

# The party formerly known as “Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands”

Unified Germany in Perspective



**DIE LINKE. PDS**



# Outline

## Background

1946-1989/90

Ideology & Voters

Strategic Behaviour at the Land level

The PDS/Left merger

Conclusion

# History



- ▶ Forced KPD/SPD merger in 1946
- ▶ Dominated by Moscow-trained leadership (Ulbricht)
- ▶ Stalinist outlook until late 1960s/1970s
- ▶ SED cells present in every factory, school, larger enterprise; right and ability to control every aspect of public life
- ▶ Centralised, hierarchical structure

## History II



- ▶ Leading role incorporated in Article 1 of 1968 constitution
- ▶ Other parties ('Blockparteien') dominated by SED
  - ▶ Bizarre surrogate for pluralism: 'Demokratischen Block der Parteien und Massenorganisationen' and 'Nationale Front'
  - ▶ SED-Membership pre-condition for almost any career
  - ▶ 2.3 Million party members in 1989

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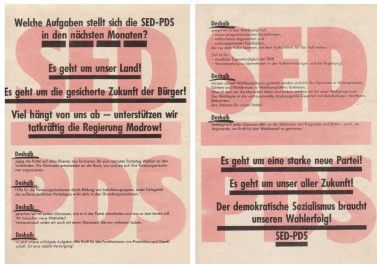
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  - ▶ About one fifth of the adult population

## History III



Vorderside

Rückseite

- ▶ Mass demonstrations in autumn '89 triggered power-struggle within leadership
- ▶ Honecker generation replaced by Krenz generation ...

- ▶ SED officially gives up leading role in December; new leadership replaced by members of the '3rd rank' (Gysi and friends)
- ▶ Party not dissolved, but renamed (SED/SED-PDS/PDS)
- ▶ Party apparatus (40,000 staff) and economic empire unravel

## History IV

- ▶ Membership figures
  - ▶ 450,000 members in March 1990
  - ▶ 300,000 members in December 1990
  - ▶ 95,000 members in 1998, today about 60,000
- ▶ Who was left?
  - ▶ More than 95 per cent former SED members
  - ▶ More than 80 per cent of party members older than 60
  - ▶ Roughly 50 per cent women
- ▶ Party organisation from early 90s very similar to other parties
- ▶ But virtually no party members/structures in West Germany
- ▶ PDS Germany's first pensioners' party



## History V

- ▶ 'Hartz' → WASG breaks away from (West German) SPD/  
Trade Unions in 2004/2005
- ▶ (Relatively) strong in Bavaria, NRW, Saarland
- ▶ Candidates on West German PDS lists in 2005 election
- ▶ Lafontaine joins party with a view to merge with PDS, 11,600  
members in 2007
- ▶ PDS renamed to Linkspartei, formal merger of both parties  
summer 2007
- ▶ 'New' party highly successful in 2009 federal election

## PDS posters 2005 West vs. East

[www.sozialisten.de](http://www.sozialisten.de)



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## Posters 2005: 'East Only'



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**Hände weg von der Bodenreform**

**Wir bleiben dran!**

Karte: Abschaffung der Bodenreform, Weg mit dem Erbschaftssteuerartikel 233, §§ 1-36, des EStGB!

**PDS**

www.sozialisten.de

100 Prozent für den Osten

**BUNDESWEIT WÄHLBAR**

**DIE LINKE. PDS**

# Ideology

- ▶ Eclectic blend of all leftist ideologies
- ▶ No extremist traces left in official documents
- ▶ Party leadership made some public commitments to democracy, though some ideas look a bit odd
  - ▶ STASI connections/approach to history?
  - ▶ How democratic are the rank-and-file members?
  - ▶ Some orthodox Marxist sub-groups within the party (Kommunistische Plattform, Marxistisches Forum)
- ▶ **Plus traditional, left-leaning unionism**



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- ▶ Quite successful in 2009

## Units of analysis

- ▶ Four east German state parties ('Landesverbände')
- ▶ Two in government (Berlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), two not (Saxony, Brandenburg)
- ▶ How independent are they, what strategies do they pursue?
- ▶ Three strategic models:
  1. Office-seeking
  2. Policy-seeking
  3. Vote-seeking
- ▶ Rather a matter of emphasis than of choice
- ▶ Office-seeking not an option on the Federal level
- ▶ Indicators on the land level needed – how to compare them?

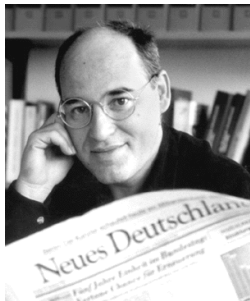
## Wings within the PDS

1. 'Modern Socialist wing'
  - ▶ Not much sympathy for GDR
  - ▶ Radical left reform of existing system
  - ▶ By democratic means
  - ▶ A more radical SPD/Green party
2. Social/left-liberals
  - ▶ Interest: 'realpolitik'
  - ▶ Focus on local/regional level
  - ▶ Less interested in ideology – 'pragmatic' left

## Wings within the PDS

3. 'Restorative ideologues'
    - ▶ Support for state socialism (Stalinism?!?)
    - ▶ High visibility
  4. 'Radical alternative wing'
    - ▶ Oppose current system & GDR
    - ▶ Linked to anarchist/'autonomous' movement
    - ▶ 'Non-dogmatic' radicals
- 
- ▶ 1 & 2 willing to participate in coalitions in principle
  - ▶ 3 & 4 in favour of principled opposition

## Case study: Berlin



- ▶ Between East & West
- ▶ Enormous debts, huge structural problems
- ▶ PDS dominated by Modern socialists and social/left-liberals
- ▶ Willing to support a program of austerity and debt-reduction since 1997 (!)
- ▶ Formed coalition with SPD in 2002, renewed in 2006
- ▶ Very little (and ineffective) opposition within party

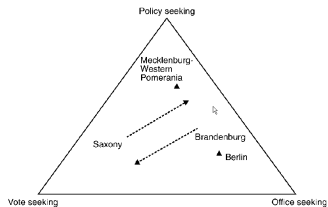
## Case study: Brandenburg



- ▶ PDS became more and more isolated after 1994, but electorally stronger
- ▶ Like in Berlin and MVP, PDS pragmatic and willing to govern in 1997
- ▶ Conflict over pragmatism/traditionalism, generational conflict
- ▶ Dominance of pragmatists 2001-04
- ▶ Strife re-emerged in 2004 but did not hurt electoral returns (Anti-Hartz-IV campaign, PDS 2nd party)
- ▶ 'Able to govern, but not willing to do so' (Bisky)
- ▶ SPD-PDS coalition 2009-



## Conclusion: 1990-05



- ▶ PDS not longer an opposition-only party but ...
  1. Very heterogeneous
  2. State parties enjoy high degree of freedom from centre
  3. Variation over time
- ▶ Party base very old
- ▶ Party confined to East Germany → prospects of long-term survival?

## 2005-07

- ▶ Schröder's 'Agenda' reforms highly controversial
- ▶ 'Labour and Social Justice/Electoral Alternative' founded by disgruntled SPD/trade union members
  - ▶ Too small to survive/make an impact
  - ▶ Largely confined to old West
- ▶ PDS/WASG alliance a high risk/high gain strategy for both partners
- ▶ Not time/support for full merger in before federal election 2005
- ▶ Internal conflict and strife within both groups
- ▶ Formally merged in June 2007

## The 'New' Left

- ▶ In a sense, the end of the old SED
- ▶ Party initially dominated by Gysi and Lafontaine
- ▶ Electoral support in the East much higher, much broader party base
- ▶ But: parliamentary group dominated by Westerners
- ▶ Future course of SPD not clear
- ▶ No support for Red-Red-Green coalitions on federal level
- ▶ Coalitions in Western states highly problematic
- ▶ Leadership and ideological problems



## Class questions

1. What does the PDS/Left stand for, and how do you evaluate its political role in Germany?
2. Will the PDS/Left survive? What is the most likely trajectory of its development?
3. Can you conceive of a constellation where the PDS/Left could join a coalition after the Federal Election of 2013?