
THE DILEMMAS OF GERMANY'S PDS

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), successor party to the former ruling communist party in East Germany, the SED (Socialist Unity Party). The PDS has enjoyed an electoral renaissance in the eastern half of Germany since the mid-1990s, and now plays an extremely important role in the national party system in the Federal Republic as well as in state party systems in eastern Germany. Nevertheless, this article argues that the PDS is faced with two important dilemmas as it attempts to secure its long-term future in German politics, dilemmas illustrated in the make-up of its membership and voters, its party identity/ideology, and – above all – its policy positions, all of which are analyzed in detail here.

As Frank L. Wilson notes elsewhere in this special issue, radical left/communist parties have had tremendous difficulties in establishing a distinctive identity and distinctive programs and policies in the wake of the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This is nowhere more true than in the case of Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Put simply, the end of communism has left the party with a number of crucial dilemmas. Unlike other communist successor parties in Eastern Europe, the PDS was born into an already developed electoral and governing system with its own institutional rules and it faced intense party competition within an already established political party system that was "extended" to eastern Germany. Unlike other communist successor parties as well, the PDS could not, even if it had wanted to, move to occupy the moderate, social-democratic left space on the ideological spectrum because the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) already occupied that space. Thus the PDS, certainly out of desire but out of necessity as well, staked a place to the left of the SPD. On the one hand this has created opportunities for the PDS since, especially in the last four years, the SPD and German Greens have moved to the middle of the ideological spectrum, leaving a vacuum on the left. On the other hand, moving to far to the left-end of the spectrum creates electoral difficulties for the party given the long tradition of failure among the West German radical left. Moreover, it is unclear whether in contemporary German politics there exists enough of a voter potential on the left that would be beneficial to the PDS. One

very big dilemma of the PDS therefore continues to be establishing a political identity and a set of policies distinctive from the SPD and the Greens but nevertheless not so far to the left that the party disappears into an electoral black hole of sectarian irrelevance.

A second big dilemma for the party has to do with its role in a continuing east-west divide in reunified Germany. After initial electoral failure in the early 1990s, the PDS returned with a vengeance in the 1994 Federal Elections, where - although it continued to receive only marginal support in the old states of Germany - it garnered 4.7% of the national vote and almost 20% of the vote in the eastern half of the country. Accounting for the PDS' new success were its ability to harness dissatisfaction in the east with the ongoing economic problems associated with integrating eastern Germany into the Federal Republic as well as eastern resentment of the dominance of western political elites (1). The PDS' ability to present itself as the champion of the underdog, and its place as the only "indigenous" party in the east, has been of vital importance to the party. Indeed, the PDS' very survival as a party hitherto has depended upon its role as the party representing specific "eastern German" interests. No wonder then that there are some who view the PDS as having less in common with other communist successor parties than with "regional" parties throughout western and eastern Europe. (Patton, 1998; Hough, 2000).

Yet although the PDS may indeed be a *de facto* a regional party of eastern Germany, it does not compete only there, nor can it afford intend to limit itself in this way. A combination of voter demographics (eastern Germany has roughly one-quarter of the population of the older Federal Republic and migration from east to west continues to climb) and, to a certain extent, an aging voting base mean that the party needs to not just maintain its share of the vote in the east in order to gain entrance to the federal parliament, but rather to increase this share of the vote. In addition, the ultimate success or failure of the PDS in the west will impact considerably the party's identity and internal dynamics, for attempts at "renewing" or reforming the party on the part of the PDS' leadership rest in part on moving the PDS away from one its chief roles, a backward-looking party of *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the old East Germany) upon which the party's more orthodox and fundamentalist wing depend. Therefore the second fundamental dilemma of the PDS is that while it must continue to represent specific eastern German interests, it is doubtful that the party could survive as a purely regional party in the long term. Yet in becoming a truly all-German party of the radical left it risks alienating core supporters in the east, thus jeopardizing the party's short-term electoral chances. While many in the PDS leadership might prefer that the party evolves into something akin to the radical socialist parties of Scandinavia, the genealogy of the PDS as well as the continuing east-west divide in Germany thus considerably complicate such a development.

This article will explore these two fundamental dilemmas of the PDS as they manifest themselves in the party's place within the German party system, the make-up of its party members and its voters, and the ideological direction of the party in both theory and practice. Considerable space will be devoted as well to the practical policy alternatives the PDS espouses, since it is here that the identity of the party and its fundamental dilemmas may be most clearly seen. A central argument made here is that the two dilemmas of the PDS have thus far forced the party to adopt an ideological melange that, while fruitful as an "opposition" position in the first decade of German reunification, is nevertheless coming under severe strain as the party attempts to both retain its base of support in eastern Germany and to increase its vote totals in western Germany. Sooner rather than later, the PDS will have to find a way around its fundamental dilemmas, create a more coherent ideological position, and offer a more coherent set of policy alternatives.

The PDS in the Eastern and Western German Party System

The electoral fortunes of the PDS – and thus the party's place in the German party system – can be summed up in one phrase: success in eastern Germany, failure in western Germany. As perhaps Moscow's most faithful ally up until the time of *Perestroika*, the GDR, ruled for over forty years by the "Socialist Unity Party" (SED), experienced the end of state socialism in the most dramatic of fashions. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the shell-shocked SED desperately searched for a way to save itself. Yet from the very beginning reformist factions in the party battled with orthodox elements for whom the GDR and state socialism were nothing but a source of pride. The rather vague ideological and programmatic "consensus" reached between these groups then and that continues to bedevil the party to this day was in essence nothing more than a mutual recognition that without a common front, the entire party would be lost. The initial results of this groping strategy were less than encouraging. As is well known, in the months that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the PDS (or rather the SED-PDS, as the party was then known) underwent a haemorrhage of party members from around 2.3 million in October 1989 to around 450,000 by May 1990. The party appeared to be in a free fall that would eventually lead to its obliteration. Furthermore, although the PDS garnered a surprising 16.4% of the vote in the first (and last!) free and fair national vote held in the GDR since 1947, this total had dropped to 11.1% in reunified Germany's first federal election in December 1990. Analysts thus predicted an early death for the party. Yet the PDS, for the reasons outlined above, rebounded in elections to the European parliament in June 1994 and, more importantly, in the federal elections held later that year, taking 4.4% of the vote and around 20% of the vote in the east. This trend continued in the 1998 elections where, for the first time in its history as the PDS, the party cleared the 5% hurdle

necessary for representation in the federal parliament with 5.1% of the vote (2). As a result, the PDS was able to gain “*Fraktion*” status in the *Bundestag*, allowing it to participate as a full parliamentary party (3).

The string of electoral successes for the PDS in eastern Germany above is even more significant when one keeps in mind the political constellation here. In the new states the Christian Democrats (CDU), SPD, and PDS are the only parties represented at the state level (excepting the presence of the radical right German People’s Union [DVU] in several states), the Alliance ‘90/Greens and Free Democrats (FDP) having virtually vanished from the eastern political landscape. Not only is the PDS now receiving over 20% of the vote in eastern Germany, it has also in several eastern states overtaken the SPD as the second-strongest party. Thus for example while the PDS received 21.3% of the vote in the Thuringia state election of September 12, 1999, the SPD mustered only 18.5%. The results of the Saxony state election of September 19, 1999 were even more dramatic. Here the PDS received more than double the vote of the SPD, scoring an impressive 22.2% of the vote versus the SPD’s miserable showing of 10.7%.

Table 1
Electoral Results for the PDS in Federal Elections, 1990-1998

	1990 Total Vote and % of Vote	1994 Total Vote and % of Vote	1998 Total Vote and % of Vote
Germany, Entire	1, 129, 578 (2.4%)	2, 066, 176 (4.4%)	2, 515, 454 (5.1%)
Eastern Germany	1, 003, 631 (11.1%)	1, 697, 224 (19.8%)	2, 054, 773 (21.6%)
Western Germany	125, 947 (0.3%)	368, 952 (1.0%)	460, 681 (1.2%)

Source: Brie, 2000.

As table 1 shows, the PDS has thus more than tripled its vote in federal elections in both eastern and western Germany. The electoral success of the PDS in the last half-decade, despite (or perhaps because of) opposition to it from every major party, has been stunning.

Electoral success in the east has, moreover, been translated into substantial political power for the PDS. Operating within this *de facto* three-party system in the east, the PDS has begun to play a critical role in determining the composition of state governments there. The political strength of the PDS has been clearly recognized by the SPD. Although still spurning any coalition with the PDS at the federal level, a change in attitude on the part of the federal leadership of the SPD from 1996 onwards – and changes in the balance of power within the PDS that gave reformers and those in favour of coalitions a clear majority in the party – have made it possible for closer cooperation between the PDS and SPD in eastern Germany, especially in Saxony-Anhalt (the so-called “toleration” model of government), in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, where reunified Germany’s first state-level SPD-PDS coalition came to power in 1998 (Olsen, 2000; Berg and Koch, 2000), and now in Berlin, where the PDS governs with the SPD in a coalition government since the October, 2001 state elections.

Putting a damper on this optimistic picture for the PDS, however, has been its electoral showings in the western half of the country. Here the party’s results remain at a very low level, a mere 1.2% of the vote in the last federal election. Whereas the PDS was able to increase its absolute numbers of the national vote in western Germany from some 125, 000 to around 460, 000 from 1990 to 1998, its percentage of the vote in the west remains around one-twentieth of its vote percentage in the east (21.6% in 1998).

Indeed, electoral results in state elections in eastern and western Germany further underscore the chasm between the PDS’ electoral support in the new and old states. In the east, these results range from a high of 24.4% in the 1998 state elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania to 17.7% of the vote in the Berlin state election in 1999. Indeed, the last Berlin state election shows alone the vast difference between the PDS in western and eastern Germany. While the party received 4.2% of the vote in western Berlin, the PDS by contrast garnered 39.5% of the vote in the eastern half of the city. In state elections in the old states of Germany proper the PDS’ best electoral result hitherto has been in Bremen, where the party received 2.9% of the vote in 1999, a disappointing result due to the party’s hopes for an electoral “breakthrough” in this city-state with a strong left-wing tradition. The results throughout western Germany in state elections range from the high in Bremen to very meagre results in the Saarland (0.8%) and Hamburg (0.7%).

The same things that make the PDS a successful party in the east account, at least in part, for its lack of success in western Germany. First, unlike the PDS-East which still enjoys a huge advantage in membership and disciplined organization over its rivals in the new states, the PDS-West is organizationally and materially weak. The 4,000 party members in the West – about as many as can be found in any large city in eastern Germany – make up only about 3% of the total mem-

bership. There are not enough members to staff local party groups (*Basisgruppen* or BOs) across western Germany, so that large geographical areas have no local party groups. Where the PDS is represented, it usually has only a handful of members, and these members are too often extremely politically inexperienced. Alongside problems in the membership itself are severe financial problems. Nearly all local party groups, for example, operate on shoestring budgets; because of financial constraints, many have no official party office and must operate out of members' homes or meet in taverns. Secondly, the weakness of the PDS-West can be traced to the ideological dogmatism and left-wing sectarianism of much of its state leadership there, compared to the more pragmatic leadership of the party at the state level in the East and at the federal level. This ideological dogmatism is, of course, given sustenance by orthodox Marxists and GDR nostalgics in the east. Yet it also has a distinct genesis in the recent Western German past. Desperately in search of political "partners" that would help it gain a foothold in western Germany and thus survive the 5% hurdle for federal elections, in the early 1990s the PDS chose to work with established, but electorally marginal, parties of the far left, such as the German Communist Party (DKP), Communist Federation (KB), the Federation of West German Communists (BWK), and the Unified Socialist Party (VSP). Problems between the PDS and its partners soon surfaced. While the PDS leadership was attempting, at least publicly, to distance itself from the SED's Leninist/Stalinist ideology (if not always the party's past), its western German counterparts were almost completely unfazed by the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and continued to assert their view of "true" socialism. Added to these frictions was the continued strife – carried over into the PDS – amongst these small parties, some of which were Trotskyite, some Maoist, and some Stalinist. Just before the PDS forbade dual membership in the PDS and other parties, the radical left joined the PDS in droves, often taking over effective control of state organizations through both sheer numbers and better political organization and using the party for their own personal far left crusades. Although some state party organizations have changed dramatically since 1990, many still bear the imprint of their origins in 1990.

The third and final reason for the PDS' lack of success in western Germany is the simple fact that the PDS is not "rooted" in western German society and is treated as an alien import from eastern Germany by the western German electorate. The diffuse eastern "life-feeling" that the PDS taps into (chiefly a feeling of being marginalized by western Germans and western parties) and that makes the party such a formidable presence in the new states cannot be transferred to the PDS-west. As the foregoing discussion of the financial, personnel, and organizational problems of the PDS-West also makes clear, the lack of adequate institutional structures in western Germany can also be seen as a cause – as well as an effect – of the party's lack of resonance in western Germany. Having retained for the most part its structural/institutional linkages, the PDS is represented in nearly

every locality at the local level in eastern Germany while it is notably absent from large areas of the West.

Thus while the party in eastern Germany has enjoyed electoral and political success to a degree unexpected by anyone familiar with German politics in 1990-91, the PDS in western Germany remains little more than a political sect. Even party insiders no longer think that the PDS will be able to establish itself quickly in western Germany and think rather in terms of decades, rather than in years, in hoping for PDS success in the west. The dilemmas of the PDS are thus much in evidence when one looks macroscopically at the PDS' place in the German party system. Although the PDS leadership recognizes that the key to political success in the western half of the country (and thus continued long-term success nationally) depends upon moving the PDS away from both its sectarian and ideologically dogmatic politics as well as its purely "eastern" profile, such moves are fraught with difficulty. In order to demonstrate the PDS' practical political competence and its suitability as a coalition partner the PDS needs the experience of governing (thus, it is also hoped, broadening its base of support). This can only be achieved, however, in coalitions with the SPD which will invariably – indeed, already have in the state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania – dilute the party's left-wing and "opposition" profile as the imperatives of coalition government move the PDS onto more politically pragmatic ground. The upside of this is that the PDS will be seen as more attractive to a western electorate the PDS sorely needs. The downside of this is that the PDS risks undermining its own ideological *raison d'être*. Indeed, those radical leftists in the party who warn that the PDS is heading towards its own "Bad Godesberg" that would spell the end of the party may have their own ideological agenda but nevertheless have a point (4). Moreover, additional electoral support in the west depends in part upon the public's perception that the PDS is an all-German, rather than an eastern regional, party, thus risking a dilution of its distinctive regional profile. Calls to abandon the western expansion of the PDS in order to concentrate on its base in the East are not infrequently heard, although always dismissed by the national leadership (5). Yet such doubts cannot be easily dispelled.

PDS Voters and Members: Nostalgic Milieu or Modern Catch-All Party?

The dilemmas of the PDS are also much in evidence when looking at the voters and membership of the PDS as the party tries to retain its current voter base as well as expand it beyond a still rather narrow clientele. The “classic” communist party had its base of support in the working class. Although in some cases this was more communist myth than reality, it nevertheless remained true that it was to the working class that communist parties attempted to appeal. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, of course, it is impossible to know just what support totalitarian communist parties such as the SED had amongst workers (itself a completely elastic sociological category subject to the imperatives of communist myth-making). Be that as it may, it is quite clear that blue-collar workers are, if anything, disproportionately under represented amongst communist successor parties. This is certainly true for the PDS, whose support among blue-collar workers in eastern Germany – while slowly rising – still remains meager. So if not workers, who does vote for the PDS? What are the characteristics of its voting base?

It must be said at the outset that the voting base of the PDS – at least in eastern Germany – is not considerably different than the voting base of the other parties, i.e. there is hardly any singular characteristic that distinguishes PDS voters. Be that as it may, a closer look at eastern versus western voters for the PDS show some important and revealing differences among them. One of the most extensive of recent analyses of PDS voters, East and West, is a study by Viola Neu (Neu, 2000). When looking at the occupational structure of PDS voters, for example, Neu finds that only 7% of western voters for the PDS are unemployed, while nearly 20% of easterners are. Furthermore, although this 20% is only marginally above the average rate of unemployment in the east (18% of eastern voters in 1998), the number of those in retirement who vote for the PDS (38%) is significantly higher than the average eastern voter (29%). Thus, one can assume that among those in retirement who vote for the PDS there exists a significant amount of “unwilling” (i.e., unemployed) retirees. In the west, the unemployed are only slightly above average (7% to 4%), while retirees who vote for the PDS (6%) are significantly below the norm (23%). The differences in age structure of the PDS in the east and the PDS in the west are confirmed as well by the number of “students” (a category which includes a wide range of occupational education as well as education at institutions of higher learning) who vote for the PDS in eastern and western Germany. While this group makes up only 3% of PDS voters in the east, it represents almost ¼ of those voting for the PDS in the west. In regards to the age structure of its voters, Neu found that while the percentages of supporters in the two age groups 30-44 and 45-59 are nearly identical in the two halves of Germany, the younger and older age groups are a mirror image: in eastern Germany in 1998,

the PDS receives almost 1/3 of its support from those 60 years or older, while in western Germany the PDS receives more than 1/3 of its support from the two youngest voting groups and only a slight percentage (6%) from those 60 years or older. Thus while the PDS can count on the support of a stable voter base in the east, in western Germany the PDS has thus far found resonance only among younger voters.

Given these characteristics of PDS voters it is not clear whether the party can be considered a “milieu” party appealing to a GDR-nostalgic sub-culture within eastern Germany, a “catch-all” party that is beginning to appeal to a much broader segment of the (eastern) population, a “protest” party for those disenchanted with the social and economic conditions of the new Federal Republic, or a regional party similar to the Scottish National Party or Italy’s Northern League. All of these ways of viewing the PDS have some merit but are incomplete. Thus to characterize the PDS it would be more accurate to describe it as having elements of all three of these party models. It is inarguable that the PDS in eastern Germany continues to depend upon a core group of voters drawn from the ranks of alienated party functionaries and those who supported the old regime to one degree or another. Thus the “old guard” (in terms of both age and political attitudes!) of the SED votes heavily for the PDS, as do those clearly frustrated with the economic conditions of eastern Germany. In western Germany, of course, the PDS is hardly a catch-all party. It can also only marginally be considered a milieu party, since its “milieu” is limited to small, left-wing circles, but rather resembles more a protest party in terms of the characteristics of its voters (see Neu, 2000). Having said that, however, the PDS has considerably broadened its appeal in the last half-decade and now attracts a remarkable number of young voters to the party in eastern Germany. The heterogeneity of PDS voters in eastern and (especially) western Germany presents a continuous challenge to the party. Holding this disparate group of voters together remains an extremely difficult task and is becoming more so as the party leadership attempts to move the PDS slowly away from its more blatant GDR-nostalgia and radical left-wing positions.

Similarly to its voting base, the membership of the PDS-East and West diverge considerably. What’s more, the PDS-West is inarguably more politically heterogeneous than the PDS-East (Chrapa and Wittich, 2000; von Dittfurth, 1998). To take one example, age structure, while almost 40% of the membership in the west is under 40 years of age, and only 21.9% over 60 years of age, in the eastern half of the country the reverse is true. As table 2 shows, in eastern Germany 80.3% (!) of the membership of the PDS is over 60 years of age, while only 2.8% are under 40.

Table 2
Age Structure of the PDS Membership in Eastern and Western Germany

Age of Member	Eastern Germany (%)	Western Germany (%)
Under 30	0.6	15.6
30-39	2.2	22.8
40-49	7.9	23.3
50-59	9.1	16.5
60-69	30.7	11.2
70-79	41.1	9.4
Over 80	8.5	1.3

Source: Moreau and Grabiak, 2002

No wonder then that not only scholars, but even the PDS leadership, has spoken of the “dying out” trend of the PDS membership (Brie, 2000). Moreover, while the PDS appears to have a relatively stable (if rapidly aging!) membership in the east, the western PDS has seen wild fluctuations in its membership. A recent study of the PDS membership commissioned by the Party shows that almost 1/4 of PDS members in the west have been in the party only 2 years or less while 3/4 of PDS-West party members have only been members since 1995 (Chrapa and Witlich, 2001). Turnover in the PDS is also quite high. Thus, for example, while in 1996 the party took in 330 new members it lost 137 (Gohde, 1997). Accounting for the high turnover in party ranks, some have argued, is the relatively low level of party “bindedness” by PDS-West members (6).

In addition to these demographic differences, there exist significant differences in political attitudes between PDS-West members and PDS-East members. According to the latest internal study of the PDS membership, while only 6.8% of the membership in the East sees the role of the PDS as “preserving the vision of socialism” (with another 11.6% suggesting that “socialism” means representing “socialist values”), an astonishing 27.2% of PDS-West members believe that the party should chiefly represent this elusive “vision of socialism.” (Chrapa and Witlich, 2001). This does not mean that the political profile of the PDS-East is unambiguously more to the political center than the PDS-West. Far from it, since left-wing orthodox/GDR-nostalgic groups in the East continue to be a major obstacle to further party reform, as will be discussed further below. Both the PDS-East and PDS-West membership is extremely heterogeneous in terms of political attitudes. All in all, however, members in the East are far more politically pragmatic than their western cousins. Thus the membership in the East as a whole has been far more supportive of attempts to move the PDS farther away from the ghetto of extreme left politics, seen in support for coalitions with the Social Democrats at the

state level. In the latest PDS internal study, this is demonstrated in the fact that 33% of the membership in eastern Germany finds participation in coalitions in principle with the SPD and Greens desirable and only 2.2% undesirable. In contrast, almost 14% of PDS-West members reject coalitions completely and only 23.1% believe such coalitions are desirable (Chrapa and Wittich, 2001). What's more, 52% of party members in the East are of the opinion that the current state coalition government in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania has been very good for the PDS while only 27.1% of party members in the West feel this way (Chrapa and Wittich, 2001).

All in all then, the membership of the PDS is quite heterogenous, both in terms of the demographic characteristics of its members as well as in its political attitudes. This is of particular concern to the party leadership, since the leadership needs to hold on to both its older, more orthodox members as well as to recruit new members for a rapidly aging party. Yet differences in political attitudes as well as "cultural" differences between the PDS-East and PDS-West make this task a quite difficult one. The leadership's task in this matter is, however, made somewhat easier by two key facts. First, those orthodox leftists within the PDS in both eastern and western Germany may throw up roadblocks to reform but will nevertheless hesitate to leave the party, since this would consign them to political irrelevance. Second, as long as the party leadership continues to at least pay lip service to the "good side" of the old GDR, the grass roots membership in the east will most probably always stay loyal to the PDS. Leaving the PDS is still akin to leaving the Church: the party is less a collective for rationally achieving concrete political goals than a "community of mourning" (*Trauergemeinschaft*) for the old GDR or a "warming shelter" (*Wärmestube*) against the cold reality of reunified Germany (von Dittfurth, 1998). Thus for better or worse, for the near future the party leadership is probably stuck with the membership it has got.

Party Ideology

The internal contradictions within which the PDS operates are on full display when looking at the party's official political programs. To date the PDS has published two party programs, one in 1990 and one in 1993 which was an extensive revision of the 1990 program. At this writing the PDS is in the middle of a debate on a new, draft party program. The new draft program, approved by the party leadership and written by two of its most gifted theorists, has provoked intense controversy. Indeed, several orthodox leftist party members appointed to the committee tasked with writing the new program resigned their posts after the vote on commissioning the draft and have offered their own draft program ("Program der PDS," 2002; *Freitag* 29, 2001; *Sozialismus*, 2001; *Neues Deutschland*, 2001). Although it remains an open question whether the new draft program will be ap-

proved it will be nevertheless discussed below to show how the PDS continues to evolve ideologically, as well as to show how the party continues to grapple with its dilemmas.

As noted above, the first PDS party program was written in 1990, immediately before the East German elections in March, and therefore reflects the confusion of the party as it searched for a way to salvage a “third way” socialism. The program rejected traditional state socialist staples such as the leading role of the party, the dismissal of parliamentary democracy as mere bourgeois democracy, Marxism-Leninism as a “scientific worldview,” and a focus on the revolutionary role of the working class. In the place of these the PDS argued for a rather vague pluralistic “socialism of values” such as social justice, solidarity, freedom for the oppressed, help for those most disadvantaged by the market, and so on (PDS, 1990). The disparate nature of this “new” conception of socialism was evident in the spiritual forefathers the PDS claimed for inspiration – not only Marx and Lenin, but Bernstein and Kautsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci. Not surprisingly as well, the PDS’ stance towards capitalism was itself contradictory. While rejecting a “market society,” the PDS nevertheless argued that it supported a market economy for reasons of both efficiency as well as individual freedom – as long as it reflected “socialist values.” Moreover, although criticisms of the political and economic system of the former East German state are harsh, the party program states that the old German Democratic Republic had undeniably positive aspects. All in all, the 1990 party program reflected three different versions of “socialism” roughly corresponding to the different ideological camps within the PDS which emerged after the end of state socialism: a more traditional Marxist-Leninist version appealing to the relatively unreformed hardliners in the party (apparent in the program’s discomfort with capitalism and many of PDS’ members longing for its vanished homeland); a social-democratic, western-oriented version of Socialism associated with the left-wing “pragmatists” or “reformers” in the party leadership (apparent in the party program’s rejection of key elements of Marxism-Leninism as well as its embrace of parliamentary democracy); and a “new left” or “post-materialist” socialist melange associated with the “youth wing” of the PDS as well as much of the PDS-West (apparent in the importance accorded environmental, feminist, and left-wing grass-roots democratic issues) (Olsen, 1998).

By the time the 1993 program was written, the initial euphoria in eastern Germany surrounding German reunification had long since vanished, victim to the sobering recognition – and bitter resentments – of the enormous difficulties involved in equalizing living standards between east and west. Not surprisingly, the new party program reflects this disillusionment in the general population with its concomitant reappraisal of life in the old GDR. Daniel Zilblatt has termed the new ideological direction of the PDS after 1993 as “leftist retreat” as the PDS here is much more critical of capitalism in general and the political and economic system

of the Federal Republic in particular (Zilblatt, 1998). Not only are the references to the free market more grudging and the evaluation of socialism à la the GDR more positive, here the party praises the October 1917 revolution in Russia as a positive achievement and states unequivocally that “the capitalist character of modern society is chiefly responsible for the endangerment of human civilization and culture” (PDS, 1993). Nevertheless, it must be said that here too the conception of socialism the PDS offers is a highly contradictory one, embodying elements of orthodox Marxism, traditional social democracy, and 1960s-inspired New Left social critique. What holds these disparate versions of socialism together is, however, the nationalistic/regionalistic/GDR nostalgic tenor of the entire document. The party clearly saw the opportunity to present itself as the spokesperson for embittered eastern Germans, a political strategy that brought the party a lot of success. Throughout the party program the GDR is viewed as a kind of experiment in socialism that provided lessons for contemporary socialists that contrasts positively with the contemporary Federal Republic. Although the GDR leadership is accused of “mistakes, false paths, neglect, even crimes,” GDR society nevertheless supposedly demonstrates “valuable results and experiences,” such as “social justice, the subordination of production goals to the interests of the working people, and a solidaristic and peaceful communal life in Germany.”

The new draft program the party leadership has offered for discussion to the membership is, by contrast, a much more forward-looking, modern document, perhaps in the recognition that the PDS cannot live from the past and needs to find a secure left-wing niche within the German political party system. “Modernity” plays a key role throughout the document, both in terms of the party’s self-understanding as well as in its appraisal of the political and economic system of the Federal Republic. Gone are most of the positive references to the GDR as well as the praise for the Russian revolution. Gone as well are those more backward-looking elements of the previous programs which attempted to justify the political and economic system of state socialism while at the same time attacking its “mistakes.” And while global capitalism continues to be singled out for criticism by the party, it is no longer capitalism per se that is made responsible for the “endangerment of human civilization and culture” but rather the “most powerful, profit- and power-driven elements of modern capitalism.” Although this at first glance would seem to be a distinction without a difference, long passages in the text instead praise certain aspects of modern capitalism and seek to distinguish between a “bad” capitalism unfettered by, indeed aided by, the modern state, and “good” capitalism, which – given a degree of guidance and oversight by government – may contribute to an expansion of individual freedom. Indeed, even the profit motive of modern business is seen as contributing something positive to individual freedom, so long as it contributes to the goals of social solidarity, equality, and social justice. Thus, the new program suggests that businesses that reinvest their profits so as to maximize employment might enjoy a tax break. The central theo-

retical point of departure for the new party program is, in short, a affirmation of a “modernity” which encompasses both parliamentary democracy and the free market.

This is quite remarkable. Orthodox socialism since at least Lenin has traditionally rejected both modern “bourgeois” democracy and the modern economic system (“capitalism”) as “lower” forms of social life which would be *aufgehoben* (preserved and raised up to a higher level) in a new socialist age. In contrast, the PDS draft document suggests that rejecting parliamentary democracy and capitalism in this way is both illusory and dangerous, since it is tantamount to rejecting modernity with all of its “hard-won achievements.” In an attack on those “new” or “third way” social democrats, the party program suggests that the hard-won achievements of modernity – in essence, the modern welfare state – are under attack from a new “neo-liberal dogma”(7). As a “modern socialist party,” the PDS instead wants to defend these achievements of modernity while removing those obstacles that, it is claimed, stand in the way of modernity’s further development. Thus the new draft program presents an ingeniously updated, (post-modern) Marxist view of history. Instead of the “capitalist” system acting as a fetter on productive forces (thus necessitating a socialist revolution that would usher in a truly modern, because more economically-rational, society), it is rather certain “elements” of global capitalism that act as a fetter on the continued development of “modernity,” defined as an ever-increasing expansion of social equality and individual freedom.

The new draft party program of the PDS is theoretically fascinating, and perhaps more logically cohesive than its earlier programs. Yet it is difficult to know whether in essence this is much more than a recycled Social-Democracy of the post-war era with its defense of an extensive welfare state. As will be discussed further below, it is also difficult to know how what practical policies might be entailed by this theoretical position. Yet aside from these practical difficulties, it is of course far from clear that the new draft program will in fact become the party’s official program or, even if it were to become the official program, what result this would have practically on the behaviour of the party. In other words, in looking at the “party ideology” of the PDS it would be a mistake to only look at party programs, since such programs are invariably a series of theoretical compromises between different party factions that may or may not be strong indicators of the reality of a party “on the ground.” Here one must distinguish between, on the one hand, the public pronouncements of the party leadership and, on the other hand, the attitudes of both its rank and file members as well as factions opposed to the party leadership.

In their book on the PDS, Richard Stöss and Gero Neugebauer have divided the membership of the PDS into three ideological camps: modern reformers,

who dominate the party leadership; traditional socialists, organized into organized factions such as the *Communist Platform* and the *Marxist Forum*; and basis-democratic fundamentalists, the vast majority of the PDS' older, culturally conservative membership in the East (Stöss and Neugebauer, 1996). Although this classification scheme is perhaps overly simplistic, it nevertheless does capture the ideological currents running through the PDS. During the party's ten-year history, reformers (those who would move the PDS more to the political center and adopt more pragmatic means and goals) have openly battled orthodox socialists (those who insist on a Marxist, if not quite Leninist, ideology and are much less politically pragmatic). There is little question today about the predominance of reformers among the party leadership, and the orthodox socialists are limited to blocking more wide-ranging reform within the party. Nevertheless, the orthodox socialists, by playing upon the fears of the fundamentalist, culturally conservative base of the party, have managed to score some political successes. Thus at the PDS' party conference in Münster in the Spring of 2000, orthodox socialists were able to defeat a motion of the party leadership authorizing the use, on a case-by-case basis only, of the German military in peace-keeping missions under UN auspices (*Pressedienst* 2000, *Die Zeit*, 2000). More recently, the party leadership's belated statement on the forced merger of the Social Democrats and Communists into the SED in the late 1940s has rankled the fundamentalist base (for whom the history of the party lies at the core of these members' identity), as has a (very limited) statement of "regret" for the building of the Berlin Wall. Despite the still rather limited nature of these "apologies" (for many in Germany, these statements by the PDS do not go far enough), there has been a lot of grumbling from the rank-and-file, not to mention scathing criticisms from orthodox socialists.

Designed to show the suitability of the PDS as a coalition partner to the SPD in Berlin, these recent moves by the leadership once again demonstrate the difficulties in breaking out of the fundamental dilemmas of the party. Without more decisive moves away from its totalitarian past the PDS has very little chance to continue to play a key role in eastern Germany, let alone to establish itself in western Germany. At the same time, a complete break with the historical traditions, political values, and cultural habits of the SED and East German state would weaken its core base of supporters in the East. Similarly, while modifying its party ideology to reflect a more politically pragmatic left-wing politics will undoubtedly increase the PDS' chances of expanding its voting base in western Germany, a too-hasty move in the direction of the SPD risks alienating its membership in both eastern and western Germany for whom socialism is still associated with a radical "overcoming" of modern capitalism and parliamentary democracy.

PDS Policies: Between Ideology and Political Pragmatism

The dilemmas and contradictory nature of the PDS are perhaps most on display in its concrete policies, which operate in a kind of no-man's land between East and West, state socialism and modern democracy, 21st century practical left-wing politics and 20th century orthodox Marxism. To be sure the single most important determinant of PDS policies has been these policies' effect and resonance in eastern Germany. In other words, it is through its policies and programmatic positions that one can see the PDS most clearly as a defender of "eastern interests," or more, an eastern "regional" party. Throughout the 1990s the PDS has been the most vocal party in forcing the government to defend its record in the eastern states through its parliamentary initiatives and public questions for the government. As Dan Hough has convincingly shown, the PDS concentrates its policies overwhelmingly on "eastern" themes, such as the professional credentials of those educated in the GDR, the treatment of former members of the GDR's military and state security apparatus, infrastructural development in the new states, and above all the economic policy of the federal government in equalizing wages, the cost of living, and employment prospects of those in the east with those in the west (Hough, 2001).

Having said that, however, in the PDS's attempts to be both eastern and western party, forward-looking socialist and backward looking GDR-nostalgic party, the PDS often puts forward rather contradictory and vague policy ideas. This can be seen most clearly in the party's economic and unemployment policies. The PDS has, at first glance, seemed content to merely defend the classic welfare state that is rapidly being called into question by global realities but which nevertheless remains the single most important "positive legacy" of the old GDR. Among other things, the party's official policy calls for a greater amount of spending by the state in the areas of public transport, welfare benefits, education, and tax breaks for couples with children (*Kindergeld*) (*PDS im Bundestag*, 1999). At the same time, the PDS has argued against the restructuring of the tax brackets to reduce the tax burden, wants to retain inheritance and capital gains taxes, and advocates an environmental tax more far-reaching (and costlier) than that proposed by the SPD-Greens coalition. It has argued as well against changing the pension system and has rejected the still rather modest reform of pensions put forth by the government. In terms of employment policies the party has advocated legal reductions in the work week (to around 35 hours), a policy idea that is also being tried in France under the current Socialist government. Finally, the party has advocated – and to some degree put into practice in the state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania – the creation of a publicly subsidized employment sector (*öffentlich geförderten Beschäftigungssektor* or ÖBS) to support the expansion of the industrial or service base. The idea behind the ÖBS is to hive socially, culturally, and ecologically worthwhile

projects into the public sector at the market price, with the eventual goal of privatizing these projects. In other words, the ÖBS attempts to be a kind of “half-way house” between the private and public sector.

In light of these policy stances it would be hard to resist the notion that PDS’ policies are nothing more than traditional “tax-and-spend” policies designed to prop up the welfare state. Yet actions by the PDS at the state level belie somewhat this simple image. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, for example, the PDS has gone along with its SPD coalition partner – despite a lot of displeasure from the PDS base – and scaled down state debt by drastically cutting current spending and reducing new state-financed initiatives to a minimum. Similarly, the Berlin PDS, now in a coalition government with the Social Democrats, has already shown that it is not afraid to use the budget knife to reduce that city’s out-of-control spending (*Berliner Zeitung*, 2002). What seems clear from all of this is that, although the party “officially” continues to insist on a by-the-numbers defense of the welfare state, undoubtedly in order not to lose party members or voters, in practice the PDS has shown considerably more willingness to reach political compromise in economic policies, most probably because the party wants to prove its competency to a western German public that it can behave responsibly in government (*Die Zeit*, 2001). Whether this pragmatism (opportunism?) will continue to develop within the party depends on a host of factors, above all, the ability of reformers to keep the orthodox socialists at bay, itself dependent upon the party’s electoral fortunes. In other words, will the political pragmatism and practical competence that the PDS has developed in governing ultimately help or hurt it with voters? At this writing, this is still very unclear.

In contrast to the party’s economic policies (which at least hint at some movement away from orthodoxy), the PDS’ foreign policy is still by and large mired in a vague, backward-looking utopianism. Nevertheless, foreign policy – more specifically, the PDS’ stance on military force – remains one of the few policy areas where there is little difference of opinion between reformers and orthodox leftists. For example, while proclaiming its allegiance to the European Union, the PDS is sharply critical about the “democratic deficit” of the EU and argues for greater powers for the European Parliament. It also rejects a common currency for the EU unless “the EU is made more socially just and ecologically sustainable.” (*PDS im Bundestag*, 1999: pp. 28-29). How these goals are exactly to be achieved is not said, nor is it said how the PDS would propose to work out differences within the EU should member states resist particular measures for the PDS’ ideas of “social justice.” Similarly unclear is the PDS’ stance towards the eastern expansion of the EU. Although espousing a leftist internationalism and anti-nationalism consistent with a new “borderless” Europe which would include the former East bloc, the party also continues to harbor resentments against a “capitalist” EU rooted in the free movement of capital, goods, and labor and its expansion into

traditionally socialist countries. Moreover, the inclusion of economically weak states – those that qualify for EU “regional fund” assistance – into a broader EU might necessitate cutting funds to current EU laggards, such as eastern Germany. How the PDS will defend “eastern interests” while at the same time expressing solidarity with weaker eastern european states remains a big question. All in all then, the membership of the PDS (both east and west) is clearly uncomfortable with the entire notion of the EU unless it can be made over completely in the PDS’ image.

“No compromises with reality” best describes other aspects of the PDS’ foreign policy. Thus the PDS calls for the abolishment of the intelligence service, claiming that spy agencies “by their very nature cannot be democratically controlled.” (*PDS im Bundestag*, 1999: p. 35) Similarly, the party argues for a drastic reduction of the armed forces (*Bundeswehr*) in the short term and for its abolishment in the long term. Finally, the PDS also wants to limit NATO to a “purely defensive function” (whatever this might mean) for the foreseeable future and also foresees its dissolution and “replacement by civil structures.” (*PDS im Bundestag*, 1999: p. 52). As mentioned above, the PDS’ party congress in the Spring of 2000 even voted down a modest attempt by the party leadership to move the PDS onto more politically pragmatic ground concerning the *Bundeswehr*. At that meeting, the leadership proposed that the PDS group in parliament be empowered to decide on a case-to-case basis whether German troops might be used in peacekeeping actions under the auspices of the UN only. Party leaders argued that, being strong supporters in theory of the UN, the PDS should be prepared to authorize the use of German troops should the UN deem such troops necessary to prevent large-scale violence in a particular region. Although this would have meant a still very limited role for the German armed forces, the rank-and-file of the party would have none of this, and more radical members and groups within the party accused the leadership of breaking the so-called “pacifist consensus” of the PDS, or worse, of being passive accomplices in a purported “remilitarization” of Germany (*Die Zeit*, April 13, 2000: p. 6.).

Moreover, after the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th, Gregor Gysi suggested that although he was fundamentally against unilateral military action, he would support a “commando” type raid (perhaps under the auspices of the UN) to bring the terrorists to justice. The left-wing of the PDS was outraged, and after the US military response, even Gysi had to back down from his earlier comments.

The party’s attitude towards NATO and the *Bundeswehr* is colored not only by many of its members’ avowed pacifism but also by a long-ingrained hostility. In the east, this hostility is the legacy of the anti-western propaganda of the old communist regime, where the western powers were always blamed for the height-

ening of cold war tensions while the GDR and other communist states were seen as peace-loving. In western Germany, anti-NATO and anti-military sentiment was part and parcel of the student revolts of the 1960s that led to the radicalization of the West German left that now forms the backbone of PDS support (meager that it is) in the West. These long-held prejudices combine with a unrefined pacifism in shaping the PDS' foreign policy positions, something quite evident in the party's stance towards the Kosovo conflict. Although proclaiming the party's neutrality between the warring parties and claiming only to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict, many members sympathy for the "socialist" government of Slobodan Milosevic was transparent (8). Similarly, many PDS members could not resist suggesting that while they condemned "terrorism," US actions in the Middle East were ultimately to blame for the September 11th attacks.

Finally, in terms of domestic policy, the PDS shows its "New Left" colours by arguing for such things as Gay marriage, feminist issues, the unfettered right to political asylum, and for an end to nuclear power (*PDS im Bundestag*, 1999). In contrast to the party's foreign and economic policies, many of these particular policy stands, while popular with the western membership as well as a certain slice of the intelligentsia in the East, are known to be at odds with the attitudes of the fundamentalist, culturally conservative base of the PDS in eastern Germany. Thus various studies of the membership show a great deal of skepticism towards the idea of Gay marriage, more foreign immigration into Germany, or a ban on nuclear power. For example, one of the defining characteristics of the PDS for party members is the party's agitation against right-wing extremism. This policy has been largely, although not exclusively, shaped by the legacy of the GDR's official claim to be the "anti-fascist" state *par excellence*. Yet the GDR was hardly welcoming to foreigners, and it is no accident that many of the worst outbreaks of right-wing extremist violence in the early 1990s occurred in eastern Germany. PDS members and voters are hardly exempt from this. Indeed, several party leaders in recent years have accompanied their call for an end to hostility to foreigners in Germany with a call for an end to this hostility within the ranks of the party (9). The cultural cleavage between East and West, between a reformist leadership and a traditionalistic base, is nowhere more apparent than here. In summary, the dilemmas of the PDS are evident in the concrete policies of the party as well.

Conclusion

The road towards becoming a forward-looking, politically mature party of the radical left is fraught with difficulties for the PDS. On the one hand, moves by the Schroeder government and, in turn, the SPD and Greens leadership, towards the political center since the new red-green government came to power have undoubtedly left a narrow space on the left side of the political spectrum that offers

the PDS a chance to move out of its radical left-wing, GDR-nostalgic ghetto. On the other hand, moving to far away from its current ideological niche may drive away some voters and members for whom a “second SPD” is completely unattractive. This is especially true in western Germany, where dogmatic left-wing “true believers” still dominate state party organizations: any significant move to the political center risks a western German backlash. In addition, while long-term success for the party depends upon making successful inroads into the western German electorate, becoming an “all-German” party of the left may also weaken the PDS’ role as a party specifically representing eastern German interests, thus also driving away both members and voters upon whom the PDS depends. Yet without a firmer “western” or all-German profile, the extremely modest successes the PDS has scored in the old states of Germany risk being squandered.

The ideological melange and vague, contradictory policies that have hitherto marked the PDS reflect these dilemmas as the party leadership attempts to navigate a rather narrow channel of political possibilities. However, now more than ever, the PDS will need to articulate a more coherent ideological vision and develop a more concrete set of policies. Whether it will be able to do so depends upon a host of factors, including the response of the established parties of the left, the SPD and Greens, to the PDS’ new political moves, as well as the PDS’ own ability to successfully manage inner-party conflicts between socialist reformers and the orthodox left, between the “ostalgie” of its eastern base and the “westalgie” (i.e., nostalgia for 60s radicalism in the old Federal Republic) of its western party organizations, between modernizers and traditionalists.

Notes

1. Indeed, despite massive monetary transfers from western Germany and significant improvement in the economy since the new red-green government came to power in 1998, eastern Germany still remains an economic basket case. Thus, for example, while unemployment in the western half of Germany hovers around 8%, the figure is 18% in the east, with some eastern states reporting rates of 19% and some particularly troubled regions at between 30-50%. In light of these facts, it is understandable how the SPD’s Wolfgang Thierse’s, one of the leading political figures in eastern Germany, described the east as “on the abyss” in a recent parliamentary report on the economic situation of eastern Germany
2. In 1990 the PDS was able to gain representation in the *Bundestag* due to a federal constitutional court ruling mandating different electoral rules of the two halves of the country. In 1994 the PDS was able to gain representation owing to a constitutional provision stipulating that any party that receives 3

direct mandates in Germany's mixed electoral system, whether it receives 5% of the total vote or not, will receive the percentage of seats corresponding to its share of the proportional representation vote total.

3. *Fraktion* status allows a party to full participate in parliamentary committees. Up until 1998, the PDS was only accorded the status of a "political group" which left its participation in parliamentary committees dependent upon other political parties granting this (which they rarely did).
4. After continued defeat at the polls, at their 1958-59 conference in Bad Godesberg, the Social Democratic Party renounced many of its longstanding ideological pillars (present since the days of Bebel and Kautsky) such as its opposition to capitalism and its goal of a socialist revolution. It thus announced itself as a modern social-democratic, rather than socialist, party.
5. Thus for example the famous "Letter from Saxony," an open letter to the party leadership from several leading Saxony state PDS politicians, urged the party to abandon its quest to establish itself in western Germany in favor of concentrating on being a party representing eastern German interests only. This letter was quickly denounced by just about everyone in the leadership (and among the rank-and-file as well). Nevertheless, the "Letter from Saxony" was rejected not because of its undoubtedly correct analysis of the reality of the party in western Germany but because it threatened a certain orthodoxy about the party's desired role in the German political system.
6. An evaluative study by Bernhard Boll of the reasons PDS members join the party suggest strong differences between members in the west and members in the east. While PDS members in the west join the party primarily to satisfy certain pre-existing political goals (what Boll terms "expressive" reasons), PDS members in the east join the party both because of these reasons *as well as* "instrumental" reasons, such as career advancement, family and peer group ties, etc. Thus, Boll argues, an important reason for the PDS' deep roots in eastern German society and its corresponding large and stable membership lies in the party's ability to satisfy its members instrumental as well as expressive motivations, an ability totally lacking in the west. As Boll writes (p. 176), "along with the unsatisfactory organizational and personal presence of the PDS in the old states of the Federal Republic...the very different motivations for joining the PDS in the old states could be added to the list of reasons for the continuous weakness of the party [in the west]." Bernhard Boll, "Die Mitglieder der PDS: Motive für den Parteibeitritt - Empirische Ergebnisse einer Mitgliederbefragung in Sachsen-Anhalt," in *Die PDS im Parteiensystem*, eds. Michael Brie and

Rudolf Woderich (Berlin: Dietz, 2000), 168-179. Chrapa and Wittich's internal study of the PDS gives some support to the idea that PDS members in the West are less bound to the party than those in the east: while around 30% of the former could imagine leaving the party, almost half of the latter would be prepared to do so.

7. This is also the essence of Gregor Gysi's "Twelve Theses for a Modern Socialist Policy," a response to the "third way" manifesto of British leader Tony Blair and German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. An English translation of Gysi's theses was published in *Labor Focus on Eastern Europe*, #64, 1999, 64-96.
8. Thus, for example, a cursory review of letters to the editor in *Neues Deutschland* (the former party newspaper and even now close to the party) during the Kosovo conflict revealed less a "pacifist" rejection of Germany's participation in NATO actions from PDS supporters than a visceral hostility to the West.
9. Thus Angela Marquardt, a former member of the party leadership group and still a highly visible member in the party, argued at the last party congress in Cottbus for and end to "racism within the PDS."

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Biographical Sketch

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