

Reds, Greens block German infrastructure

by Rainer Apel

The first action of the new "red-green" government in the German state of Saxe-Anhalt, to announce a drastic and senseless reduction of the speed limit on the highway connecting Berlin with the western part of the country, bodes ill for the future of infrastructure projects in the east.

The minority government coalition, consisting of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party, is only able to stay in office with the support of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), successor to the former ruling East German communist party, the SED. Unfortunately, the radical environmentalism in Saxe-Anhalt could turn out to be a model for other eastern states, located in geographical positions which are important for the expanding of traffic connections.

In upcoming elections in Brandenburg (Sept. 11) and Mecklenburg-Prepomerania (Oct. 10), the preferred coalition partner of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), will very probably fail to gain the 5% of the vote necessary to bring it into the state parliaments. If the Social Democrats refuse to cooperate with the CDU, a red-green constellation similar to that in Saxe-Anhalt will emerge.

The major part of the planned Transrapid magnetically levitated railroad line from Hamburg to Berlin goes through the state of Brandenburg, while part of the projected A-20 Baltic highway is located in Mecklenburg-Prepomerania, as well as the former nuclear site at Greifswald, where nuclear research programs are planned. The Hanover-Berlin high-speed railway is in Saxe-Anhalt, along with a major part of projected improvements for navigation on the Elbe River. All of these projects are already subject to protests by environmentalist groups, Greens, the PDS, and parts of the SPD, and this could mean that if those political currents get a major say in their state governments, nothing will function east of the Elbe.

The Greens have announced that, should it form a coalition government with the SPD after the federal elections in October, it will stop construction of the Baltic highway and the Transrapid maglev train, by government decree. Many Social Democrats clearly sympathize with this policy, endorsing what SPD chancellor candidate Rudolf Scharping calls "an ecologically compatible economy." It seems that despite some useful initiatives in industrial policy, the SPD

has not overcome more than 15 years of the radical ecological propaganda of its former standard-bearer, Oscar Lafontaine, and others.

The role of the 'former' communists

While ideological fixations are the main motive in the Green and Social Democratic parties, things are somewhat different with the PDS. The "former" communists are using ecology as a means of deliberate sabotage of the western economy, just as did their predecessor, the SED. They want to use the ensuing economic and social problems as a lever for their propaganda and political blackmail.

If things elsewhere go the way they have in Saxe-Anhalt, where the PDS is not part of the government and can oppose the "red-green" coalition whenever it wants, yet the government depends on it in all major decisions, the PDS will have an ideal situation for blackmail. Not since the days of the Communist Party of Germany in the Weimar Republic have communists had so much political influence in the whole of Germany. Furthermore, the PDS can rely on a highly mobilized membership and large vote percentages in the eastern states, which give it the potential to block important government projects through petitions, should the parliamentary lever not be sufficient.

Effect on eastern Europe

In addition to the effects inside Germany, a major concern is how the economic construction of eastern Europe could ever get moving, if essential modern transportation links connecting it to the West, via Germany, never come into existence. Without the A-20 highway, the lines of the ICE high-speed train and the maglev connections going east from Berlin, to Poland, for example, will have to rely on transportation networks built right after World War II, or even earlier, which cannot cope with today's traffic volume. Truck drivers regularly have to wait 12, 15, or more hours at the German-Polish border crossing at Forst. Right now, with drastic speed limit reductions supposedly to abate ozone pollution, which is becoming more frequent in some German states, travel times will come to approximate those of the 19th century. One might as well take a horse and carriage from Berlin to Poznan or Warsaw.

Nor will the reconstruction of industrial production in the Czech and Slovak republics succeed, if the planned improvements of shipping capabilities on the Elbe are blocked, and if the connection of the Czech and Slovak industrial centers to the Hamburg harbor is not carried out.

Without infrastructure, the hoped-for generation of industry and jobs will not occur. Under a "red-green" regime, what will happen in the East will be what has already happened in the western part of Germany during the last 20 years of environmentalist sabotage: Hundreds of billions of deutschmarks of investment will become politically impossible, with disastrous economic consequences.