

Elections in Saxony Transform German Politics

by Rainer Apel

The results of the Sept. 19 elections for state parliament in the German state of Saxony show the beginning of a qualitative shift in German politics. The inability to deal with the worsening economic crisis has devastated the “established” national parties, first of all the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his Green Party coalition partner. Despite appeals from establishment institutions and the mainstream media to the voters not to voice their protest by boycotting the ballots, 39% of voters in Saxony and 44% in Brandenburg stayed home, on Sept. 19. The direct protest vote, benefitting the right-extremist National Democratic Party (NPD) in Saxony, and its sister party, the German People’s Union (Deutsche Volksunion, DVU) in the state of Brandenburg, has been played up by the national and international media.

The Civil Rights Movement Solidarity party (BüSo), led by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, campaigned hard in Saxony, and achieved a higher total than ever before, with nearly 6% in some districts. The party’s slate as a whole won 0.5% of the statewide vote, and 2-5% for each of its 21, predominantly young, candidates. The following are some BüSo results from individual election districts: Schwarzenberg, 2.2%; Zwickau 2, 3.6%; Zwickau 3, 3.0%; Chemnitz 4, 3.8%; Freiberg, 2.2%; Görlitz, 2.7%; Kamenz, 2.4%; Meissen, 2.4%; Mittweida, 5.7%. In numerous sub-districts, between 5 and 8% of the vote was recorded.

Although these vote totals appear small from the vantage-point of American politics, they represent a more than fivefold increase from the BüSo vote in 1999. Voting for the 21 direct candidates were 18,034 people; for the whole slate, 11,284. Further, in Germany’s parliamentary system, small parties can play an important leverage role that does not exist in the American electoral system. Once a party achieves 5% on the

national level, it becomes eligible for seats in parliament, and can be a coalition partner in the national government.

In spite of very modest campaign funds, the forceful campaigning of the young BüSo activists and the BüSo’s job-creation program—8 million productive jobs through 200 billion euros of state-directed annual investments—made the difference. Party chairwoman Helga Zepp-LaRouche called her party’s vote: “a breakthrough—it proves that we are on the right track. This is real outreach, and it was done by the LaRouche Youth and the Monday Demonstrations. The major parties are paying the bill for Hartz IV [the government’s vicious austerity program]. If they don’t change, it will get worse for them.”

The BüSo was directly responsible for sparking the Monday demonstrations, which spread from Leipzig, in Saxony, on July 12, to cities throughout Germany, and now to other nations in Europe. Although the election is over, the demonstration process continues to grow, and reshape politics.

Problems for the CDU

Saxony’s CDU State Governor Georg Milbradt paid the highest price for the neo-liberal social-economic policies of national party chairwoman Angela Merkel: The CDU lost 15.8%, compared to its 1999 vote. The Christian Democrats ignored the fact that 75% of the CDU voter base, according to an opinion poll published three weeks before election day, supported (and still supports) the Monday demonstrations. The CDU also lost heavily (7.1%) in the state elections in Brandenburg, while the post-communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) consolidated its position in both states. The SPD lost 7.4% in Brandenburg, and lost 18 of its 37 election districts to the PDS, but it remained the strongest party there, in terms of the statewide vote. While losing only slightly (0.9%) in Saxony, the SPD’s 9.8% there nevertheless repre-



The LaRouche Youth Movement and the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity party (BüSo), during a week of action in Berlin earlier this year. The BüSo's fivefold vote increase in the state of Saxony during the Sept. 19 elections, is the harbinger of political earthquakes to come.

sent the party's worst election result in Germany's post-war history.

The Monday demonstrations have proven to be the main catalyst of the expanding debate on economic alternatives to the austerity policies of the Schröder government and the other parties. Monday rallies, held in about 240 cities of Germany the day after the Saxony election, will continue, in spite of the political establishment telling the citizens that "now after the elections, protests are no longer meaningful." The pressure of the protesting population on the government and the establishment parties to change policies, will increase, as will the recognition of the BüSo and the LaRouche Youth, who again on Sept. 20 intervened in 17 Monday rallies, either with speakers or in other forms.

A specific pressure to change can be observed inside the CDU, where a revolt is building against Chairwoman Angela Merkel and her neo-con leadership circle. Christian Democrats in Saxony feel quite frustrated at the fact that their party "did not listen in time, to what the voters think about Hartz IV," that after some statements of sympathy with the Monday protests in early August, Governor Milbradt returned to party discipline, namely Merkel's hard line of "budget reforms." Merkel, in interviews, as well as during her visits to Saxony during the election campaign, left no doubt that she not only backed Hartz IV, but insisted that budget cuts had to be even deeper. Voters were scared away from the CDU.

And even after the election debacle, Merkel urged her party to "close ranks" and "stay the course," but, as the afore-said Saxon opinion poll shows, 75% of her party in Saxony

alone wants another policy. On a national scale, Merkel's hard-headedness has decreased popularity ratings for the CDU from 50% at the end of May, to 42% in mid-September. With her suicidal policy course, she will not be able to chase Chancellor Schröder out of office.

Dilemma for the SPD

For the SPD, however, there is no real reason to applaud the rapid drop in CDU popularity, because it does not solve the Social Democrats' problem that they still have no policy to address the nation's catastrophic unemployment situation. Leading SPD politicians, including the Chancellor himself, have repeatedly admitted in public, that their Hartz IV package of drastic cutting in labor market and welfare budgets will not create any real new jobs. For young Saxons or Brandenburgians who finish school and find no job in their state or city, the alternative is either to seek a job in one of the western states, or to

join the long queues of jobless at home.

Since official statistics omit all jobless citizens who are above age 58, or who are involved in make-work programs of 6-9 months duration, real unemployment in the east of Germany generally is 50% above the official figure. This means that the real average unemployment in Saxony is not 18%, but rather 27%, and in the crisis regions, it is not 21 or 22% as claimed, but above 30%. There is generally one free job offered to 50, 80, or even 100 jobless citizens, in Germany's eastern regions, where full employment will be achieved, only if 2-3 million new jobs are created. So far, only the BüSo program has shown how this can be done, with high-technology infrastructure development, linked up to the Eurasian Land-Bridge.

Unless the SPD finally listens to the BüSo, there is no question but that the frustration level will rise. Current plans are for a huge rally in Berlin on Oct. 2, the day before German Unity Day. Nor is the unrest likely to end then, because Hartz IV will actually go into effect in January.

In addition, the ferment is now spreading throughout the rest of Europe, where every country is under assault from the austerity diktat of the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. Demonstrations have occurred in France and Austria, and on Sept. 23, labor unions and leftist organizations, with a total membership of more than 300,000, are planning a day of national protest against austerity in seven cities in Switzerland. On Sept. 21, protests broke out in the Netherlands, with more than 30,000 people taking to the streets of Rotterdam.