

Saxony Election: Ruling SPD To Be Minor Party?

by Rainer Apel

Two weeks after their disastrous showing in the June 13 elections for new European Parliament (see *EIR*, July 9 and July 16, 2004), the German Social Democrats (SPD) were struck by a new disaster: In the June 27 elections for municipal parliaments in the eastern state of Thuringia, the SPD vote was cut by more than one-third statewide, from 24.4% to 15.6%. In some of the municipalities, the SPD lost much more than that: for example, 11.9% in Greiz; 12.6% in Suhl; 13.8% in Weimar-Land; 15.1% in Weimar. And most of the 8% increase of non-voters, compared to the last municipal elections in Thuringia in 1999, were deserters from the SPD. Voters are abandoning the party, and with the exception of a few elder Social Democrats, like Hans Koschnick (see *EIR*, July 9), the party leadership is incapable or unwilling to grasp what is going on. The Chancellor, and former SPD party chairman (until March 2004), Gerhard Schröder, is not showing any intent to review and change his budget-cutting policies (the “Hartz IV” package for deep cuts in labor, unemployment, and welfare budgets)—which are certain to drive even more voters away.

In Saxonia, Thuringia’s neighbor state which will hold elections for state parliament on Sept. 19, the SPD is in complete panic and disarray. On the day before the aforesaid Thuringian municipal elections, Saxonian state party chairwoman Constanze Krehl could only get 54% of the delegates at an SPD state party convention in Döbeln, to support her pro-Schröder policies. Krehl’s main challenger in the party, Thomas Jurk, received almost 90%, however, which forced Krehl to resign on June 28.

Krehl’s ouster does not solve the SPD’s problem, however, which is to prevent their vote from dropping from the 10.7% it had in the 1999 Saxonian state parliament elections, to the 5-8% range, which is what opinion polls now give the party. If the party, under its new leadership, continues to stay loyal to the Chancellor’s budget-cutting policy, it is certain to fall further. Chancellor Schröder’s plan to “reform” unemployment and social welfare payments into a work-for-welfare scheme by Jan. 1, 2005, will cut state payments to 180,000 long-term unemployed, and another 50,000 welfare-receiving Saxonians, by more than 25%—from a monthly pay of 451 euros to 331 euros. Even if the state continues to pay rent, electricity, and heating, the unemployed, and welfare recipients, may hardly be able to buy food and other goods of daily consumption. Medicine, bus and train fares,

and other expenses all will have to be paid from this 331 euros sum, starting next year. Now, who should expect these 230,000 Saxonians to be so masochistic as to vote SPD in September? The Chancellor and the national SPD party leadership seems to expect just that, because they are urging the Saxonian party section not to campaign for any position critical of the Chancellor’s policy.

Labor Deserting the SPD

The Saxon state section of the DGB (German Labor Federation) expects that many—if not most—of these 230,000 voters will either stay home on election day, or vote for other parties, like the post-communist PDS. The anti-SPD populism of the PDS made it the big winner of the June 27 Thuringian municipal election, receiving 25% of the vote instead of the 18% it had in 1999. In opinion polls, the PDS is now ahead of the SPD in all five eastern states of Germany.

A DGB official in Dresden, the Saxon state capital, told this author on June 30, that labor is skeptical that a new SPD leadership would pursue a better policy. Even with the support of many of Krehl’s opponents, the Saxon labor unions could not get the themes “labor” and “social welfare” placed prominently on the party’s election campaign program. They were placed way back in the list of campaign items. “An SPD without any prominent reference to labor and social issues? That would be like the Greens . . . almost forgetting to mention the environment,” the DGB official said, forecasting that the disarray and disorientation in the SPD would drive voter turnout below the 53% reached in the Saxon state elections five years ago.

While it is uncertain whether the SPD will avoid becoming a minor party, what is certain is that the LaRouche movement, and its BüSo party, have launched a large-scale intervention in the Saxonian campaign. With the campaign theme, “In Sachsen Muss die Wirtschaft Wachsen!” (“Economic Growth Must Start in Saxony!”), some 50 organizers of the LaRouche Youth Movement from Germany, and other European states, will take part in the remaining 10 weeks of the campaign, addressing the issues that concern the 70-80% of voters in lower-income categories. They will also address those of young Saxons below voting age, presently thinking of leaving Saxony to look for a job and a future somewhere else. The LaRouche youth will tell them there is a future if the government’s budget-cutting policies are dumped, in favor of a “Eurasian Land-Bridge” perspective of new infrastructure. If Saxony were to expand its machine-building center in Chemnitz, convert some of its capacities in the crisis-stricken automobile sector in Zwickau to the production of tractors and other farming machinery, and transform the traditional Leipzig industrial fair into an exhibit of goods produced in Euro-Asian countries, this eastern-most state of Germany could make a genuine contribution to the development of the Eurasian Land-Bridge. And if young Saxons decide to join the LaRouche youth, it will be good for Saxony.