

GERMANY'S PARTY OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

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A great many people expected in 1989 that the break with the old East-bloc communist parties might lead to some strong forces for the renewal of socialism. Many people in the West were surprised at the time that there was so little expression of this. In the German Democratic Republic there was, in fact, a strong democratic socialist current in the demonstrations of the Fall of 1989. Although in the context of the abrupt unification with West Germany this current was smothered, it nevertheless re-emerged via the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). This is a development that bears very careful examination.

The following essay is an attempt to illuminate the **PDS's** potential as a socialist organisation. It is impossible to cover here the legal-political struggles between the PDS and the state as regards expropriation attempts, attempts to delegitimise or **criminalise** some of its leaders, etc., nor the mainstream media distortion of the PDS. The main purpose, rather, must be to describe and analyse this organisation's programme, its actual political practice, the character of its membership, its relationship to the rest of the left, and the attitudes of the population, principally in the East, towards it.

The Political Culture of GDR Intellectuals

To understand the PDS, it is necessary to begin by noting the rather special characteristics of the GDR intelligentsia which contained more **critically-minded** Marxists than that of any other East-bloc country. In the first weeks of the *Wende* (*Wende* = the 1989 "turning point" in the GDR) it was possible to hear expressions of socialist sentiment on the part of several of the citizen-movement leaders. And the overwhelmingly socialist slogans of the first demonstrations in the GDR were not a mirage simply because they were finally eclipsed by a pro-unification wave. There was indeed a sentiment for socialism in the GDR, most conspicuously among Berlin intellectuals and artists, and among other strata, especially in the central and northern regions.

Of all the countries later to be included in the East-bloc, the Eastern part of Germany had experienced the highest level of pre-war industrialisation, and had developed the largest indigenous socialist and communist intelligentsia and working class. No other East-bloc country was enriched by so many prestigious left and communist artists and intellectuals returning to it from war-time emigration in Western Europe or North and South America. The SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland = Socialist Unity Party, the GDR's ruling party that resulted from the KPD-SPD merger) was still in 1989 "in however deformed a way, the repository of the strong socialist and communist traditions in the parts of the former German Reich that now constitute the GDR. It has not suffered the traumatic splits and purges of its Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovak counterparts since the 1950s, and its considerable reform-communist potential has not so far been displayed." The SED was able to absorb and retain so many pre-war communists and socialists because the guilt of social-democrats, Christian activists and communists for having failed to avert or defeat Nazism led to a determination to hold out in the face of a repressive atmosphere and stay in the country, retaining their socialist ideals.⁷ Moreover, the guilt at having inflicted suffering on the Soviet people was not only an official ideology; it was widely felt by left intellectuals outside the KPD. In this connection, even the merger of the KPD and SPD in 1946 was not entirely a manipulated sham; there was a genuine feeling in the Berlin SPD for it. The SPD even had a "pro-Russian" wing!⁸

The repercussions of the purges of the 1950s were comparatively less devastating in the GDR than in Poland and Hungary, because the workers' and intellectuals' revolts of 1953 and 1956 respectively were separate and, therefore, less explosively dangerous. The SED leadership was able to "break" the intellectuals' revolt more surgically and selectively. In Poland, by contrast, there were still some notable, creative Marxists in the 1950s, but after the purges only a handful remained; in the GDR many more such people survived all purges. Although it was not allowed real public exposure, there was widespread debate and dissent in the GDR, but it took place much more within a Marxist orbit. (One factor that helped keep Marxism attractive for the intellectuals was the fact that, unlike in the libraries of the USSR, for example, it was possible to read Western Marxist literature in GDR libraries.)

The ranks of Marxist intellectuals were less devastated in the GDR because of the regime's policy of privileging them and applying a carrot-and-stick policy. It was often the older loyal intellectuals who exhibited the most consistently critical attitudes. Stefan Hermlin (a Spanish Civil-War veteran, now in the PDS) had organised daring symposia and written courageous position papers on artistic freedom, which were then followed by rebukes and punishments but which still left him enough freedom to publish and be widely read. Not all dissidents were as lucky, but nevertheless Hermlin's career, and those of Stefan Heym and Christa Wolf are

typical enough of a representative group of dissidents to illustrate the distinct character of the GDR intelligentsia.

In the context of the current backlash of the Eastern populations which are experiencing a wave of nostalgia and defensiveness *vis-à-vis* their specifically Eastern ethnic or national identities, the case of the East German population, especially the intellectuals, again stands out from the rest. The exceptional situation of two countries, the GDR and the FRG, sharing the same language and basic culture, but with two different social systems, has, now as before, left GDR citizens with less of a national, ethnic, basis for any local pride and identity and has forced that identity to be much more centred around the idea of a social system than is the case in other Eastern European countries. Thus even people who would not directly profess socialist beliefs are able, when their pride is wounded, to identify with the social system in which they had grown up. This is not contradicted by the fact that there is now a dangerous minority that supports xenophobic attacks against immigrant workers. Those who were most militant in accepting a new "Germanness" opposed to the communist past in 1990 were forced to suppress their "Easternness". And when the same people were suddenly beset with the current specifically Eastern problems they could only blame non-Germans. But racist explanations for social pressures are still new to GDR culture, as is greater-German nationalism, and polls consistently show negligible electoral support for such nationalist projects as well as for the extreme right-*Republikaner* in the East. There is now, moreover, a swing away from the right towards the SPD and PDS. It is important, also, that this GDR specificum should not be lost amidst a common-sense assumption, based on the Nazi experience, of a given and immutable German racism more virulent than e.g. Polish or French racism.

The PDS

The rebellion within the SED in November–December 1989 was the accomplishment of the rank-and-file; it was never initiated at the top. The Central Committee building was besieged several times in those months (when both a CC plenum and a Special Party Congress were held) by the rank-and-file groups of the Berlin party organisation. Even the normally hostile *tageszeitung* (taz), Germany's principal pro-Green Party daily, reported as moving and sincere the expressions of radical democratic positions and allegiance to communist traditions coming from the rank-and-filers. "Tens of thousands of SED members from the 'rank-and-file' on November 8th in front of the CC building. It was a spontaneous demo called by word of mouth in the city. They were even more bitter than others in the society because what was done wrong or criminally was done in the name of socialism. . . . 'We want finally to play a role, even if not a leading

one!' The SED rank-and-file protested against years-long tutelage. A locksmith's introduction was typical: 'I am a powerless comrade.' Almost every speaker demanded democratization, delegation from bottom to top, a special party congress. . . . A woman asked whether the movement was passing the women by. She demanded quotas in all Party structures. . . . A female tractor driver, a fireman, etc. spoke. 'The self-righteousness of the leadership is unbearable . . .' The SED rank-and-file concluded by singing defiantly, desperately and movingly the Internationale. Many waved their Party card in their hands or held up their fists.¹⁰⁴ There were similar actions in Halle and Neubrandenburg, where the party rank-and-file threatened strikes. At the November CC meeting, compromises were made, some reformers were added and almost all of the old leadership were dropped, but the rank-and-file wanted a Special Party Congress to enact more radical changes.

By December 3rd the whole CC resigned; Gregor Gysi was given the role of investigating corruption and preventing the destruction of evidence; delegates for the upcoming December 8th Special Party Congress were coming forward with demands from their constituents for what amounted to the foundation of a new socialist party. During that week about 500,000 members, including entire district leaderships, left the party.

In the December 8th Special Party Congress, where the SED was turned into the SED-PDS, the 2,700 delegates voted 95% for Gregor Gysi, the lawyer who had defended Rudolf Bahro, Robert Havemann, Barbel Bohley and New Forum, as new chair. They unanimously rejected liquidation of the party and elected 101 national Vorstand (directorate) members to replace the old 300-member Central Committee. (By the Feb 24th 1990 Electoral Party Congress 33 of these had left the Vorstand.) Gysi warned that the overcoming of the 40-year Stalinist tradition was still before them. Immediately, there was the expression of the wish not to have a single line, that the members should "not wait for the new line" but should "struggle over the Party's path." Unity from now on was not to mean closed ranks within the Party but rather "openness *vis-à-vis* all democratic movements and people." Gysi's speech named the progressive lines of the communist, social-democratic and antifascist and pacifist traditions which should be absorbed into the Party's platform. This was the beginning of the party's struggle to absorb and go beyond communist, social-democratic and social-movement traditions. As Gysi said, "What we're trying out here doesn't yet exist in the world." He called for the dissolution of the Betriebskampfgruppen (factory-based militia) and the abolition of the Ministry of State Security (MfS or "Stasi").

Although the initial changes were driven by rank-and-file pressures, nevertheless in that first congress the voting was still passive, with delegates approving everything the new young leadership proposed. It was

only later, starting in 1991, but largely in 1992, that radical democratic rank-and-file processes become more **firmly** rooted.

In the first few months of the party's existence in its new form, the continuity with part of the old apparatus still made many people uneasy. (The apparatus before the reform included **44,000** people.) Lothar Bisky, now chair of the PDS, recalls how, "as the PDS was founded, everyday it was a decisive question if one was falsely informed by the apparatus. Who's representing what interests? One didn't **know**."

The first major problem was the Treptow Monument rally in January 1990 which illustrated the difficulty of calling for defence of the GDR against neo-fascists as a way to rally people behind the party, with the Stasi and party apparatus essentially still present. The party called a mass anti-fascist rally at the Soviet memorial in Treptow Park, Berlin on **January 3rd**, 1990. Using the neo-Nazi defacements and **graffiti** that had recently appeared in Berlin, including on the Treptow monument, the SED-PDS planned a show of force to rally the party and its allies and boost morale. **250,000** people came, and although the demo did on the surface accomplish its immediate goals, calling upon the anti-fascist traditions of the country, the damage it caused was longer-lasting. Vestiges of Stalinist anti-fascist rhetoric from some speakers conveyed an image of continuity with the SED tradition of using such rhetoric to eclipse other problems. As Gysi later realised, it was clearly ill-considered to demand a new security force without having thoroughly dismantled the old one and just after Prime Minister **Modrow's** regime had called for a new security force. Those among the **organisers** with whom I spoke were happy with the morale and **spirit** but had a sinking feeling observing types in the crowd who merely yelled slogans calling for a security force. Any GDR citizen could have recognised them as **MfS** (State Security Ministry) plainclothesmen. The leadership was embarrassed. Intra-party conflicts resulted, the citizens movements were even more alienated, and the Western press made much of it.

During the second half of January 1990 criticism within the Party reached a peak. There was increasing external pressure on members, yet demands for dissolving the party came mostly from its own ranks. Thousands of members left daily, and the infrastructure crumbled rapidly. It was at this point (**Jan 21st**) that Dresden mayor and party vice-chair Wolfgang Berghofer quit and joined the SPD. He favoured quick economic and currency union with the West. Up to that time the **SED-PDS's** internal debates were driven by a series of legal – and, indeed, encouraged – factions or "platforms" **e.g.** the Social-Democratic Platform, "**Third-Way**" Platform, PDS Initiative Platform, Communist Platform (KPF). The departure of Berghofer and other leading Dresden party officials triggered another wave of resignations, principally of **social-democratically** oriented members, careerists, economic functionaries and

apparatus members, the **Volkspolizei** and officer corps. But, as Gysi pointed out,⁴ there were also some who left simply out of fear of blacklisting on their jobs. They were reacting to the climate of increased anti-SED hostility in January (as a result of more revelations of SED leadership corruption and the Treptow demonstration).

On January 18th, all party factions (except the **KPF**) were calling for the dissolution of the **SED-PDS**.⁷ At this point there was a counter-movement, which itself was a continuation of the spontaneous rank-and-file demos during the CC meeting in November '89: young people, especially women, demanded thorough-going renewal instead of liquidation. On the 20th, the Vorstand passed a resolution for a rapid and consistent renewal of the party to be laid out in detailed steps. This would include the further reduction of the apparatus, the quickest possible separation from discredited party members, and the consistent continuation of rehabilitation proceedings.

After the Berghofer withdrawal, a second rank-and-file impulse turned into a movement with an amazing constructive capacity for the rescue of the party. It caught almost everybody by surprise.⁸ An example was the spontaneous meeting, on the same evening as Berghofer's resignation announcement on TV, of young members of the Dresden district directorate to form a presidium capable of getting to work immediately. The dissolution decision of the Saalfeld directorate brought more than 100 rank-and-filers out of their houses during the night to elect immediately a new local directorate. Thus at several crucial stages, from November 1989 on, it was not old functionaries, but rank-and-file movements of largely young members who kept the PDS alive and, moreover, gave some reality to the leadership's conception of the party as a movement.⁹

On January 26th, the Party directorate met with the district and local leaderships, and as a result Gysi announced that there would be no dissolution of the party.¹⁰

Out of these spontaneous grassroots reform actions came the so-called "initiative groups". These groups often took over local party organisations. By January/February a series of task forces ("**AG**'s) (gays and lesbians, feminists, ecology, artists, and others) were formally established. Among these, the AG Junge **GenossInnen** (Young Comrades) played an increasingly crucial role. Their credibility with non-party young people did much to render the PDS more attractive to progressive youth, and they brought radical grassroots conceptions and ways of working into the party. The Young Comrades developed structures throughout the ex-GDR and have played a prominent role in the initiation or challenging of the party's programmes and statute. Although these **AG**s and initiative groups led the way to the now generally accepted political culture of the party, it has to be borne in mind that they alienated many working-class members who saw the SED-PDS as a "party of intellectuals and platforms."

It became clear in January that the GDR would be absorbed into the FRG. This **alone** ensured that the PDS, if it could survive, would be radically different from any other Eastern reformed ruling party. It could have no hope of being a party of government, and no career could be made in it. It was forced to be an inevitably persecuted left opposition, and did not even have the option of being social-democratic, there being no room for a second SPD in Germany. This realisation set in during January, and the Berghofer withdrawal of January 21st sealed it. From this moment on, the party was destined to diverge ever more sharply from the patterns of Eastern-European social-democratised communist parties. At this time, part of the membership published a critical statement in *Neues Deutschland* – the daily newspaper which had been the SED organ and by 1991, although very close to the PDS, had gained considerable editorial independence from it – on the policies emerging from the **GDR's** new regime headed by party-member Hans **Modrow**. There is no evidence of an unequivocal official party position sanctioning the regime's policies on reunification and on market **economy**¹⁷ at that time. Indeed, harsh debate and resignations took place in reaction to those policies.

In February 1990 there was a kind of truce between the intra-party factions in view of the upcoming elections (to the **GDR's** first democratically elected Volkskammer). This was also the period of the **PDS's** "comeback" (on February 3rd–4th "**SED**" was dropped from the name "**SED-PDS**") in which many of those afraid of the consequences of unification and many progressive youths seeking "a strong left **opposition**" (as I often heard during my polling-place interviews on March 18th, 1990) considered voting for the PDS. During the Volkskammer election campaign, Gysi showed himself to be the most sympathetic, entertaining and agile politician in Germany, in the opinion of much of the mainstream media, in this way contributing greatly to the self-esteem and optimism of PDS members and of many other GDR citizens as well.

The Electoral Party Congress of 24th–25th February 1990 elected a new presidium consisting of 13 men and 14 women, and among the 595 delegates there were many young people. In all, about 200,000 had left the party in January. Gysi spoke of "650,000 to 700,000 members" (2.3 million before November 1989), and he mentioned an interesting point: women had left the party in much smaller numbers than men, so that the proportion of women in the PDS had risen. The staff of the national party directorate consisted of 360 people (42% of the size of the former CC staff), with a lot of new young members among them. The district directorates had been reduced to 10–20% of the size of the SED ones; the local directorates had from 5 to 15 paid staff. This was a time in which many young people joined the party.

The mass exodus from the party in the second half of January had included most of the apparatus. By the end of 1990 only a thin layer of them

remained. The new leadership wavered between keeping secrets from some of the remaining "apparatchiki" and relying on their often considerable expertise. It appeared too extreme, based on mere suspicion and feeling, to get rid of all loyal staffers who had a connection to the old way of doing things. But the continued presence of such elements in the PDS inevitably left many problems in store. In October 1990, those responsible for managing the PDS's assets, Wolfgang Pohl and Wolfgang Langnitschke, carried out an absurd plan of stashing away some of the old SED assets in a fictitious Moscow firm. West-German intelligence had been on to it from the start and waited for the kickoff of the Bundestag electoral campaign in October 1990 to make it public.

"Inevitable Social-Democratization" and Market-Economy Naiveté

After its first programmatic utterances (December 8th, 1989 and February 24th, 1990), the PDS was placed in a long series of crisis situations which delayed programme discussion. Summary dismissals of the PDS's politics and potential based solely on the programmatic statements of those months, treating the party, outside of its real context, like a newly-founded Western party, prevent a serious examination of a complex new reality. The surrounding context of the PDS and the dynamics of the social-political situation in which the party found itself differed from those of other East-bloc CPs or of West-European parties with greater incentives to social-democratisation. Considerable sensitivity to the chronology and context of the programmatic utterances and politics of the PDS is needed. The party's electoral programme of February 1990 was predicated on the idea of a GDR that was, to some degree, independent. Therefore, demands like co-determination and democratisation within factories, addition of more market to the state economy, etc., could have been portrayed as conventionally social-democratic if the PDS had been proposing these demands within West Germany, but they were trying to rescue and democratise an already existing highly centralised state-run economy and then, increasingly, to cushion the inevitable capitalisation and reunification process.

By June 1990, however, Modrow declared the PDS to be "a left socialist force in fundamental opposition to the capitalist conception of the solution of global problems of humanity." And, facing the full reality of the triumph of capitalism in the GDR, Gysi said at the same time: "The party needs a new programmatic, a new identity. We have to think differently vis-à-vis capitalism than was thought in January/February, a time when we were still figuring out what could be taken over that would be good for the GDR's own [separate] society. New also is the PDS's position on social democracy which indeed has in principle made peace with capital. That

peace we cannot make." " Nevertheless, the leadership still was determined to try to co-operate with the SPD on some issues, and to stress the "many commonalities" between itself and the (left) **SPDers** and Greens. As the **PDS's** Press Secretary said: "These naive things ['**capital-dominated society**, 'social market economy,' 'the civilizing achievements of capitalism'] went away quite quickly during 1991. It's hard to pin it down, but at one point it was seen that one could not get a majority in the party any more for such dreamy **concepts**."¹⁵

Finances

On May 31st, 1990 the creation of a Volkshammer commission concerned with the assets of GDR parties and mass organisations was the start of expropriation procedures against the PDS. The commission's executive arm became the Treuhand (state trusteeship for the privatisation and rehabilitation of factories, etc. and management of assets).

Although the PDS had voluntarily given away 75-80% of the SED assets in early 1990 (consisting of 2.6 billion GDR marks worth of factories, vacation homes and guest houses, five publishing firms, 3 billion in reserve funds, etc. totalling 3 billion DM) to the health system, universities, etc., they resolved, after the **Pohl/Langnitschke** affair at the end of 1990, to give up most of what still remained. And although the real apparatchik had left the party long before, there was a decision to cut down the number of full-time employees still more drastically and ensure extreme transparency in all affairs, especially financial. The party wanted to give most of its assets to the state and municipalities for public works. By that time the PDS was willing to defend its right only to the legally unassailable property confiscated by the Nazis from the pre-war KPD and returned by the Soviet Occupation Authority.¹⁶

As of January 1st, 1992 the PDS became an organisation supported exclusively by membership dues. With 147,000 dues-paying members this has been possible. The only usable real estate is the **Karl-Liebknecht Haus** in Berlin (federal headquarters) and a small restaurant property. This means that the PDS is now the poorest party in the Bundestag, poorer than the Greens who get support for their educational foundation. The PDS, as of now, does not even have election funds granted them, because the Treuhand says it still has to decide the assets question."

The Volkshammer Elections and After

The PDS's partial recovery from its image as a Stalinist party occurred as early as February-March 1990. On March 18th it received 16.33% of the vote. This reflected considerable popular enthusiasm – especially among the youth – for Gysi, as well as the immense popularity of Hans **Modrow**

(in February 1990 a poll showed him to be by far the most popular political figure in the GDR).

The difference between the SED and the PDS could be seen reflected in the **PDS's** electorate: polls showed that three quarters of the PDS's 1.9 million voters on March 18th, 1990 had never belonged to the SED. That also meant that the majority of former SED members did not vote for the PDS.

The youth vote of the PDS was 16% (SPD: 20%; **Bü90: 5%**).¹⁸ (**Bü90** = Bündnis 90, the March 1990 citizens-movement electoral alliance bringing together the three main organisations, and now, since the December 1990 Bundestag elections, joined together with the Green Party as **Grüne/Bü '90**). Very **striking** were the preferences of those still in school: 23% of them voted for the PDS (SPD: 23%; **Bü90: 7%**). But **blue-collar** workers punished the SED by giving the PDS only 10% (11.9% **MFW**), especially in the south, while workers in some northern industrial centres gave the party over 20%. Geographically the PDS did much better in the northern areas, with top results in East Berlin (almost 30% **MFW**).

Meanwhile, PDS leadership bodies were being reduced in size, and formal membership was **shrinking** (down to 460,000 by April 18th 1990 with only 320,000 applying for new cards). The proportion of women was 40%, but those under 30 made up only 10–11%. However, de facto youth participation, then as now, is greater than membership figures would **indicate**.¹⁹ Significantly, the vast majority of rank-and-file organisations had "moved" from factories to residential areas.

Due to prosecution, fear of job loss, the "finance scandal" and, for some, the inadequate pace of renewal, the PDS lost about 60,000 members between June '90 and January '91. Middle-aged members in particular – naturally most concerned about career and advancement – left in disproportionate numbers. A high proportion of state and economic functionaries and members of the armed forces had characterised SED membership, comprising about one-third of the former party. The PDS lost this character, but, of course, not all functionaries left the **PDS**.²⁰

A comparison with Russia is useful. In the Ex-GDR there is no "red-brown" coalition, and moderate or extreme nationalists and opportunists can only find a place in Western parties. And unlike in Bulgaria, for example, those who choose to channel their former **nomenklatura** careers in a social-democratic direction do not do so within the successor **organisation** of the former ruling party. Other channels are available to them. Moreover, the former high functionaries, military and **nomenklatura** careerists either resent the PDS or cannot be integrated into its new culture.

Right after the Volkskammerelections it became clear that the citizens movements would generally interpret any vote for the PDS as a conservative vote. There are two variants of this argument: 1) the people, above all

the working class, are conservative by definition, and therefore the party for whom they vote is conservative; 2) the PDS is conservative (because most of its members did not fundamentally reject the SED or had something to do with the state), and therefore the people who vote for it are displaying conservative thinking. But by 1992 the PDS had acquired the identity of a left opposition party, and yet, after the stunning victory for the PDS in the May Berlin municipalelections, Uwe **Lehmann**, a West-Berlin Green, put forward the theory that the PDS and the CDU draw from the same electorate-group, i.e. that the same people periodically swing back and forth between PDS and CDU.²⁴ But all available studies and polls show only a current swing from the CDU to the SPD or PDS. There is no evidence of a voter migration from the PDS to the CDU from 1990 to the present (February 1994).²⁵

Is the Old Berlin Apparatus the PDS's Only Electorate?

The Berlin electorate tends to get singled out by anti-PDS analysts when trying to cope with PDS electoral successes. They point to the high concentration of employees and high functionaries of the former state apparatus, who, it is assumed, will vote for the PDS and account for most of that vote.

In a *tageszeitung* (GDR edition) (April 10th, 1990) interview, the SPD candidate for the Berlin mayoralty, **Tino Schwierzina**, accounted for the PDS's success in Berlin on March 18th by pointing to Berlin as the stronghold of the administration and the Stasi. "These people voted for the PDS, because they believed that it best represented their interests; for example, secure pensions. That's one reason." But then he admits: "On the other hand an astoundingly large number of young people voted for the PDS, either out of an oppositional stance or to give us a light boxing on the ear in the first elections." The interviewer, **Walter Süß**, intervened: "I know many people who a year ago opposed the SED state but who then on March 18th voted for the PDS. In the reunification of the two German states they did not wish to be overrun and apparently trusted the PDS more than the SPD to attend to matters of social security. If the GDR-countrywide SPD now enters a coalition with the CDU [which it did] and its right arm the DSU, won't its possibilities of winning these young people to the SPD be even less than it is now?"

The discomfort with the Berlin electorate on the part of the social-democratic establishment is best illustrated by a study of East-European free elections commissioned by the Swedish Social-Democratic Party. First there is the familiar accusation that old functionaries comprise the Berlin PDS electorate. Next comes the admission that many young, typically "alternative" left-inclined people vote for the party. To cast the latter in a negative light it is then said that these people have been rendered

lazy by too many benefits from the former state-socialist regime and hope for more such. And so the young left vote is turned into something negative as well.

My own interviews of 47 voters in East Berlin on March 18th 1990 in Pankow, **Mitte** and Friedrichshain showed more than 85% who gave as their reason for voting PDS the need for "a strong left opposition." Most of this group seemed to be under 40, and to represent the typical left or "alternativescene." There was another frequently recurring type, though, who admitted to voting PDS. This consisted of young people rather of a traditional working-class type with young children. Their reason was almost always a concern for social security, but even a few of them mentioned "left opposition."

Furthermore, the "old apparatus" theory of the PDS electorate does not fit well with present PDS popularity in the youthful Berlin districts of Hellersdorf and Prenzlauerberg.

In any case, the terms "apparatchik," "functionary" and "bureaucrat" are thrown around all too easily to convey any sort of realistic picture of the texture of life in state socialist societies. Without a more nuanced and differentiated understanding of those terms it is possible to dismiss many whom might otherwise be regarded as modern progressive people.

Statute and Process

The **PDS's** Second Party Congress, second session, in June 1991 approved what is clearly the most modern party statute in Germany. In it, the PDS is defined as a voluntary association of independent individuals. All membership-candidacy procedures are abolished. A 50% minimum quota for women is established, also affecting parliamentary groups. Non-member sympathisers are granted voting rights in various bodies, except in financial and statutory matters, and the various smaller subdivisions of the PDS are empowered to grant membership rights to sympathisers to the extent they wish. The statute even permits double membership in other parties (which the SPD statute does not). By **mid-September** 1991 97% of the entire membership approved it, making this the first time in German history that a statute was decided on directly by the rank and file of a party.

In counting the votes on the statute the party was able to get some grasp on card-holding membership: official membership totalled 180,000 in September 1991. However, the looseness of the party structure, the ability of non-members to be active in it, even before this statute, and the blacklisting that attends PDS membership, all tend to reduce the incentive to acquire official membership. There are significant numbers of young PDS activists who have never requested membership.

In any preparation for a congress or meeting in which programme or major political decisions have to be voted on there are endless motions for

changing drafts, declarations, etc. The party's various publications are, as required by the statute, open to all rank-and-file groups to express their opinions, and party literature bears abundant witness to this. The considerable transactional costs of democracy are accepted in the PDS, making procedures far less efficient than in establishment parties. The charge contained in a study on the PDS commissioned by the FDP (Free Democratic Party)²³ that the radical left task forces have no influence on the federal directorate is directly contradicted by the fact that the current 18-member directorate is made up of members mostly drawn from these very task forces, e.g. the anti-racist, media, legal, feminist, Western PDS task forces, as well as the Communist Platform. So the left debates are brought right into the highest body of the party, with no other party entity able to subdue them in the interests of efficiency or pragmatism.

The party now has only 150 staff in all Germany to its 147,000 members, and half are only part-timers on contract. The staff of the LiebknechtHaus (the federal headquarters) is only 30 people. People with important positions have to do night duty at the switchboard. In a normal SED Kreisleitung (district leadership) there were 30 to 50 staff – now a Kreisvorstand consists of some 4 volunteers in total. A normal Landesvorstand (regional directorate) has 8–10 staff. Of the 147,000 members there are 30,000 to 40,000 activist volunteers who do most of the work in the 3,000 odd rank-and-file organisations. All meetings of all party and parliamentary groups and bodies of the PDS are, by statute, open to the public.²⁴

Composition and Attitudes of the PDS Membership From 1991

A study conducted by a group of sociologists (Institut für Sozialdatenanalyse (ISDA)) in May/June 1991²⁵ showed that between June '90 and May '91 worker membership went up: in 1990 the worker share in membership was 20%, in 1991 it was 26% (some were pensioners or forced-retirees). The PDS's share of still-employed workers in 1990 was 12% and in 1991 19%. Their membership share rose because, due to the liquidation of the GDR's social and cultural infrastructure and the consequent blacklisting and intimidation of academics and employees, the latter resigned in greater numbers from June '90–May '91 than did blue-collar workers, especially pensioned workers. In June '91 workers, farmers, and craftspeople made up 30% of PDS membership, while the still-employed members in this category made up 22.5%.

In May 1991 ISDA's inquiry could no longer perceive top SED functionaries and military in the party as a group. But unemployed or pensioned former middle- or lower-level state and economic functionaries do form a sizeable portion of party membership.

Diverging from the East-German average PDS youth membership (10–11%), 30% of the Neubrandenburg PDS membership was under 30.

Anhalt-Saxony shows a similar divergence with an 18% youth membership. In any case, German unification tends to bring Eastern workers, students and intelligentsia together, because all three groups suffer from the unemployment caused by recent societal changes.

The political character of the PDS rank-and-file is often the object of careless remarks tending to dismiss it as conservative, elderly, incapable of new thinking and oppositional activism. The rank-and-file is certainly problematic in its tilt to the higher age groups and the presence of people who cannot go far beyond GDR nostalgia. But the ISDA study on membership motivations gives a more differentiated picture. The study was done in June 1991, and since that time the development has been in the direction of more participation and acceptance of the culture of debate. Moreover, half of the 300,000 members at the time of ISDA's study have since left, removing many who could not understand the party's new oppositional activism and culture.

The result of ISDA's cluster analysis is the establishment of five types of PDS members by motivation:

1) 13.8% of the members are emancipatory socialists (i.e. their political-programmatic thinking is democratic socialist and anti-capitalist).

2) 45% of the members' principal motivation is their feeling that the party is their home. They would feel socially isolated without it.

3) 17% are members out of pride and stubbornness: "I am an anti-capitalist, and I am not a *Wendehälse*." (Wendehälse = turncoat, an expression used during the Wende for those who were able to do an opportunistic about-face and deny their past.)

4) 14.4% are motivated by the idea that the party represents their interests. This group is divided into those who say a) the PDS represents the interests of the working class, and b) the PDS represents the interests of citizens living in the East.

5) 9.1% are motivated by their conscious theoretical Weltanschauung, specifically by their identification with Marxism, or their hope of renewing Marxism.

The study could not find a correlation of these motivation groups to social/class categories. There is, however, a slight correlation to age. The younger members are overrepresented in groups 1 and 5; the older in 1, 3 and 4. Essentially all groups show a very mixed age profile. Further, there is about the same proportion of activists to inactive people in each group. These even spreads, in the opinion of the report, were related to the lack of a political crystallisation point in the party at the time the study was done in 1991. But the political practice, if not the programme, of the party has since acquired more focus.

The East-German Electorate in 1993–1994

Starting with a detailed study done by ISDA in June 1993 it has become clear that "the established ruling parties now have . . . a relatively small and shrinking following in the East."

The 1993 ISDA study confirms the earlier established popularity of the PDS among academics. 22.5% of them said in 1993 they would vote for the PDS (**Bü90**: 11%; SPD: 12.2%), and 40.4% of graduates of institutions of higher learning favoured the PDS. Southern blue-collar workers were still shying away from the PDS.

It is obviously possible to establish a more stable political behaviour and preference profile for the Western electoral abstainees than for the potential Eastern non-voters who are still recovering from the shock of a new political system and the invasion of their political landscape by Western parties. What is, therefore, most interesting in the Eastern electorate is the large group who say they will vote for no party or who do not want to say anything (50% of **ISDA's** respondents). On the basis of their responses to political and ideological questions it is possible to say that this **potential-voter** block has a more left profile than those of their Western counterparts that if they come to the polls it is the SPD and PDS who are likely to be favoured. Furthermore, it is certain that the reason many did not state their preference is the fear of answering "PDS" in public, while no fear of blacklisting attaches itself to the SPD.

The ISDA study's basic object is the political, social and ideological profile of the people according to the party they declared they would vote for, and this profile without relation to party in the case of the potential non-voters. The study is important, therefore, also because it is one of the few sociological studies of the GDR population concerning matters relevant to socialist politics. **ISDA's** observations of the potential left voters show twice as many women as men, a high proportion of potential left voters in rural areas because of the fear of expressing risky opinions in close-knit communities.

But cutting across all groups within the potential voters are a set of political demands which are identified with the PDS: the desire for a change in Treuhand policies to favour factory rehabilitation, the wish for higher taxing of higher earners, and the unconditional abolition of 218 (the clause of the Federal Republic's Basic Law restricting **abortion**).²⁸ It was also found that "a demand for a differentiated evaluation of life in the GDR is not the singular plaint of a disadvantaged sect [the PDS], but the concern of broad circles of the electorate of all parties," and this is also a concern primarily represented by the **PDS**.²⁹

Programme

One cannot evaluate the **PDS's** programme apart from the context and dynamics of the situation the party finds itself in. Two prominent PDS activists from the Trotskyist tradition, federal-directorate member **Jakob Moneta** (who had edited **IG Metall's** newspaper in the 60s and 70s) and Berlin city deputy Harald Wolf (one of the young city deputies of the **Red-Green Coalition** of the 80s) feel that the party's actual anti-capitalist politics so overshadows in importance the ever-evolving and tentative programmatic utterances that a narrow concentration on the imperfect programme is one way the Western left has avoided dealing with the PDS on a political level."

In the debates leading to the final programme Gysi and **André Brie** (the national election campaign manager and head of the programme commission) decided it was time to wage a more aggressive struggle, on behalf of their vision of a synthesis of left traditions, against three groups: a) the "biography-protectors," i.e. those incapable of **criticising** the Stalinist past, b) those social-movement members excessively hostile to **working-class-based** politics, and c) those social-democrats incapable of understanding radical oppositional politics.

A central debate has been "right to **jobs/full** employment" vs. "more employment would be **anti-ecological/ask** only for basic income for the population," the latter influenced by ideas of **André Gorz**. It is obvious that the second position, as a programme for the here and now of East Germany, with its massive unemployment, and the need for labour to get some leverage over the labour market, could not be adopted, but the programme excerpted below shows clear signs of harmonising the two positions.

The summer of 1991 saw the beginning of the end of certain conservative or naive attitudes left over from the party's period of birth. The Second Party Congress, which met that summer, was marked by harsh clashes. By the Third Congress in January 1993 most of the criticisms were absorbed and implemented in the present programme. In the Second Congress **Sonja Kemnitz**, a factory-council activist, along with the "Young Comrades," had attacked the tendency in the regional PDS organisations and parliamentary groups to concentrate on paper proposals while slighting extra-parliamentary action. Also criticised was an inadequate emphasis among some members on the importance of becoming active in other mass organisations of the **left**.²¹ (Gysi had made this point as well.) But the 1993 programme makes parliamentary clearly dependent on **extra-parliamentary** work.

And **Roswitha** Steinbrenner, a member of the *Strömung* group which also fought to heighten the level of extra-parliamentary struggle in the first three years of the PDS, affirms that a shift in this direction has taken place in the regional parliamentary groups." Finally, the activism of **PDSers** in

the struggles of Belfa, MFAG and Bischofferode (see below) reflect the implementation of **Kemnitz's** other point.³³

The drafting of the 1993 programme was an exhausting process characterised by raging debates, endless revisions and **compromises**.³⁴ It was clearly the result of compromises between left social-democratic, left-wing Marxist and social-movement views. But the fundamental condition influencing a pluralistic programme is the fact that the PDS is forced to address a constituency that no Western left group, especially in West Germany, must address. That is, it must project its politics to an Eastern population which, although it has largely internalised socialist, anti-capitalist morality, is nevertheless partly hostile to Marxist language and much of what was socialist practice, and yet expects help from the party. But one has also to ask whether in West Germany the present social individualisation and the essentially complete disarray and collapse of the left does not likewise make a socialist party with a programmatic unity containing nothing other than direct class politics inappropriate.

Also evident from the programme (and from the PDS's practice) is the **PDS's** resistance to the populism of which many in the Western left accuse it. The PDS risks many potentially unpopular positions (although the abolition of the restrictive abortion clause does have majority support in the East because the **GDR's** population was long accustomed, in this case, to a progressive policy) and has shown that it is possible to move the population towards some very advanced positions. Some of the positions on feminisation of society are very daring, and the PDS's well-known total opposition to any softening of the right to asylum meets with only 50% approval among the socially oppositional group established by the ISDA electoral study (see above). The PDS has up to now taken seriously the challenge to "try to bridge the gap between social struggles in Germany and global problems" (e.g. holding the metropolitan countries responsible for underdevelopment and political repression in the **Third World**).³⁵

The following is a selection from the programme of passages relevant to the controversy over the party's social democratic features:

On the self-conception of the party: The programme sees a modern socialist party as a necessary component of a larger group of self-initiated grassroots movements.³⁶ "The PDS regards itself as an alliance of differing left forces. Its commitment to democratic socialism is not tied to any defined philosophical outlook, ideology or religion." It welcomes both people who totally reject capitalist society and those who "combine their opposition with the desire to change these relationships positively and overcome them step by step . . . The PDS believes that extra-parliamentary struggle is decisive for social changes . . . Like other parliamentary activities, local government activities can only be agents of social change if they are propelled by diverse extra-parliamentary actions." The PDS wants to see "the emergence of broad left movements . . . Critically

aware of the legacy of **Marx** and Engels," the party wants to develop a highly pluralistic inner-party culture . . .

Critique of capitalism: "Together we hold the opinion that it is the capitalist character of modern society that is causally responsible for endangering human civilisation and culture, for the militarised character of international relations, for the crisis of the world ecosystem and for the indescribable misery to be found above **all in** the southern hemisphere . . . We are of one mind that the rule of capital must be overcome. Humankind must in an historically brief period find a way out of its hitherto destructive developmental logic . . . The root causes of these global problems [new world order, military intervention] are the capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption as practised in the power centres of the world economy, together with the supremacy of patriarchy."

But then there is a formulation reflecting a strong reaction in the PDS, beginning in 1989, against official SED positions negating everything that has occurred under capitalism: "How to overcome this social structure by democratic means, while preserving and expanding its ability to be open to development and its civilising achievements – this is the most important contemporary challenge."

On socialism: "Beyond all differences of opinion we share the primary standpoint that the dominance of private capitalist property has to be ended. A range of property forms – private, cooperative, municipal and nationalised – are to be placed at the service of human requirements and the natural and social foundations of our lives. There are differing views as to whether real socialisation of property is best achieved by socialisation of control over [private] property or if conversion into common property, especially into property of the whole society, must play the decisive part."

Politics for the present: "democratising society": Here the programme presents a variety of general goals proposed apparently more or less to be **realised** at some point on the road to a socialist society involving radical democratic control of local institutions. It goes on to speak of rights of sexual orientation and other civil rights, expansion of constitutional rights, etc. The programme's preliminary measures and demands leading to socialist transformation are the kinds of proposals which draw the accusation of "social-democratic accommodationism," and, if an underlying drive to overcome capitalism is not maintained, could indeed deserve that accusation: The proposals for reorientation of the economy include various measures to set up radically democratic controls over the existing economic order and active government employment policies. It includes proposals to assist medium-size and small business, enlarge public municipal property, and "to put an end to the disadvantages of small shareholders, boost **staff** funds and give employees more stake in productive capital." The programme's proposals for agriculture include "the special promotion of cooperative property."

Regarding the full-employment controversy the programme demands "an economic policy aiming at full employment; just distribution of paid work; reduction of weekly and lifelong working time," etc. And it advocates "an increasing decoupling of social services from individually performed paid work." "We fight for a basic insurance oriented to people's needs for all age groups, calculated on average social **income**." And on East Germany specifically: "We stand for an elected East German Board, which can actively represent the interests of East Germans in partnership with Government and Parliament, and thus offer resistance to the erosion of the Reunification Treaty."

There are, further, interesting proposals for democratic control of academia and for the third world (debt forgiveness, redistribution of wealth, and overcoming of monocultures).

Internal criticism

The PDS has carried on a remarkable programme of self-searching, rather ruthless confrontation with the history of the SED, of the communist movement as a whole, and of self-analysis of the psychology and individual responsibility of everyone who had been a GDR citizen and especially a party member. No bi-weekly meeting of the **18-member** federal directorate is allowed to go by without at least some of this analysis and discussion. It is also required in **all** the rank-and-file party organisations throughout the country. Even the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* said of the published papers of a recent PDS conference: "**How** many people, how many parties, will, on October **3rd**, after three years of German unity, look back on the role they played before the Wende? The PDS does it in a noteworthy self-critical way. . . . Such a calling of oneself to account one could only wish for among the former Eastern CDU and the Eastern Liberals."

From afar the statement of PDS-member Michail Nelken (a serious political thinker deeply concerned about the PDS) that the PDS will always be an old party because "the PDS represents the greatest concentration of the stratum of those who formerly exercised power in the **GDR**" [i.e., it carries within it the leading layers of GDR society] sounds as if he is characterising the PDS as a party of the rulers of the GDR. In reality, since there is no question of the latter, he is reaching much deeper and calling for a self-criticism of the whole critically minded **SED-intelligentsia**, including himself, for having internalised, even if indirectly and subtly, the vanguardism of the **SED's** tradition.

Nelken declared in 1991 that the "renewal of the PDS has failed."" When I spoke with him in November 1993 he did not disown that statement although he acknowledged that the PDS had absorbed and put into practice radical-democratic ideas – in the composition of its leadership, and in its adoption of the most innovatingly democratic statute in **Ger-**

many, largely drafted by himself! He pointed rather to the continuing need for self-analysis of the kind of subtle, internalised elitism almost inherent in the left by definition, including sincerely democratic leftists.

In 1993 Nelken referred to "the failure of the demands for an open approach to history in the PDS."⁴⁰ Yet Roswitha Steinbrenner, a member of the same loose tendency in the PDS, the *Strömung*,⁴¹ to which Nelken belongs, acknowledges the PDS's extraordinary advances in this area and feels that Nelken's demands for this kind of self-criticism have largely been met. Since the PDS collectively bends over backwards to accommodate and publish such criticism it becomes particularly visible. One has the impression that most of the *Strömung's* demands have in fact been met. Rainer Borner, a former PDS member, said, on hearing of the results of the 1993 Berlin State Congress: "the Stromung has really won after all."⁴² In 1993 Steinbrenner could say: "We have up until last year, still as the Stromung, achieved substantively quite a lot. Thus, we've gotten the history debate to go in a direction that really is near to our positions, that is, a thoroughly critical evaluation of the GDR past and one's own actions in that past."

One of the tendencies in the PDS against which the Stromung – and Kemnitz – fought was, in their opinion, an orientation to parliamentarism as primary and an insufficient appreciation of extra-parliamentary work. Steinbrenner said in 1993 that this has changed. "And I think, however, that state associations increasingly are also distancing themselves from parliamentary activity or from what is put forward as oppositional politics. Thus, . . . the Berlin state association clearly defined . . . what it understands by oppositional politics: clear anti-capitalist politics, . . . to make alternative media effective, together with non-parliamentary groups the organizing of self-representation . . ."

The 1994 Elections and Beyond

The 1990 and the 1994 federal elections in Germany have two qualitatively completely different meanings for the PDS, and two qualitatively different meanings for the West German left, such as it is. In 1990 it was still possible for leftists to interpret the PDS entry into the Bundestag as a one-time occurrence due to the special provisions made for two separate national electoral areas, *i.e.* one only needed to make the 5% hurdle in either the East or the West alone in order to be seated in the Bundestag. Further, the left theorised that the PDS was running on the last vestiges of its 1989–90 impulse, that it was a "discontinued model". But the PDS has increased its strength dramatically in the 1992 Berlin elections and the 1993 Brandenburg municipal elections. Recent polls show that it is possible that the PDS will get 5% nationwide." But it does not need that to re-enter the Bundestag, for with the second vote each citizen has – for a person, not a

party – the PDS can conceivably get 610 such direct mandates in several districts, and it only needs three of them to override the 5% hurdle. A likely victory in 1994 with the handicap of a single electoral area has a completely different meaning for the viability of the PDS than the 1990 elections did. The Green Party, moreover, will have a more left-liberal, less radical, profile in the next Bundestag than it did when last represented there. Obviously then, elements of the Western left will view the PDS somewhat differently.

INFAS (Institut für angewandte Sozialforschung, Bonn-Bad Godesberg), published an *East-Germany Report: Image of the PDS* in the ninth week of 1993. This indicated that a spectacular change of opinion had occurred in the previous months. The East-Germans selected responded as follows: To the question "should the PDS be equated with the former SED" (this is hammered into the population incessantly by the media) only 8% said "totally and completely" and 25% said "for the most part yes"; but 39% answered "for the most part no" and 17% said "not at all." INFAS asked East Germans their opinions on the PDS presence in the Bundestag. 21% had no opinion about the work PDS deputies were doing there; 39% felt they were "not doing good work"; but 40% said they were performing "good work." 29% thought the PDS should not be represented in the next Bundestag; but 58% said they should (28% had no opinion). Thus "a clear majority of the East Germans would be happy if the PDS were represented in the next Bundestag." People were asked whether "the PDS represented their interests as East Germans." 9% said "not at all", 27% said "not so strongly"; but 42% answered "strongly" and 10% said "very strongly." Thus about half look upon the PDS favourably in this regard. To the question whether the "PDS has a lasting place in the party system" 46% said no and 42% said yes (12% had no opinion).

The results of the Brandenburg municipal elections of December 1993 seem to have confirmed the findings of the INFAS poll.⁴ There the PDS surpassed the CDU with 22% of the vote. The top results (45%) obtained by the PDS's mayoral candidate in Potsdam, moreover, was widely interpreted as demonstrating that campaigns designed to discredit individuals as Stasi collaborators no longer have an impact on the public."

One of the reasons for the change in the climate of opinion regarding the PDS is that, for the consciously left constituency, it has become difficult to categorise the other principal non-establishment Eastern political grouping, Bünd90, as a left force, and for the general population Bünd90 shows too little interest in social issues. The politicised left constituency, cannot, for example, accept the Brandenburg Bünd90's call for the extension of the activities of the West-German domestic intelligence agency into that state (each state legislature must formally approve the introduction of this agency into their territories), nor can it accept Konrad Weiss's (Bünd90) suggestion of a possible coalition of Bünd90 with the Saxon CDU. This

constituency also has problems with **Bü90's** Bundestag group's hesitation in condemning the US invasion during the Gulf war, and the UN operations in Somalia, their ambivalence about the participation of German troops in UN actions, etc. **Bü90's** obsession with no-longer existing communist repression, the Stasi, etc. no longer strikes a sympathetic chord in the general population. This and their lack of participation in social struggles, with the exception of the Bischofferode hunger strike, has **marginalised** them as far as the general population is **concerned**.⁴⁶

The other reason for the increased favour the PDS has begun to enjoy in the last two years in the East is its work among the population. The party is now generally perceived as playing the leading role in the East-German tenants organisation and in anti-Treuhandmobilisations. In the Bundestag it is seen as the strongest voice against weakening of the asylum law, for the total abolition of the West-German abortion clause, and is by far the strongest in opposing any involvement of the Bundeswehr abroad. In 1993 the party made spectacular advances in a series of trade-union struggles, most notably in the potassium miners strike in the Thuringian town of Bischofferode (which had voted heavily for the CDU in 1990). The sustained nature of PDS participation led to demonstrations of appreciation for the PDS there and to the miners asking Gysi to be their legal representative in **Bonn**.⁴⁷ Similar spectacular changes towards greater acceptance of the party took place during the labour struggles in **Märkische Faser AG** in Brandenburg and **Belfa** in Berlin. Even in the West, at the 17th Congress of the German Postal Workers Union, held in October 1993 the PDS got many more congress delegates to come to their event than did the SPD, something no one could have **expected**.⁴⁸

The West-German Left's Reception of the PDS

a) *The non-socialist Greens*

After the West-German social movements, from which the Green Party drew its meaning and strength in the early **1980s**, had waned, the politics of the Realo wing increasingly moved the party away from the socialist politics of the Hamburg Marxists who had exercised a strong influence within the Greens. By 1990 a group of Realos were exaggerating the interest shown by some Left Greens in the PDS, depicting it as a wish to merge the Greens with the latter. The **rumour** of a desired merger was used to scare people into passing an incompatibility declaration against not only the PDS but also against the GDR's United Left (VL) and against the GDR's Autonomous **Women's Federation (UFV)**. It all came to a head at the April 1990 conference in **Hagen**. The motion proposed the exclusion of any cooperation with VL and PDS-reformers no matter how the party evolved, along with an assertion of the incompatibility of the socialist tradition and Green **politics**.⁴⁹ The majority rejected it as too **extreme**.⁵⁰ But attempts to drive out the Left Greens continued, and it was inevitable

that the latter should either join a broad electoral alliance with the PDS or the PDS itself, or go into other formations, such as the Radikale Linke. Rainer Trampert and Thomas Ebermann joined the latter, while Verena Krieger and Jiirgen Reents, for example, joined the former. And the whole process accelerated the disintegration of the Greens as the main force on the left. By the December 1990 Bundestag elections the Green Party no longer could make the 5% electoral hurdle, and at present Green Party members are only in parliament via their electoral alliance with the Eastern citizen's groups and Eastern Greens.

The anti-communism of this part of the left has hindered any rational assessment of the PDS, and media close to the Greens have maintained an eerie silence on the PDS after the initial attacks. Michael Sontheimer, the new editor-in-chief of the *tageszeitung* (taz), the principal pro-Green daily, is trying to improve his newspaper's coverage of the PDS.⁵¹

b) West-German Left Marxist Groups

Less well-known than the anti-communism of the Greens and citizens movements are the set of attitudes found among some of West-Germany's most sophisticated Marxist intellectuals (in Konkret for example), specifically their allergy to "populism," which they define extraordinarily broadly, and their German self-hatred.

The extreme anti-nationalism leads to a type of cynical, symbolic non-politics. Demands had been raised in 1989 among the anti-nationalist group of Hamburg's Communist League⁵² that the West-German left must be "anti-German,"⁵³ and the politics they proposed to express this was an international alliance which would have to "unquestionably comprehend even bourgeois, indeed even conservative opponents of the 'Fourth Reich'; "The profile of the campaign would accordingly be rather anti-German than anti-imperialist." "And this thinking characterised a part of the Radikale Linke which was formed at the time the Left Greens withdrew from the Green Party in Winter-Spring 1990. This is summed up in the hope expressed that "the Germans perhaps will still catch up to the punishment which they have deserved for 45 years." "Thus, the Radikale Linke's politics amounted to saying "no" to a greater Germany after it obviously was an irreversible reality, and it consequently condemned any attempts to accept unification and try to improve the people's lot within it as shabby populism and nationalism. Such an outlook can only express itself in demonstrations and rallies having a merely symbolic purpose and devoid of any attempt to engage the population.

Even while predicting its potential rootedness in the population, the West-German left has nevertheless been able to dismiss the PDS on the grounds of its East-German regional character – as if the addition of a strongly rooted socialist force anywhere within the FRG's boundaries were not to be greeted, and as if this force could not, given time, have some

impact on a Western socialist movement.⁸ (It has been claimed that some Western PDS members, desperate for a political job, were at first extremely impatient with the PDS's eastern character and pushed for an unrealistically speedy assimilation to Western left conditions and views.)

The population is always essentially suspect in this milieu. First of all, the population's populism is associated only with right-wing varieties, e.g. Nazism, and secondly the core working-class is considered hopelessly in the arms of the SPD. If the population votes for the PDS that is proof that the PDS and the population is conservative. Any attempt to reach them is "opportunisticshit," any attempt to do something for the people in the here and now is "social-democratic," any wavering from purist positions aimed at the ultimate socialist goals will lead to one's joining the SPD. There is a natural law operating by which every attempt to wage politics ends in social-democracy. If the PDS petitions for observer status in the SI this is proof of their hopeless and inexorable slide into "social-democratic opportunism," and there is no need to examine their programme or politics in any detail at all." Michael Made, anti-Stalinist victim of SED persecution and VL member who sees his role as a left gadfly to the PDS, chided the Western left for the excuses it finds to not deal with the PDS: "And then there is the accusation, on the part of radical-left circles, of social-democratization. And the Federal Republic's left, which itself shows a certain closeness to social democracy, is, when the PDS theme is brought up, always given to pulling out a magnifying glass: and guess what! they also find a little Stalinism there, if you please!"⁹

The PDS: Dilemma and Opportunity

The dilemma of the PDS then has essentially to do with its closeness to the Eastern population. This is both a problem for the party and an obvious advantage. The problem is that many in the population, which often displays an unconscious closeness to the PDS, a love-hate relationship, want a traditionally "Eastern" political force to paternalistically protect them. This tends to pull especially the regional PDS in a pragmatic and populist direction. On the other hand, the party strives to be radical. The party has, for example, been asked by the Eastern Lutheran organisation to represent its interests as against what they consider the encroachments of the Western Lutheran association. In Gysi's words: "we are a left party, but we are also an East party." This is reflected in the style and appearance of the party at rallies and congresses, where a young, radical-looking leadership, and other young activists, contrasts with a more conservatively dressed and mannered base. But the "normal" population itself may become more oppositional through the West's imposition of "Stalinist-textbook capitalism."

One thinks of a dilemma also in connection with party property: on the one hand, the initial extensive assets the party inherited from the **Weimar KPD** and the GDR SED engendered distrust and resentment from the citizens movements and much of the Eastern population (although less so from the Western left), and the consequent expropriation-harassment distracted the party from political work. (To be sure, it is doubtful whether the party could have avoided harassment in general by re-founding itself.) On the other hand, most of those who favoured a new foundation in 198% 90 (which would have meant renunciation of assets) now feel the party could not have done as well as it did in the early elections and have carried out the public activities and rallies that it did without the financial assets of its incipient phase and the consequent ability to do effective publicity work. "I found near unanimity among these people by the end of 1993 that a new foundation would have caused most of the present older rank-and-file members to leave and that the present party, totally self-financed out of their dues which support a radical young leadership and its ideas, would probably not exist. The irony is that some of the party's severest critics, including those who have called for it to give up all of its assets, hope that the party will get back into the Bundestag in 1994, a possibility that probably would not exist if the party had earlier done what they demanded. There was another reason not to re-found, and this must be taken seriously: the importance of keeping continuity with the SED in order to give people an "address" where they can deal with the problems of the GDR and SED past, and where responsibility, including legal responsibilities in certain matters, can rest, and also where one can confront the history of ruling parties in states like the GDR. It is thus beginning to look as though the decision to keep some of the infrastructure and assets was a sound one. Additionally, if the PDS had immediately given up the publishing firm **ZENTRAG**, it is doubtful whether *Neues Deutschland*, the largest supra-national Eastern paper of the left or right (which was rescued from extinction by a campaign involving a variety of non-sectarian leftists, including people very critical of the PDS), could have weathered the period. The association with SED assets has proven also not to be an eternal burden, as witnessed by the fact that it has not prevented the PDS, after four years, from getting creditable electoral results, as well as the more general credibility the INFAS "Image of the PDS" poll revealed.

Finally, on the party's relationship to the population, Roswitha Steinbrenner conveys something of the essence of the PDS project, which differentiates it from the citizens movements and most West-German left groups in its tolerance for the normal conservative or apolitical citizen. The fear the progressive German intelligentsia has of populism, for obvious historical reasons, has worked to distance much of the German left from broader layers of the population. It is particularly significant that **Steinbrenner**, a radical feminist, anti-populist, social-movement activist

and member of the **Strömung**, the **group** most critical of conservative or nostalgic tendencies in **party members**, displays an appreciation of the decency and progressive potential of much of the population and of the older PDS rank-and-file so often dismissed by social-movement critics:

I also get the objection from the Autonomous Women's Federation (UFV) that the party has a great program, but the members don't stand behind it. And then I say: perhaps they haven't **fully** understood or read it, but as long as they tolerate it it's okay. There **really** is a tolerance **there** on the part of the **members for this statute** and for this **program**. **Because** otherwise **people** would withdraw. And what is **productive** in this **membership mix** is that one is **forced to** permanently question **positions** that one has developed, that one remains continually in discussion . . . I think that, in contrast to the majority of former GDR citizens, they question their own actions and their own past critically . . . They **are** shy about bringing all this self-criticism before the public, but the **thinking** is already a new one, and also their actions. I can't change people's consciousness if I only act for myself and if I deal with all others as per se conservative and incapable of movement, because that's not the way people are. People act on their own concerns, and I think the Greens in the 60s and 80s in the old FRG have shown us, with ecological consciousness, how one can really change people's behaviour . . . But we've also experienced this capacity for change in the GDR. In 1945 the level of consciousness of people in the East and the West **was** not different. And I think that such human values that did exist in the GDR, such as **the sense** of responsibility for others and for society as a whole, for example, a social way of thinking, that is, to let no one fall through the net . . . or the sensitivity to violence in families – there was significantly less violence in families, because they were publicly criticized and because the neighbors, for example, involved themselves when children were beaten or if women were beaten – that didn't happen over night. A social debate on such problems was initiated, and it changed consciousness, possibly not deeply enough, otherwise many East Germans wouldn't be living as they **are** now living, that is, using their elbows again. But it did exist. Those who are today again using their elbows and who grew up in this country, in the GDR, **are** doing it with a bad conscience. Who does it in the West with a bad conscience? So, I think these are examples showing that it is worth carrying out a social debate on alternatives regardless of alleged human nature.

It makes no sense constantly to block people with verbal radicalism and insult them, rather than really to go to them and ask "where does your problem lie, and where do you see the causes for your problem, and can you imagine that the causes you see may not at all be the causes?" But that has to be done carefully, and it has to be done steadily, with participation, with visible action . . . you have to meet people where they **are**, you can't curse that they **are** where they **are**. Because somehow they got there, and it's also your own failing that they're there. The East German population is indeed very contradictory in its actions, and it is, to a great extent, our fault, the fault of the PDS as successor to the SED . . . It's also important for those of us remaining from the **Strömung** to understand that you can't get victories overnight.*

Perhaps the PDS is the hope for German socialism or perhaps it will help rekindle a left movement and disappear into it. Perhaps it will not even have that measure of success. But the present essay makes clear that the PDS has weathered the storms thus far, defying earlier predictions of its imminent demise, and has by now politically turned a decisive corner. It appears to be an electorally viable socialist organisation and could be the first large political force to the left of social-democracy in central Europe since the Weimar Republic, with large implications for the world socialist movement. Whether it survives the next couple of decades or not, it is novel and important enough finally to be the object of more energetic interest and investigation on the part of the international left.

NOTES

1. Giinter Minnerup, "Freedom in East Germany: Opening up a New Europe?," *The Nation*, December 4, 1989, p. 673.
2. The last reflection of this was the slogan of the citizens movements during the *Wende*: "Bleibe im Land und wehre dich täglich!" (Stay in the country and defend yourself daily).
3. Jonathan Steele, *Inside East Germany: The State that Came in from the Cold*. New York: Urizen, c1977, p. 46; and Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*. New York: Gateway, 1967, pp. 446-447.
4. Klaus Hartung, "SED-BASIS auf der Strasse: Grundorganisationen vor dem ZK-Gebäude fordern Parteitag," *taz*, Nov 10, 1990, p. 94.
5. Conversation with Lothar Bisky, November 17, 1993.
6. *Neues Deutschland*, February 1, 1990.
7. *Zbid.*, January 20121, 1990; and Heinrich Bortfeldt, *Von der SED zur PDS - Aufbruch zu neuen Ufern? controvers. Diskussionsangebot der PDS* Berlin 1990, p. 28.
8. *Ibid* p. 30.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
10. *Neues Deufschland*, January 27128, 1990.
11. Among the earliest intra-party factions, the Social-Democratic Platform essentially disappeared at the time of the "Berghofer Syndrome." The "Third-Way" Platform was also dissolved, though some of its members have become prominent in the PDS now. Today only the Communist Platform continues to exist. The latter cannot be dismissed as Stalinist, although it certainly includes such people. Its processes are highly democratic; it played a major role in the early history of PDS reform; and it stressed gay/lesbian and feminist liberation, etc.
12. A respectable case can be made, however, to show that the Modrow regime's policies constituted the last attempt to inject positive features into what was by then an inevitable German unification.
13. *Neues Deutschland* June 18, 1990, cited in Knut Mellenthin, "PDS: Kein Frieden mit dem Kapital," *arbeiterkampf* 320 (June 25, 1990), p. 6.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Conversation with Hanno Harnisch, PDS Press Secretary, Berlin, November 22, 1993.
16. In June 1991 the trusteeship moved to confiscate even current membership dues! This was done while much of the left was on vacation to avoid protests, and its illegality was quite unambiguous.
17. In answer to fantasies about "foreign SED millions" the PDS Press-Secretary, Hanno Harnisch, said in a conversation in Berlin on November 22, 1993: "Then as now there could be a firm in Switzerland, even now, some journalist say. But if such firms exist then they haven't the slightest connection to the PDS. The proof is that we really gave over notarially to the Federal Republic all claims on old assets abroad. So that even if a firm should still be there, about which we do not know, and which is still doing business, they don't do it to the benefit of our bank account, and then the owner would be either the manager there or the Federal Republic. The party has no knowledge of and no claims on such firms. And no access, and it doesn't want access."
18. Unless otherwise indicated all figures from: *INFAS-Report DDR 1990. Wahl der Volkskammer der DDR am 18. März 1990. Analysen und Dokumente*. Bonn-Bad Godesberg, March 1990 (which includes INFAS Deutschland-Politogramm 6-7/1990 (Wahltagbefragung am 18. März 1990)); and from a study by the AG "Analyse," cited by Bortfeldt, *op. cit.*, (fn. 38): *Meinungsforschung zur Volkskammerwahl* (Manuscript) Berlin, March 26, 1990. MFS = Mannheim Forschungsguppe Wahlen. These figures are quoted in Knut Mellenthin, "PDS der DDR - eine Herausforderung für die BRD-Linke," *arbeiterkampf* 318, (April 30, 1990), p. 12.
19. The youthful appearance of the PDS's major electoral rallies, etc. indicates the reluctance of such young people formally to join this, or any, party. On the difficulties all German parties face regarding youth recruitment see Ingo Preusker, "Vom Gangelband befreit: Die PDS hat anderen Parteien eins voraus: den Mut zur Verjüngung," *Wocheupost*, January 13, 1994.

20. Bortfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
21. Interview with Uwe Lehmann and Petra Pau (PDS), *Freitag*, June 5, 1992, p. 4.
22. On the December 1993 Brandenburg municipal elections see INFAS poll summarized in *Sächsische Zeitung*, December 7, 1993; and Michael Müller, "Weniger Testwahl, dafür vielleicht Signal für Systemkritik," *Neues Deutschland*, December 7, 1993. On voter migration in May 1992 in Berlin see *tageszeitung*, May 26, 1992.
23. Armin Pfahl-Traughaber, "Wo steht die PDS? Versuch einer extremismusorientierten Einschätzung," *liberal* March 1993, pp. 6–8. (*liberal* is the party journal of the FDP.). This and Patrick Moreau's book are apparently the only non-left studies on the PDS. Moreau is close to French foreign intelligence circles and writes on terrorism and intelligence. See Patrick Moreau, *PDS: Anatomie einer postkommunistischen Partei*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1992 (Schriftenreihe Extremismus und Demokratie, Vol. 3). Moreau equates the PDS with the SED and believes it would effect the same policies if it came to power.
24. Occasionally, however, the national directorate makes an exception and discusses a problem in closed session, and always attracts party criticism for this.
25. ISDA – Institut für Sozialdatenanalyse, *Forschungsbericht: Strukturen, politische Aktivitäten und Motivationen in der PDS. Mitgliederbefragung der PDS 1991*. Berlin, June 1991. This East-Berlin-based institute occasionally collaborates with the West-German EMNID polling organization on "Sonntagsfragen."
26. *ISDA-Studie Nr. 11. Im Blick: Wahlen '94. Soziologische Zielgruppenanalyse*. Berlin, June 1993, p. 4. See also *Der Spiegel*, February 21, 1994, p. 39, 42–43.
27. Michael Sontheimer ("Der Osten wählt rot," *taz* December 7, 1993) claims that the 1990 CDU vote was a one-time exception to a structural left (including the SPD) electorate in the East.
28. *ZSDA Im Blick: Wahlen '94*, p. 28.
29. *Zbid.*, D. 31–32.
30. A somewhat myopic attention to program has had this effect on the only two substantial articles on the PDS in English: Gus Fagan, "The Party of Democratic Socialism," *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 41/1 (1992), pp. 30ff.; and John Rosenthal, "On the Long Road to the Third Way? The Second Party Congress of the PDS," *Socialism and Democracy*, 13 (May 1991), pp. 7ff. Although neither article displays the emotionally-charged abhorrence of the PDS typical of much of the West-German left, both end by dismissing the PDS as reformist or accommodationist, or as probably developing in that direction.
31. *PDS-Pressedienst* 1991, No. 26 (June 28), p. 9–10.
32. Conversation with Roswitha Steinbrenner, November 24, 1993.
33. Kemnitz still criticizes an excessive respect for legality in PDS trade-union work. (private communication, January 12, 1994).
34. See André Brie's history of this process in *Disput* 3/4 (Sonderausgabe) 1993, pp. 32ff.
35. *Im Blick: Wahlen '94*, (see fn 34), p. 41.
36. *Programme of the Party of Democratic Socialism*, Berlin, 1993, p. 30. (Translation occasionally corrected by the author from original in *Disput* 3/4 (February 1993), pp. 36ff). All citations, in what follows, are taken from this publication.
37. "Bonner Bühne: Wo bleibt der Mensch?," *Die Zeit*, August 27, 1993.
38. From Dieter Reichelt's summary of the history debate of the first session of the third party congress on 26/27 June 1993 in *Disput* 13/14, 1993, p. 54.
39. See Wolfgang Sabath, "Immer wieder Gehversuche: Vom 2. Parteitag der PDS," *Freitag* June 28, 1991, p. 4.
40. Reichelt, *op. cit.* Again, this is Reichelt's paraphrase. Nelken announced his intention to publish a reply to Michael Schumann's paper on the subject.
41. The Stromung [= "tendency"] was a loose conglomeration of critics in the PDS. Politically it ranges from people with less of a class-based social-movement politics to people with more of a feel for class politics, but certain left critics who are especially worried by "abandonment of class politics," like Thomas Kuczynski and Sonja Kemnitz, were never in the *Strömung*. Stromung figures still in the PDS include Nelken, Steinbrenner, Thomas Nord and Judith Delheim.
42. Conversation with Roswitha Steinbrenner, Berlin November 24, 1993. All citations from Steinbrenner are from this conversation.

43. Starting in September 93 the PDS got its **first** 5% result from polls taken of Western and Eastern citizens **regarding** their party choice for the **1994 Bundestag elections**. By January 1994 5% results became more frequent, the range being from 3% to 5.3% in **January-February** 1994. Polls in the West alone show a rise from ca. 0.3% to 2%.
44. Before the major electoral breakthrough for the PDS in December 1993 in Brandenburg (see below) the May 24, 1992 municipal elections in Berlin represented the first turning point. The PDS got 29.7% of the East Berlin vote. (from **INFAS's** preliminary results published in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, May 26, 1992). But, with still higher percentages, the PDS became the strongest party in five East-Berlin districts. (Lichtenberg (**35.5%**), **Marzahn** (**34.9%**), Hellersdorf (**30.9%**), Hohenschonhausen (**35.5%**), Mitte (**35.8%**). (From preliminary official results, *Berliner Zeitung*, May 26, 1992).
45. Further statistics contradict the theory that the PDS got only protest votes. Michael Miiller, in *Neues Deutschland*, refers to an INFAS poll (more fully covered in the *Sächsische Zeitung*, December 7, 1993) in Brandenburg according to which 28% of the unemployed voted for the PDS (SPD: 34%). He points out that protest votes always come overwhelmingly from people in relatively secure situations. Michael Müller, "Weniger Testwahl, dafür vielleicht Signal für Systemkritik," *Neues Deutschland*, December 7, 1993. And the ISDA study on the 1994 elections shows that the unemployed, when they do vote at all, vote **fearfully** and **pragmatically**. Konrad Weiss, a **leading figure of Democracy Now** and **Bü90**, issued a call on **December 6** to deny the PDS any **cooperation** "as a **matter of political hygiene**."
46. **Gr/Bü90's** lack of concern with social issues is reflected in the opinions of their electorate, half of which, according to **ISDA's** study, think the workers should bear **more** burdens. (ISDA: *Im Blick: Wahlen '94.*, p. 33.)
47. See Hannah Behrend, "Social Struggles After **Unification**," *New Politics IV*, 4 (Winter 1994), pp. 119-121.
48. There were ca. **600** delegates. One evening of such congresses is customarily set aside as a **party evening**. Parties have always regarded these as important barometers, especially in pre-election periods. The organisers of the congress themselves noted during the preparation for the congress that the PDS Party Evening was stimulating "an extraordinary interest." Only 250 seats were optimistically prepared, but **380** came, and they were without **exception** congress delegates. In contrast to this, the SPD got about 250 congress delegates, **but they directed their invitations strongly towards the local party prominence**, invited their whole rank and file and hired a dance band and famous performers, so that 800 people in all came. The **Gr/Bü90** evening attracted 30 people, that of the CDU 60. (The **FDP** did not participate.) The delegates attending the PDS evening included a striking proportion of young and female colleagues. The evening was much more characterised by direct, engaged substantive political discussion than the SPD evening was. (Gerd Graw, "17. Kongress der Deutschen Postgewerkschaft: **Konflikt zwischen Arbeit** und Kapital," *betrieb & gewerkschaft* 9 (November 1993) [bulletin of the PDS Task Force on Factories and Unions], p. 23ff.)
49. Ralf Fucks, a representative of this part of the Realo wing, admitted in a *Volkszeitung* interview (March 30, 1990) that cooperation with the PDS could be very positive for a socialist project: with "16% for the renovated PDS, a simpatico media star like Gysi, an honourable figure like **Modrow**, a professional apparatus, several hundred thousand members - doesn't that open new pan-German perspectives for the left? The potential is there, also in the Federal Republic - left social-democrats, purged DKP members, oppositional trade-unionists, homeless **68ers**. Whether such an alliance could survive does not concern us. Perhaps it is historically necessary in the sense of one last attempt to save the socialist project. He who wants to do so should - but please not with the Greens. Ecological politics is a new beginning opposed to traditional directions and goals, not a continuation of socialist politics by other means. A political alliance with the PDS would be the end of the Green Party."
50. After a majority of the delegates refused to so categorically limit future alliance possibilities to the Greens, New Forum and the UFV, a left resolution succeeded in being adopted with the support of critical Realos which stated that the Greens do not wish "to ignore the originally radical-democratic and humanistic content of the socialist world of ideas," despite its discrediting through SED rule.

51. Conversation with Michael Sontheimer, December, 1993.
52. A part of the now defunct **Kommunistischer** Bund played an important role in the growth of the Green Party, and its still surviving monthly journal, *arbeiterkampf* (ak) is a forum of debate and analysis on a level much higher than its name ("workers' struggle") would lead English-speaking readers familiar with the names of sectarian periodicals to expect. An article by **Knut Mellenthin** appears in ak 318 (April 30, 1990): "PDS der DDR – eine Herausforderung für die BRD-Linke," (pp. 12ff). It remains the most penetrating treatment of the underlying resistance of West-German Marxists to the PDS and the most sober consideration of the PDS, especially remarkable for its time. I have drawn heavily on it in this section on the Western Marxists' relation to the PDS.
53. Jiirgen, "Weshalb die Linke anti-deutsch sein muss," ak 315 (February 5, 1990), pp. 32ff.
54. Jiirgen, "Mit Schönhuber gegen die Alliierten," ak 314 (January 8, 1990), pp. 17ff.
55. Wolfgang **Pohrt**, "Spiel mit verteilten Rollen," konkret (April 1990), pp. 69ff. Or see **Detlef zum Winkel's** wish that Germany itself might finally be destroyed: "Ceterum censeo," (konkret (January 1990), pp. 21ff.
56. See Gus **Fagan**, "The Party of Democratic Socialism," Labour Focus on Eastern Europe 4111 (1992), p. 36.
57. Declaration of withdrawal of the Hamburg Eco-socialists and Linksradikaler from the GAL, April 6, 1990: "Wir verlassen die Grüne Partei," (konkret May 1990), p. 22; and Georg **Fülberth** (Ex-DKP) and **Siggi Fries** (Bundestag deputy of the Greens), "Auf Honecker einen Noske?," (konkret May 1990), pp. 24ff. In their article they even fleetingly count the votes of the PDS and the SPD together for the election of March 18, 1990.
58. Made in ak 319 (28. Mai 1990), p. 21.
59. Interviews conducted by the author in November 1993 in Berlin.
60. Conversation with Roswitha Steinbrenner, Berlin November 24, 1993.