourth German Reich," for German supremacy over all of Europe. For this reason, some words must be said on what is on the minds of the East Germans.

When the old communist regime fell in October 1989, under the domestic and international pressure created by the peaceful mass rallies of millions of people in nearly all East German cities, an immense spirit of progress was on the East Germans' minds. Especially when the Berlin Wall and the German-German borders were opened for free transit on Nov. 9, it was generally believed that now, the two German governments would meet and discuss a policy of rapid reunification, introduce Western-style economic management, and reorganize the East German society in a such a way that political freedom and all other vital attributes of a modern republican state would become accessible for the East Germans. It was generally hoped that the nightmare of 44 years of Stalinist repression, personified by the Stasi secret police apparatus, was over, at last.

hope was bitterly betrayed by the transition regime of the "reformed communists" around Prime Minister Hans Mo-

Voting patterns in East Germany



The East German Christian Democratic Party won the most votes in virtually every district, but was particularly strong in the southern industrial belt, which was formerly a "red" stronghold. The communists were crushed, but maintained toeholds around the administrative center of Berlin and in the militarized north.

drow. The communists anticipated that the popular movement would want to quickly seize the files of the Stasi, in order to find out how its command structure worked and who the chief criminals were in that system, and to discover the identities of those who comprised the Stasi's huge network of informants and collaborators, so as to ensure that these individuals did not penetrate the opposition groups and parties. The Modrow regime therefore resolved to seal all the files and postpone all "sensitive" investigations until after the elections.

The "reformed communists" played for time to restructure their party and front organizations, to reorganize the core of the Stasi repression and infiltration apparatus, and—most important—to secure the clandestine transfer to the Soviet KGB, of all sensitive files on the central occupation network of the Soviets in East Germany. This includes the network of about 5,000 East German spies still operating in West Germany and the rest of Europe.

The case of Gregor Gysi

Evidence on this communist rescue and evacuation operation came to light through a news leak about internal sessions of the communist PDS leadership on March 5. In response to worried questions from party cadres all over the country, PDS chairman Gregor Gysi stated in a secret circular to all relevant party sections that files and names of key Stasi personnel had been mixed and rewritten in order to secure a base for future operations against the opposition. Gysi stated that the opposition "citizen committees" had no access to the most important Stasi files, that the core of the old apparatus had not been affected by the revolution.

Gysi, who has received much favorable Western media coverage since mid-December when he was elected new party chairman of the SED-PDS, may be a gifted populist, but he is definitely not a "nice guy." He is advised by a team of three senior Soviet foreign intelligence officers: hard-core German communists Markus Wolf, Moritz Meckel, and Sonja Kuczynski. Two of these deserve close attention: Wolf was the longtime head of the Stasi foreign intelligence apparatus from 1958-87 and has sought refuge with the KGB in Moscow, whence he is directing dirty tricks and smear campaigns against the conservatives in East Germany. Mrs. Kuczynski has been a foreign agent of the Comintern apparatus since the 1920s; she popped up in the Stalinist exile enclave of Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s, and played a central role in the Rote Kappelle ("Red Orchestra") espionage and sabotage organization based in Paris during the 1930s.

It was here, among this team of Gysi advisers, that the ominous series of anti-Soviet slogan-sprays on Red Army monuments and military installations between Christmas and New Year was designed. Even though most East Germans were convinced that they had been arranged by the Stasi, the communist-controlled East German media went ahead and tried to blame the incidents on the new opposition parties.

The ploy backfired, because no one, not even the staunchest members and supporters of the communists, took the incidents seriously. The next smear campaign was against Wolfgang Schnur, the chairman of the DA opposition party; then a third was launched immediately after the landslide conservative victory in the March 18 elections. Leaks were then circulated through the media that "many of the newly elected deputies" of the parliament had been contacts of the Stasi. The outgoing Modrow regime, certain to be replaced

by a conservative-led government within two weeks after the elections, did a last act of select sabotage, posing an ultimatum to all 400 deputies to step forward and clarify their past connections to the Stasi.

But one should never lose the sight of the fact that those who are behind the slander campaign, the SED and its “re-formist” successor, the PDS, were very closely interwoven with the old Stasi—much more closely than any of the other parties before the revolution. If there is anything to “clarify” at all, it is the interconnections between the PDS/SED and the Stasi, and the continuity of these links. Because there is still an untouched enclave of intimidation and manipulation of the remaining membership and its strongholds in the bureaucracy, their families and relatives, the PDS was able to gain 16.3% of the vote on March 18.

May 6, the next milestone

With the May 6 municipal elections in East Germany only a few weeks ahead, the most urgent task will be to crush this relic of communist power and to drive the communists out of every central position in the country, once and for all. This is also important in respect to remaining illusions in Moscow, about chances of disrupting the German reunification process, of infiltrating the new political landscape, of placing sabotage specialists in key positions in the future reunified Germany.

On May 6 the former opposition parties are aiming at making sure that the PDS receives at most one-third the number of votes that it won on March 18. This can be achieved through a ruthless investigation and legal mop-up of the remains of the old Stalinist regime within the next four weeks.

PDS chairman Gysi himself is an inviting target. His father, Klaus Gysi, a longtime communist party member in charge of spying on and controlling the churches of East Germany, was one of the first members of the regime who had to step down at the height of the peaceful revolution last autumn. His son Gregor, a lawyer by profession like Wolfgang Schnur, did not have to make deals with the Stasi, because he led a privileged life as the son of a senior regime official. Sons and daughters of other senior party and regime officials have had to step down; but not so Gregor Gysi, who seems to be a well-protected asset. Here is where one could find most revealing details on how the continuity of the old regime, in new disguise, works.

In the interest of consolidating democratic rule in East Germany, pressure on the PDS must be maximized in the coming weeks. The anti-socialist forces of the Alliance for Germany and the Liberals—which together already have a 53.33% majority of seats in the new East German parliament—can count on the sobering effect of the SPD’s election defeat among disappointed Social Democrats.

The dilemma of the Social Democrats

The Social Democrats of East Germany emerged last autumn as one segment of the mass-based, multi-faceted

revolution. Then suddenly in December, acting on outside pressure from the West German SPD, the eastern SPD decided to walk out of the planned joint opposition slate against the communists and their front organizations. The original plan was to gain a landslide majority of at least two-thirds of the voters, bring the communist influence down to almost zero, and reorganize the giant task of economic, political, and jurisdictional recovery through a temporary, emergency coalition of all non-communist parties.

The SPD walked out, tempted by unsound opinion polls that said the party could gain an absolute majority on its own, thus driving the first big wedge into the mass opposition against the regime. Other opposition groups with leftist and ecologist outlooks, such as the New Forum and Democracy Now, followed the SPD on this desertion course.

All of these deserters were defeated in the March 18 elections. The main political showdown is now between the conservative Alliance and the communist PDS; all the other groups have to line up with one side or the other, and the SPD would do well to return to the original concept of the united anti-communist opposition that would have a two-thirds majority if the parliamentary seats of the Alliance and the Social Democrats are added to each other.

Should the SPD, however, under the influence of the West German SPD election strategists, continue with the policy of obstruction it has pursued since late December, it is certain to suffer another defeat in the May 6 municipal elections. The main bulk of the votes will then be divided up between the Alliance and the PDS, and the communists will try to gain votes from the SPD’s socialist current. But this is something the SPD and PDS must fight out among themselves.

Meanwhile, one week after the March 18 elections, it seemed more likely that the new East German government would be composed of the conservatives and the liberals, mirroring the ruling government coalition in West Germany, with the SPD being seated together with the PDS on the opposition banks in the parliament. But there were also hints that stronger currents in the SPD’s parliamentary group would prefer to enter the municipal election campaign at arm’s length from the PDS. By March 21, some sources in Bonn and East Berlin were already predicting that sooner or later, the SPD would ruefully return to the Alliance and enter the government. A “Grand Coalition” would be able, at least, to secure the integration of East Germany into West Germany through a solid, “no-risks” majority of two-thirds of the votes in the parliament; this would make the entire reunification process much smoother, because it would create an undefeatable pincer movement against the obstructionism of the PDS.

But there are other options, too. Reunification will also work with a “simple” parliamentary majority of Alliance and Liberal votes, which could launch a referendum of the East German population on the unity question. The outcome of that referendum would be certain.