The party formerly known as “Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands”

Unified Germany in Perspective
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
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
- In a population of 16 Million (including children)
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
- In a population of 16 Million (including children)
- About one fifth of the adult population
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
PDS posters 2005 West vs. East
Posters 2005: ‘East Only’
Posters 2005: ‘East Only’
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-tilting unionism
Voters

- Concentrated in the East (both Land- and Bund-level)
Voters

- Concentrated in the East (both Land- and Bund-level)
- Hardly any workers
- Little gender bias
- High level of formal education
- Commitment to democracy *and* socialism
- Dominated by (former) (public sector) employees
- A party of the old middle-elites?
Voters

- Concentrated in the East (both Land- and Bund-level)
- Hardly any workers
- Little gender bias
- High level of formal education
- Commitment to democracy and socialism
- Dominated by (former) (public sector) employees
- A party of the old middle-elites?
- 2nd or 3rd party in many parts of East Germany
Voters

- Concentrated in the East (both Land- and Bund-level)
- Hardly any workers
- Little gender bias
- High level of formal education
- Commitment to democracy *and* socialism
- Dominated by (former) (public sector) employees
- A party of the old middle-elites?
- 2nd or 3rd party in many parts of East Germany
- Some hope of national impact after 2005 election
Voters

- Concentrated in the East (both Land- and Bund-level)
- Hardly any workers
- Little gender bias
- High level of formal education
- Commitment to democracy *and* socialism
- Dominated by (former) (public sector) employees
- A party of the old middle-elites?
- 2nd or 3rd party in many parts of East Germany
- Some hope of national impact after 2005 election
- 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 is 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?