

**Understanding the Performance of the  
Left Party (*DIE LINKE*) in Western Germany:  
A Comparative Evaluation of Cartel  
and Social Cleavage Theories as  
Explanatory Frameworks**

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## Abstract

In 2007 Germany's Left Party (*DIE LINKE*) won its first seats in the regional parliament of a western federal state, Bremen. This success contrasted with the failure of its predecessor, the PDS, to establish an electoral base beyond the eastern states. Today the Left Party is represented in eastern and western legislatures and challenges established coalition constellations both at federal and regional level. How can we understand the Left Party's significant breakthrough in the West?

The existing literature has sought to analyse and interpret the Left Party's origins, success and challenges, and has also emphasised the importance of the western states, both for the PDS and the Left Party. This thesis offers new insights by evaluating the respective strengths of two distinct theories, Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory, as explanatory frameworks for the Left Party's breakthrough. The theories are also appraised in a detailed case study of Bremen. The study examines whether the party displayed the organisational traits, parliamentary focus and electoral strategy identified in Cartel Theory. The investigation of Social Cleavage Theory explores the mobilisation and framing of class-based protest in the anti-Hartz demonstrations, and analyses election results for evidence of a realignment of class-based support. The existing empirical data is supplemented by qualitative evidence obtained through questionnaire responses from Left Party members and sympathisers in Bremen.

The final chapter considers the evidence as to whether Bremen is representative of other western states or an exceptional case. The overall findings suggest that indications of organisational features and the parliamentary focus associated with Cartel Theory did not explain the increase in Left Party support. Also, the redistributive character of the party's programme countered, rather than converged with, the prevailing policy offer. However, WASG ties to organised labour and the SPD helped establish the Left Party in the tradition of social democracy and the political mainstream. Protest and the demand for social justice were indeed mobilised and framed in class terms and the Left Party attracted the votes of the unemployed and workers, as well as organised labour, with a partial realignment towards the Left Party, notably in SPD strongholds. The thesis concludes that class cleavage and class-based voting more strongly account for the Left Party's electoral breakthrough.

The originality of the thesis lies in its approach of combining theoretical analysis with an in-depth local case study, supplemented by empirical evidence. The thesis also suggests avenues of future research that may validate or challenge the strength of the two explanatory frameworks over time.

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# Introduction

In 2005 a new left-wing alliance entered the German national parliament (Bundestag). Formed from the Party of Democratic Socialism (Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus - PDS) and the recently emerged Electoral Alternative Work and Social Justice (Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit - WASG), the alliance subsequently merged to constitute the Left Party (DIE LINKE). The new Left Party became Germany's fifth main party at national level and is currently the largest opposition party in the Bundestag. It has also gained seats in a series of regional parliaments, including in Germany's western federal states (*Länder*).

The rise of the Left Party has important implications for German party politics. First, it challenges the established constellation of party coalitions. With the addition of a third left-of-centre party, the Social Democratic SPD, at best ambivalent about cooperation with the Left Party, has found it increasingly difficult to achieve a majority for its preferred coalition with the Greens, giving rise to more 'Grand Coalitions' and minority governments, a trend that looks set to continue<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, there is now a party clearly to the left of the SPD in the western states. Conversely, from the outset, the PDS adopted the strategy of '*Westausdehnung*' (western expansion) but despite concerted and repeated efforts never succeeded in becoming established as a political force beyond the eastern states of the former GDR.

The Left Party has also managed to bring together sections of the western German left, which had largely spurned the PDS during its fifteen-year existence. Furthermore, by attracting the support of the western and eastern electorates, the party constituted a new political force across both the eastern and western regions of the country<sup>2</sup>. Most recently, the party has gained its first ever premiership, leading a Left-SPD-Green coalition in the eastern state of Thuringia. While it is unlikely that the party will replicate this achievement in the West anytime soon, a number of regional elections are scheduled to take place from 2015 onwards, including in some key western *Länder*. It is currently unclear whether the Left Party will be returned to parliament or whether it can enter the three legislatures where the party has hitherto failed to gain

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<sup>1</sup> A Grand Coalition is formed from the two major mass parties, the SPD and the Christian Democrats (CDU).

<sup>2</sup> The Left Party remains unrepresented in the parliaments of three western states: the two large southern states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, as well as Rhineland Palatinate.

representation. Furthermore, with the centre-left vote now split three ways, a further question concerns the potential for the first formal SPD-Green-Left coalition in the West.

These developments and opportunities touch on some of the core political and strategic tensions that often caused conflict in the PDS and continue to spark debate in the Left Party today. At what price should the party cooperate with the SPD to bring about an overall change in political direction (*Politikwechsel*)? Should the party remain committed to a pathway of principled opposition? Is the party best described as an office-seeker or as the parliamentary arm of social movements? And how can the party be understood historically in relation to the German left?

Since the foundation of the PDS in 1989, the literature has offered a variety of insights into the party. The PDS has been explained in the context of unification and the fate of post-communist parties (Bayliss, 2008), and it was not unusual for the party to be portrayed as an outsider with extremist tendencies (Moreau, 1994). With an overwhelmingly eastern organisational and voter base, the PDS has been designated a 'milieu' party, or the party of unification's 'losers', with few prospects of becoming established in post-unification Germany (Gapper, 2003a). Furthermore, the literature displayed little optimism concerning the strategy of *Westausdehnung*. Despite a general consensus among the party and commentators that the western electorate was essential for the long-term survival of the PDS, the party's 'easterness' and SED heritage were widely identified as barriers to establishing sustainable ties to existing western leftist and social movements and western voters (Olsen, 2002a).

In light of the striking disparity between the party's resilient eastern electorate and the bleak outlook in the West, debate increasingly centred on the notion that the PDS might abandon *Westausdehnung* altogether and instead consolidate its strength in the East (Patton, 2000) to become an eastern regional party (Hough, 2001). Regional aspects therefore became more prominent in the literature. Focusing on the East, analysis was primarily concerned with the PDS 'toleration' of SPD-led minority government, and later with power sharing as the junior partner in Germany's first 'Red-Red' coalition. PDS participation in regional governments became the fulcrum of internal conflict relating to the party's understanding of socialism, political directions and goals (including parliamentary or extra-parliamentary orientation), the pathways of principled opposition, toleration or government (Behrend, 2006), as well as the

subsequent changing nature of internal party structures and sense of purpose (Gapper, 2003b).

However, the PDS-West was not entirely overlooked. In fact the literature highlighted the dilemmas surrounding the achievement of the much-needed establishment in the western states: the party was evidently unable to attract disillusioned SPD or Green voters, while its attempts to unite a splintered extra-parliamentary left were both fruitless and unsustainable (Neu, 2000). Meanwhile, the party did gain seats on some western municipal councils, but a qualitative study of western PDS politicians at this level (Olsen, 2002b) explored the everyday hostility still encountered by elected PDS representatives, including endeavours by their counterparts in other parties to exclude them from participating in the democratic process. With the PDS failure to secure re-election to the Bundestag in 2002, the literature was once again concerned with the party's anticipated demise; the party's lack of relevance in the West was attributed in part to weak performance at national and European level (Weiss, 2005), while the focus on the eastern core electorate was considered an alienating factor for western voters, and threatened the necessary breakthrough in the West (McKay, 2004). Later, a retrospective view of *Westausdehnung* carried out shortly before the PDS/WASG cooperation lamented the missed opportunities to build and develop a genuinely grassroots party with strong ties to unions and extra parliamentary movements, thus contributing to the rise of the (then) competitor, the WASG (Meuche-Mäker, 2005).

The public response to the SPD government's Agenda 2010 and specifically the Hartz reforms proved to be the turning point not only for the PDS but also for the German left. Naturally, the emergence of the WASG and the subsequent foundation of the new Left Party has been the subject of much analysis seeking to account for and explain the significance of the merger, as well as prognoses for the party's long-term development. One such approach, the vacuum thesis, by which a party occupies a space on the political spectrum vacated by another (in this case the SPD) was able to offer a partial explanation, but did not account for the earlier failure of the PDS to occupy the space resulting from the SPD's shift towards the '*Neue Mitte*' (Olsen, 2007). Alternatively, the ability of the new left alliance to meet societal demand for social justice was elucidated in terms of a combination of opportunity structures that comprised actors, institutional factors and the framing of demands and protest (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007). Indeed, the demand for social justice was a recurring theme in the literature; rather than ideological extremism or economic pessimism, support for economic redistribution was identified as a common value among eastern and western voters (Bowyer and Vail,

2011). The existence of social divisions was also explored in relation to voting behaviour, where analysis identified evidence of cleavage-based voting (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011). Meanwhile, it has been argued that the continuing success of the Left Party, particularly in the western states, depends not only on the mobilisation of former SPD voters, but also on the ability of the party to mobilise non-voters into class-based politics (Soltz, 2007). Furthermore, the uneven development of the party and the federal nature of Germany's political system mean that many of the dilemmas that faced the PDS remain unresolved in the Left Party; most notably the question of office-seeking versus issue/vote-seeking goals, where divisions between the eastern and western party branches still persist (Green *et al.*, 2007). Nonetheless, despite continuing challenges, the Left Party's impact on German party politics and its significance for the German left emphasise the relevance of even this partial breakthrough in the western states.

To sum up, the literature has set out analyses and interpretations of the Left Party's origins, success and challenges. It has also emphasised the importance of the western states, both throughout the entire existence of the PDS, and for the Left Party today. On the other hand, the current literature has yet to combine theory and empirical evidence in a detailed exploration of the Left Party's development and performance. Therefore, against the background of the PDS's underachievement in the western states, the aim of this research is to appraise the ability of two very different explanatory frameworks, Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory, to account for the far greater success of the Left Party. To do so, it examines the evolution of both parties and then undertakes a detailed analysis of Bremen, the western federal state in which the Left Party's breakthrough occurred.

The first chapter begins with an account of early PDS efforts to establish party organisations and a voter base in the West. It sets out the party's three main policy areas: representation of eastern interests, social justice and antimilitarism. These themes have subsequently formed the cornerstones of Left Party policy today. Also explored in this chapter are the different political and strategic approaches that characterised the eastern and western PDS, particularly in relation to party organisation, (extra-)parliamentary orientation and office seeking. Once again, the same recurrent – or unresolved – issues are manifested in the Left Party. The chapter then provides an overview of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz 'reforms' and explains how the public response and the subsequent emergence of the WASG alliance created the conditions for the foundation of a new, all-German party to the left of the SPD.

Following an analysis of the often uneasy dynamic of the PDS-WASG merger, the chapter reflects on continuity and change in the three main policy areas.

The thesis then begins to consider explanations of the Left Party's electoral breakthrough in the western states. Chapter Two introduces the first of the two theoretical approaches, Cartel Theory. This framework offers two interesting perspectives for the analysis of political parties. First, it suggests that a changing relationship to the state and a series of coordination dilemmas lead parties to adapt their internal structures and organisation. As a result, we can expect to see an increasingly top-down approach within the party (described as the ascendancy of the party in central office) and prioritisation of the parliamentary party over grassroots activism. The second perspective concerns electoral competition. According to Cartel Theory, parties seek to maximise their own security within the institutions of the state and minimise external threats from political challengers. To do so, they employ oligopoly-like behaviour and techniques such as the rhetoric of 'no alternative', thereby subduing and restricting the policy supply. Although Cartel Theory is usually concerned with parties and electoral competition at a national level, Germany's federal structure means that the 'top down' and oligopolistic effects could also refer to the party executive within an individual federal state. The thesis investigates the theory's ability to explain the developments in the PDS/Left Party's performance, both generally and in the specific context of Bremen.

The second framework applied in this thesis is Social Cleavage Theory. Given the Left Party's strong policy focus on social justice and economic democracy, Chapter Three specifically addresses the class cleavage in relation to the tension between capital and labour. Again, two key perspectives are explored in the chapter. The first concerns the enduring relevance of the class cleavage. The continuing salience of socio-economic class has been cast in doubt in light of the changing nature of economic activity and the shift from the industrial to post-industrial society. However, analysis of characteristics associated with modern patterns and types of employment, including the rise of the 'precariat', in fact demonstrates the continuing importance of the capital-labour cleavage. Moreover, support for welfare has remained resilient in Germany, particularly among workers and the unemployed, and was exemplified in the protests against the Hartz employment market and welfare reforms. The second perspective is concerned with class-based voting. The thesis analyses voting patterns both for the Social Democrats (SPD) and the PDS/Left Party in eastern and western Germany and then in

the context of Bremen to determine whether a partial realignment of class voting has indeed occurred.

In Chapter Four the main findings from both explanatory frameworks are carried forward and applied in a case study of the Left Party in the city-state of Bremen. Particularly acute social and economic challenges and the fact that Bremen offers a favourable environment for small parties identified the state as a seemingly obvious target for a PDS breakthrough. However, a succession of poor election performances proved the strategy unsuccessful. In the 2007 regional election, however, the new Left Party alliance entered Bremen's parliament (the Bürgerschaft) and formed a full parliamentary group, the first in a series of electoral breakthroughs in western legislatures.

The aim of the Case Study is to account for the Left Party's groundbreaking achievement in Bremen, with specific reference to the two explanatory frameworks. As a context not only for understanding the historical circumstances of the Left Party's success, but also for evaluating the respective strengths of the theories, the chapter begins with an overview of key socio-economic and political characteristics of Bremen, and considers the disappointing performance of the PDS in regional elections.

The analysis of the explanatory frameworks begins with Cartel Theory. In its investigation of any tendency to adopt organisational features identified in the theory, the study focuses on the tensions between the two components of the Left Party alliance as well as between different strata within the party hierarchy, particularly concerning central party influence in local matters and prioritisation of parliamentary politics. Secondly, the study considers evidence relating to the 2007 election campaign to discover whether the Left Party consciously modified its policy offer in the interests of parliamentary politics and longer-term cooperation or office-seeking goals.

The analysis of Social Cleavage Theory focuses on the anti-Hartz demonstrations to consider class-based mobilisation and in particular the changing actors and language of protest. The study then undertakes a detailed analysis of the 2007 Bürgerschaft election results, and includes factors such as locations of support, occupational group, unemployment and past electoral choices. The study investigates the extent of class-based voting patterns and possible realignment from the Social Democrats to the Left Party.

The study draws on available data including official election results and locally based resources, such as collected press releases, articles, flyers and transcripts of speeches, as well as discussion forum contributions and PDS/Left Party publications. To further investigate the explanation of the Left Party's electoral success in 2007, two questionnaires were distributed to Left Party members, voters and sympathisers in Bremen. The questionnaires tested the key themes identified in Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage theory in a series of both closed and open questions. Chapter Four's introduction to the Case Study provides a full account of the research methodology, including some of the obstacles encountered. This qualitative, supplementary data obtained enriched the existing evidence and enhanced understanding of the Case Study's key findings.

An increasing parliamentary focus was discernible in Bremen's Left Party. First, internal organisation saw resources and activities increasingly dedicated to supporting the future parliamentary party. Secondly, the scope of the campaign was concentrated on policies achievable within the competence of the regional parliament. In addition, instances of federal party involvement suggested the increasing ascendancy of the party in central office, as well as attempted restriction of policy. However, the campaign was premised on an oppositional role for the party; furthermore, the majority of the electorate as well as sections of the party deemed Left Party governmental cooperation either unlikely or undesirable. Analysis from the perspective of Social Cleavage confirmed class-based mobilisation over the Hartz reforms, and that the protest was increasingly framed in class terms as the influence of the WASG also grew. Second, in the 2007 election, the Left Party was most successful in attracting the votes of the unemployed, workers and trade union members. However, the party received its greatest voter share in specific Green strongholds, and therefore continued to build on the modest historical strength of the PDS in these areas.

The chapter concludes that while key aspects of Cartel Theory were identifiable in the Left Party, these did not actually explain the increase in voter share, and as such cannot account for the party's breakthrough electoral success in Bremen. Nevertheless, the WASG's origins in Social Democracy and especially organised labour overcame (or at least alleviated) the fundamental weaknesses that had cast the PDS in the role of perennial 'outsider'; furthermore, the WASG contributed to the framing of protests in class terms. With a clearly redistributive policy offer and established links to the 'familiar' social democratic tradition, the new Left Party was in a position to mobilise opposition to austerity, privatisation and cuts and to gain

substantial support among workers, the unemployed and trade union members. Even though the party's best performance was in Green strongholds, SPD losses here and especially in many traditionally Social Democrat-voting districts indicated a partial realignment of these voter groups to the Left Party. These trends suggested the relevance of Social Cleavage Theory.

Chapter Five reflects on the Case Study findings and discusses whether Bremen, while undoubtedly significant for the Left Party, can be considered representative of other western states or an exceptional case. The Hartz reforms were implemented nationwide and their consequences felt in each federal state. Yet the Case Study demonstrates that Bremen suffered from particularly severe unemployment and poverty and was also experiencing the impact of the 'restructuring' programme of cuts and privatisation. In addition, Bremen is distinct from most other western states through its political traditions and status as city-state. The chapter therefore undertakes a comparison between Bremen and the western states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen and Hamburg. Although less detailed than the Bremen study, the analysis identifies similarities and differences relating to organisation, parliamentary focus and office-seeking goals as well as class-based support for the Left Party:

- First, attempts were made by the central party to ensure conformity among candidates and campaigns. In some instances the intervention occurred because of organisational weakness at regional level; elsewhere the objective was clearly to modify policy in the interest of achieving parliamentary representation.
- Second, policy goals closely reflected the national party programme and were mostly confined to the competence of the regional legislature. However, the election programmes' emphasis on redistribution and the democratisation of the economy actually set the Left Party somewhat apart from the established parliamentary parties and therefore indicates that policy convergence did not account for the increase in the party's support.
- Third, some contrasts became evident in the approach to government cooperation, ranging from unequivocal rejection through to participation in preliminary talks with the SPD and Greens, thus highlighting the tension between office-seeking tendencies and principled opposition; nevertheless, in each state the party entered parliament in an oppositional role.
- Finally, alongside traditionally SPD-voting areas, Green strongholds emerged as locations of Left Party voter share in Hamburg and Bremen, suggesting that antimilitarism might represent an additional important means of attracting support,



albeit one rather specific to the two city-states. Overall, though, in each state it was the same three voter groups – workers, the unemployed and trade union members – that constituted not only the greatest voter share, but also produced the most significant qualitative change in Left Party support.

To sum up, Cartel Theory cannot satisfactorily explain the rise in Left Party support in the regional elections. The organisational traits and parliamentary focus identified in the theory and evident within the western party associations may have intensified in anticipation of the parliamentary success, but did not signify a substantial qualitative change at the time of the party's electoral breakthrough. Furthermore, despite the parliamentary focus, the Left Party programme proposed a set of alternatives that countered the prevailing policy offer. Therefore, conscious policy convergence by the Left Party is also unlikely as an explanation of the party's success. However, the WASG's organisational and political origins were instrumental not only in facilitating ties to organised labour (therefore overcoming an inherent weaknesses within the western PDS), but also in establishing the Left Party within the Social Democratic tradition and therefore closer to the political mainstream.

Social Cleavage Theory requires the presence of a clearly defined social group to mobilise around a particular tension. Opposition to the Agenda 2010/Hartz reforms and the continuing demand for social justice exemplified this mobilisation, which the WASG in particular succeeded in framing in class terms. In the regional elections the Left Party attracted the support of the unemployed and workers, as well as organised labour. Even though the SPD continued to benefit from a degree of loyalty among these voters, the evidence from this research indicated a partial realignment towards the Left Party, especially in working-class SPD strongholds. Furthermore, though an additional source of support was indicated in middle-class Green strongholds (at least in the city-states), it was the votes of the unemployed, workers and trade union members that represented the most significant qualitative change in Left Party support. The findings therefore endorse the thesis that the class cleavage and class-based voting most strongly account for the Left's electoral breakthrough.

The originality of the thesis lies in its approach of explaining the Left Party's success through the consideration of two competing theories. In addition, the theoretical analysis is combined with a local case study of the Left Party, which is in turn supported by empirical evidence. The thesis also places the protests against the Hartz reforms in the context of social movements and organisational change. This

combination of approaches allows a more differentiated understanding of the Left Party's breakthrough than might be gained from a historical perspective only. Finally, while both theories considered in this research contribute insights into the trajectory of the Left Party and its initial success in the West, the party's continued presence in western legislatures is by no means assured, so it is perhaps too soon to reach longer-term conclusions regarding the party's performance. The thesis ends by suggesting avenues of future research that may validate or challenge the strength of the two explanatory frameworks.

# Chapter One: The PDS/Left Party and its Development in the West

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the Left Party and to set out the key developments that led to its founding in 2007. The story begins with the party's predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Section One explains the emergence of the PDS in response to the citizens' movement and change (*Wende*) in East Germany and the subsequent process of unification, and outlines the rationale for the party's early attempts to establish a voter base in the western federal states.

The PDS identified three major policy areas: the representation of eastern interests in unified Germany, social justice and antimilitarism. Section Two draws on PDS programmes and manifestos to explore the development of these policy areas — the core issues and themes which the party hoped would also mobilise leftist voters and activists in the western states. It soon becomes evident that contradictions emerged relating to these themes, and that these often resulted in a clash of interests that reflected the deeper tensions running through the party. The PDS never succeeded in becoming a truly national party and continued to attract the majority of its electoral support in the East, where it was far more established in the party political system as well as in positions of responsibility, both at local and regional (*Land*) level. However, the party's pragmatic approach and parliamentary success in the eastern states were often at odds with the more ideologically based and extra-parliamentary approach in the West. Divisions ran particularly deep within the party over whether to seek a reform of capitalism or a socialist alternative, and whether to pursue office-seeking goals or principled opposition. Meanwhile, the issue of antimilitarism and peace brought to the fore the tension between the party leadership on the one hand and activists on the other.

Against this background and in light of a stubbornly weak PDS presence in the West, Section Three reflects on the party's strategic dilemmas. Throughout the party's existence, sections of the party, mainly in the eastern states, urged the leadership to

abandon the strategy of western expansion. The existing tensions became even more acute when the party failed to constitute a parliamentary group at federal level; while the western electorate became even more strategically important, further doubt was cast on the party's ability to become established as a fully nationwide party and a leftist force in both regions of Germany.

Section Four turns to the foundation of the Left Party. The implementation of far-reaching welfare and employment market reforms triggered protests among people affected by and opposed to the fundamental restructuring of work and the social state (referred to by Wiesendahl (2004, p.1) as the '*Welfare Wende*'). Members and supporters of the Social Democratic party also participated in the protests. The schism led to the emergence of a new alliance, the WASG, and a unique opportunity to establish a new left-wing movement to the left of the SPD. This section also focuses on the often uneasy relationship between the PDS and WASG, and the factors that compelled their cooperation and eventual merger to form the Left Party.

The final section of the chapter returns once again to consider the themes of eastern interests, social justice and peace, all of which continued to form the political direction of the Left Party programme. It was with these policies that the Left Party gained sufficient electoral support not only to form a parliamentary group in the Bundestag, but also to enter the regional parliament in Bremen, followed by a succession of other western regional legislatures.

By the end of the chapter, there will be an understanding of the catalysts for the formation of the PDS and the Left Party, the continuing strategic importance of the western states and an overview of the main policy areas. The chapter is the foundation for subsequent exploration of the two theoretical frameworks that seek to explain the Left Party's eventual success in the western states.

## 1.1. Beyond the *Wende*: the Formation of the PDS

In 1989, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) experienced an autumn of political and social upheaval. This period became widely referred to as '*Die Wende*', meaning 'change' or 'turn'. The country saw the proliferation of new opposition groups such as Neues Forum (New Forum), Demokratischer Aufbruch (Democratic Awakening) and Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now). None of these groups regarded themselves as parties (Neugebauer, 1995, p.39). But in October that year, the Social Democratic Party in the GDR (SDP<sup>3</sup>) declared itself a direct competitor to the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - SED), the governing or 'leading' party since the GDR's foundation in 1949. The SDP's stated intention of participating in elections thus effectively represented a challenge to the SED's monopoly on power (*ibid.*). At the same time, as a result of the autumn's burgeoning political unrest, the SED found itself confronted with a weakening of its political hegemony; this too spurred the processes of transformation within the bloc parties<sup>4</sup>. These transformations took the form of renewal drives among the old parties, the foundation of new parties and the formation of new alliances. In short, it became clear that the political 'unity' of the GDR's bloc parties would not survive (*ibid.*). Consequently, political parties in the western Federal Republic began to consider strategies for expansion in the East. The Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberals (FDP) assimilated corresponding existing bloc parties (*ibid.*, p.40); the CDU also adopted the more right-wing sections of the citizens' movement (Demokratischer Aufbruch and a breakaway section of Neues Forum) (Irving and Paterson, 1991, p.357). All the same, both Neues Forum and Demokratie Jetzt reaffirmed both their status as citizens' movements and their rejection of political parties (Neugebauer, 1995, p.40).

Between 8 and 17 December 1989, the SED embarked on an extraordinary congress at which it declared its break with Stalinism and stated its commitment to democratic socialism (Behrend, 2006, p.26). The congress also resolved not to dissolve the SED in order to found a new party, but instead announced the existing party would be renamed the SED-PDS<sup>5</sup>. Human rights lawyer Gregor Gysi was elected Chair of the 'new' party.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1990 the SDP changed its name to the SPD, to align itself to the West German Social Democrats.

<sup>4</sup> A bloc of nominally independent anti-fascist parties that were effectively controlled by the SED.

<sup>5</sup> To avoid confusing terms, the thesis refers to the party as the PDS for the period between 1989 and 2005 (the start of the PDS's cooperation with the WASG).

(At a further congress in February 1990 the party was renamed again, this time simply as the PDS.) The party's critics claimed this unwillingness to formally break with the past provided proof the party was nothing but an SED-*Nachfolgepartei* or even SED-*Fortsetzungspartei* (successor or continuation party respectively), emphasising that the PDS would, for all intents and purposes, mean SED business as usual, albeit under a different name (Moreau, 1994, p.11).

The *Wende* placed immense pressure on the PDS. On 1 December 1989, the GDR's parliament (Volkskammer) revoked the SED's claim to leadership from the GDR constitution and therefore its status as party of state. The party had also been stripped of its organisational monopoly (Behrend, 2006, p.24). On the other hand, by choosing to rename rather than dissolve the SED, the PDS maintained its forerunner's logistical structures, members and, importantly, its informal network of contacts, without which it is doubtful the party could have survived (Neugebauer, 1995, p.41). However, it was also confronted with the threat of expropriation; SED cash and business and property were transferred to the state, so that by the end of 1990 the PDS was left with just five per cent of SED assets (Die Linke.PDS, 2007a). Furthermore, while SED membership had previously amounted to over two million people, numbers plummeted to 450,000 by May 1990 and to just 200,000 by the end of the same year (Patton, 2011, p.36).

In March 1990, a total of twenty-four different party groups, political parties and electoral alliances participated in the Volkskammer election. The election and the subsequent phase that led towards unification clearly demonstrated two related phenomena; first, that western parties had quickly established themselves as the dominant force in the East's political system; and, secondly, that it had become unfeasible for the bloc parties to survive without a western partner (Neugebauer, 1995, p.41). In the Bundestag election of December 1990, it was overwhelmingly the western-affiliated parties that would receive the majority share of the vote in the eastern *Länder*, while the PDS and Bündnis '90<sup>6</sup> survived only because of an exceptional ruling on the conditions of the election (*ibid.*)

In General Elections (Bundestag elections) two votes are cast, with fifty per cent of parliamentary seats allocated according to the results of each respective vote. The first vote is given directly to a constituency candidate, a rule which is intended to maintain a personal, localised element to representation. The result of the first vote is calculated

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<sup>6</sup> Alliance '90: An electoral alliance including Neues Forum, Demokratie Jetzt, peace and human rights activists and Greens. Bündnis '90 merged with the (western) Greens in 1993. The party is officially known as Bündnis '90/Die Grünen.

by means of a simple majority and the winner in each constituency is elected to parliament via a direct mandate (*Direktmandat*) (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.83). The second vote is for party lists put forward in the respective federal state and is of particular importance since this determines the balance of power within the Bundestag. The result of the second vote is calculated proportionately, and parties must normally achieve at least five per cent — the electoral threshold — in order to gain seats in parliament (*ibid.*). However, to minimise the disadvantage to small regional parties, including those representing national minorities with little chance of polling five per cent of the second vote, the direct mandate rule (*Grundmandatsklausel*) allows a party to enter parliament if it has won three direct mandate seats via the first vote (*ibid.*, p.84). Since it was rare for small parties to win a constituency outright<sup>7</sup>, for many years the rule was of only minor significance. But in 1994 the PDS would go on to win three constituencies outright and therefore qualified to enter parliament under the *Grundmandatsklausel* ruling, despite failing to clear the national electoral threshold. In the post-unification period, the direct mandate rule thus assumed a more prominent role, particularly in relation to PDS representation in the Bundestag. In August 1990 both the Federal Republic's Bundestag and the GDR's Volkskammer agreed that the electoral threshold should apply to the whole of Germany as a single entity in the first all-German general election to be held in December (Irving and Paterson, 1991, p.372).

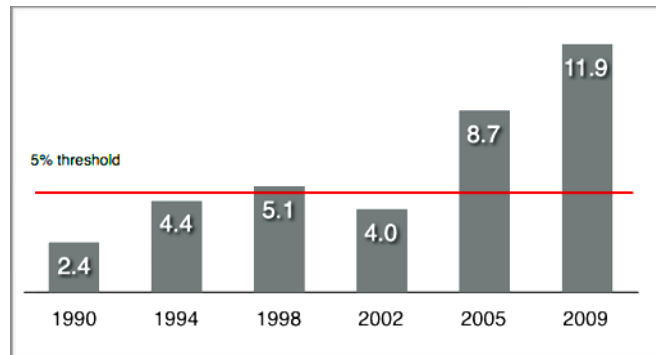
To allow the small eastern parties a competitive chance, their larger, western 'sister' parties would open their lists to the eastern candidates. However, the PDS, which had no such western ally or natural partner, made a formal complaint to the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe. On 29 September 1990 the complaint was upheld on the grounds that the electoral law passed by the two parliaments failed to ensure equality of opportunity for political parties (Die Linke.PDS, 2007a). Consequently, a revision to electoral law stipulated that for the December 1990 election only, the five per cent threshold must be cleared in either the western or eastern *Länder*. In short, although unification had already taken place just two days before, East and West were to be regarded as two separate electoral entities (Irving and Paterson, 1991, p.372).

The revision threw a lifeline to the PDS. For although the party managed to win just 0.3% of the western vote and 2.4% overall, its result in the eastern states (11.1%) was enough to ensure entry to the first all-German Bundestag, with seventeen seats (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.23). Figure 1.1(a) below shows the share of second votes

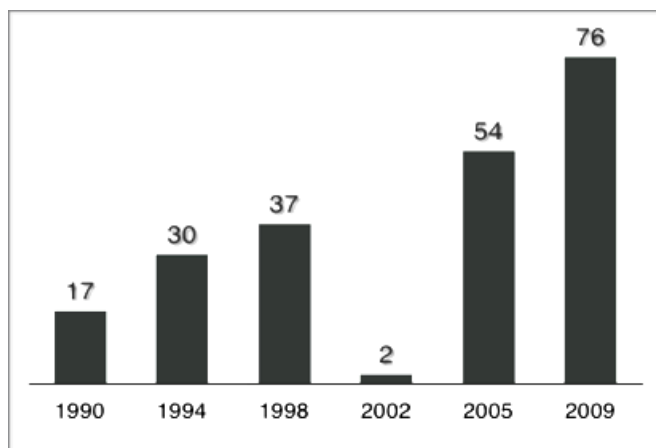
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<sup>7</sup> Notable exceptions: Former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher won his constituency of Halle for the FDP in 1990, while the Greens' Hans-Christian Ströbele won the Berlin constituency of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in 2002 and 2005 (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.84).

(*Zweitstimmen*) gained by the PDS, and (from 2005 to 2009) the Left Party in federal elections since unification, while Figure 1.1(b) illustrates how these votes translated into parliamentary seats in the Bundestag. The data for the year 2002 highlights the disastrous consequences of failure to overcome the electoral threshold; after this election, the PDS was represented by just two members of parliament.



**Figure 1.1(a): PDS/Left Party percentage share of Bundestag votes**  
(DIE LINKE.PDS, 2007b)



**Figure 1.1(b): PDS/Left Party Bundestag seats**  
1990-2002: PDS; 2005: Left Party.PDS (with WASG); 2009: Left Party  
(DIE LINKE.PDS, 2007b)

Parties represented in the Bundestag aim to form a *Fraktion* (parliamentary group)<sup>8</sup>. The *Fraktion* consists of the party's elected members but can also include members of other parties who share the same political goals and do not electorally compete against

<sup>8</sup> Translation note: *Fraktion* is translated as 'parliamentary group' in official Bundestag documents. However, the standard English translation of *Gruppe* is 'group', which may lead to confusion over which term is meant. For the purpose of clarity, this thesis applies the following translations throughout: *Fraktion* = 'parliamentary group'; *Gruppe* = 'group within the Bundestag'.



the main party in any federal state. To qualify as a full parliamentary group, the party has to make up at least five per cent of the Bundestag members or, failing this, has to apply for recognition by the Bundestag as a whole (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013). Despite entering parliament through the special threshold ruling, the PDS failed to achieve the five per cent of the vote (thirty-four seats) normally required for parliamentary group status. The PDS and Bündnis '90/Greens delegations applied unsuccessfully for full recognition and both were subsequently assigned the status of *Gruppe* (group within the Bundestag), rather than that of full parliamentary group (*ibid.*). The *Gruppe*, which requires a minimum of five members or three direct mandates, does not receive the rights and privileges extended to the full *Fraktion* (*ibid.*) and as a result is subject to several restrictions placed on its political work (see Chapter Two).

Gaining parliamentary group status is therefore extremely important, especially for smaller parties. Aside from the associated significant material resources, such as additional funding, staff and offices, it also entitles the party to a greater allocation of speaking time in parliamentary debates<sup>9</sup>. Without these resources and rights, it is difficult for a party — in particular a new or regionally based party — to maintain a visible presence at federal level. Consequently, the electoral system of the Federal Republic was an important factor driving PDS strategy for the western states.

### **1.1.1. From Informal 'Project' to Establishment in the Western States**

In the early part of 1990, a group consisting of the reform wing of the Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP), Greens, Social Democrats, members of the Kommunistischer Bund (Communist Alliance) and others within the western independent left movement gathered in Hamburg as part of an initiative convened by Wolfgang Gehrcke (formerly chair of the DKP) and Christane Reymann of the PDS (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.15). The aim of the meeting was to establish a common discourse concerning the *Wende* and its consequences. According to Gohde (1995, p. 70), only minor consideration was given to whether the PDS might need to find a western partner to participate in forthcoming Bundestag elections; at the time, the next general election was not anticipated before 1992; hence for the initiators of this gathering, the priority was not the founding of a new western party. Instead, they envisaged the instigation of a leftist '*Sammelbewegung*' (collective movement) in which

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<sup>9</sup> This theme is explored in greater depth in the next chapter, which discusses the issue of state resources and subsidies in the context of Cartel Theory.

the various left forces in the western states were able to find a way to overcome existing party and organisational borders, with the PDS as a common reference point. The atmosphere was therefore provisional and project-like (*ibid.*).

Although the PDS already had a statute and manifesto, both had been rendered largely irrelevant, as they had been written within the specific context of the GDR. As a result, neither document was able to serve as the starting point for the building of a new party in the western states. However, by the middle of 1990 it became clear that elections to the Bundestag would actually take place as soon as December that same year. (Gohde, 1995, p.70). The PDS opted to contest the elections with the 'Left List', which involved the party opening up its list to members of other organisations and independent candidates, a strategy that enjoyed by no means unanimous support in the party. Relations between the PDS and DKP organisations had been growing closer and therefore a number of PDS members believed it made little sense to abandon ties to what seemed to be the only serious and relatively known western partner in favour of an assorted bag of 'leftists' (*ibid.*, p.71). As such, there was a degree of support for a concrete partnership with the DKP. Another stream of opinion preferred the rapid establishment of a new party organisation in the West, supported by a network of contact offices and PDS initiatives. Even so, the majority of the PDS leadership at the time favoured the idea of the Left List, although it was also open to the idea of establishing a new party organisation in the western states at some point in the future (*ibid.*). The first western Left List and PDS regional organisation was established in Baden-Württemberg, on 2 September 1990, with other western states following suit (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.15).

The decision to pursue the Left List strategy also met with a strong reaction among the various leftist groups in the West — the same groups who had initially been courted by the PDS to form the collective movement 'project'. The eco-socialist wing of the Greens, who had broken away from their party because of what they perceived as 'rampant red-green inebriation'<sup>10</sup>, formed their own loose collective, opposing what it saw as social-democratic and nationalistic tendencies within the PDS, and stood against the Left List in the election (Gohde, 1995, p.71). Meanwhile, a number of the reform orientated communists had fallen by the wayside at some point between their exit from the DKP at the end of 1989 and the formation of the Left List in the summer of 1990; other DKP members who had thrown in their lot in with the PDS 'project' took a

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<sup>10</sup> A reference to the increasingly mooted notion of electoral cooperation between the social democrats (SPD) and Greens.

sceptical view of the electoral list, fearing a rapid *de facto* founding of a new party before they had a chance to fully consider the fate of their own. Although individuals without prior membership of any party also joined the PDS in the formative years, the majority of western PDS members already had some sort of political background (*ibid.*).

A common expectation among former DKP members and those who had left the Greens or SPD was that the PDS/Left List should somehow manage to heal all their old wounds, regardless of whether these centred on a perceived lack of radicalism or too much conformity in the previous party organisations. In short, the PDS was to be the socialist party able to provide everything that had been impossible within the confines of the respective old parties. Yet for many among the western left, it became clear there was a considerable difference between the concept of the PDS in theory and the PDS in practice; although it presented itself as a combination of a party and 'movement', its activities and organisational structures failed to live up to this self-image and, therefore, several of the expectations placed upon it (*ibid.*, p.74). Moreover, its own history as dominant state party meant that the PDS was regarded as authoritarian and anti-parliamentarian, while its critical stance on the unification process earned it a reputation as an 'anti-western' party. Thus, unable to credibly change its (perceived) character overnight, the PDS failed to convince that it was a fully '*gewendete*' party at the beginning of the unification process. This wordplay, which alluded to the *Wende*, implied that the PDS had not only failed to undertake structural reforms, but was also regarded as out of step with the spirit of transformation and the unification. As a result, the stream of the West's most prolific left-wing activists into the PDS did not materialise to the extent that had been anticipated (Neugebauer, 1995, p.42).

Nonetheless, even after the 'collective project' initiative was replaced by the election-orientated Left List, followers of various leftist, autonomous and anarchist groups did continue to gravitate towards the western PDS. Members of these groups constantly sought to justify (to each other and perhaps also to themselves) their membership of the PDS, a party which they considered suffered from too much social democracy and too little radicalism; indeed, it was commonplace for these members to cite as their motive for joining the PDS their intention to prevent the party's drift to the centre ground (Gohde, 1995, p.76).

### **1.1.2. Why Were the Western States so Important for the PDS?**

The early general election in December 1990 prompted the PDS to switch the nature of its cooperation with the western left from a loose, project-like approach towards the party-based electoral Left List. However, the December election also directly contributed to an important development element in PDS strategy concerning the western states specifically. As described above, the ruling that a party should clear the five per cent threshold in either eastern or western Germany allowed the PDS to gain representation in the Bundestag, thanks to its strong result in the East, and in spite of its poor (under five per cent) result nationwide. But it also rendered the Left List superfluous, at least in terms of helping the PDS over the electoral threshold (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.16).

The task was now to transform the various Left List groups into PDS regional party organisations (*Landesverbände*). Nonetheless, these organisations maintained 'Left List' as a suffix to the name and a number of western party associations continued to view themselves in terms of a cooperative, rather than as a party, even refusing to accept members on a formal basis. According to Gohde (1995, p.72), with hindsight, subsequent internal conflict within the PDS can be traced back to this serious 'birth defect'.

There were also other, more far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, the decision to run the Left List did little to alleviate western scepticism about the extent of PDS willingness to participate in alliances without (again) assuming the leading role; on the other hand, experience of the early attempts to establish a presence in the West raised concerns within the PDS about the cooperation potential among much of the 'organised orthodox or dogmatic left spectrum' of the Federal Republic (Neugebauer, 1995, p.43). Gohde (1995, p.72) therefore claims that it was thanks to the internal dynamic of the existing cooperation, rather than any consciously political decision, that the PDS took the step of becoming a nationwide party. Neugebauer (1995, p.42) concurs with this view, stating that internal debates such as those concerning the past or the overall direction of the party played a less influential role in driving the PDS through the transformational period than did any reluctance of other parties such as the DKP to become associated with the PDS, whether for historical or ideological reasons.

Competing in the western states, the PDS was in a rather unique position. Unlike communist successor parties elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, the PDS did not benefit from any 'fresh start' and instead faced electoral competition from established and strong western parties in a political marketplace they had created. On the other hand, unlike established communist parties in western Europe, it had at that time no network of cooperation with other organisations and no experience of competing against capitalist parties (Hough, 2005, p.146). The longer-term prognosis for the PDS as a nation-wide party was far from optimistic:

*The PDS is likely to retain a presence in the five new Länder, but at the next Federal election the 5% threshold will apply to the whole territory of Germany and it is very unlikely that it will secure representation. (Irving and Paterson, 1991, p.370)*

In this quote, Irving and Paterson highlight the danger of failing to clear the electoral threshold that would be applied nationwide, rather than for separate regions, in subsequent Bundestag elections. The risk had to be minimised, but a strategy that depended on winning eastern direct mandates neither provided a reliable safety net nor secured a sustainable route to Bundestag representation and parliamentary group status. Support among the eastern population could by no means be taken for granted; it was likely that both the eastern socialist 'milieu' of former SED members and civil servants as well as the eastern protest vote would erode, initially due to migration to western states and, over the longer term, due to an ageing voter base. Furthermore, over 80% of the population resided in the western states, meaning that even a strong share of the vote in the East might not suffice to counter a weak performance in the West. Instead, a sustainable strategy of gaining representation and parliamentary group status in the Bundestag required the party to safely clear the electoral threshold nationwide, which in turn necessitated a substantial increase in the share of the western vote. This calculation continued to underpin PDS strategy right up until the party's cooperation and subsequent merger with the (western-based) WASG.

*It is very unlikely to survive except possibly in a few parts of East Germany. Probably the majority of its supporters will gravitate to the SPD in due course. (Irving and Paterson, 1991, p.371)*

Here, Irving and Paterson underline the conundrum facing the PDS. On the one hand, the party could not rely on its relative popularity among the eastern electorate to secure

its future as a parliamentary group in the national parliament. The party leadership was also ideologically committed to 'establishing an all-German socialist alternative to the SPD' (Patton, 2006, p.209) and the claim to be a modern socialist party rather than an eastern regional party would carry greater credibility if the persistently vast gap between its eastern and western voter share could be narrowed (McKay, 2004, p.53). Yet on the other hand, the prospects of establishing a solid voter base in the West were bleak for this decidedly eastern party. It was unclear as to why western voters should prefer the PDS to the well-established Social Democrats, and the experience of the Left List had already demonstrated the PDS's limited appeal among the western left. Moreover, despite the imperative to secure a voter base in the western states, the eastern PDS forcefully asserted itself as the only 'indigenous' party able to articulate the eastern interests and dissatisfaction with the consequences of unification. (Olsen, 2002a, p.198) This type of language clearly identified the PDS as a party very much at home in the East, rather than a party seeking to embrace the West. Olsen (*ibid.*) therefore considers it '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'.

The long-term pursuit of western expansion (*Westausdehnung*) therefore required the emphasis of socialist policies designed to appeal to the western left, despite the inherent risk of jeopardising shorter term electoral prospects and despite a conflict line between the aims of this strategy and the interests of the party's own eastern core (McKay, 2004, p.67). The following section focuses on the programmatic development of the PDS and introduces the key themes of eastern regionalism, anti-capitalism and antimilitarism.

## 1.2. Key Policy Areas: The PDS

*It makes sense to vote for more PDS in the Bundestag: as the party of social justice, as the party of peace and antimilitarism and as the party that sees a better future for eastern Germany. (PDS, 2002)*

The PDS provisional programme was adopted at conference in February 1990 and published under the heading '*PDS — Progressiv — Produktiv — Pro-DDR*' just in time for the March Volkskammer elections (PDS, 1990). Due to the time pressure, there had been little opportunity for extensive policy debate; nonetheless, the programme had to fulfil a number of objectives and expectations. At the heart of the party's programme was the need to achieve a 'balancing act, portraying itself at once as new and progressive, while not alienating those who had worked in the GDR for the just socialism the SED claimed to be progressing towards' (Hough, 2005, p.143).

By early 1990, with a haemorrhaging membership base (from just under 1.5 million members in December 1989 to ca. 650,000 members in February 1990) and further loss of material assets, the PDS was facing a decidedly uncertain future (Moreau, 1994, p.15). Therefore, the immediate priority for the PDS was to hold its ground among what remained of its existing supporter base and, at the same time, to somehow present prospects that would attract new members (Neu, 2011, p.9). In essence, despite the stigma of representing a state that would cease to exist (Hough, 2005, p.143), the party had to identify its own 'continuity of purpose' in a rapidly changing environment (Patton, 2011, p.39).

The party had already undergone structural and constitutional change. The Statute of December 1989 established congress as the highest organ in the party and guaranteed secret ballots held for the election of the party leadership as well as other officers and commissions. Regional party organisations were granted autonomy and freedom to form articles of association. Distancing the PDS from the SED's 'administrative-bureaucratic-socialism' (*ibid.*), the Statute set out the rights and responsibilities of individual members, including the freedom to organise themselves into regional and national groups (*Zusammenschlüsse*) that reflected particular social interests, political areas of activity or perspectives (PDS, 1991). These Interest Groups (*Interessengemeinschaften* - IGs) and Working Groups (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften* - AGs)

comprised a broad range of interests, such as those of young people and Christians, as well as a variety of specific policy themes, including education, ecology and peace. One of the most prominent and certainly most vocal streams within the party was the Communist Platform (KPF). Still active within the Left Party today, the KPF endeavoured to prevent a pull towards social democratisation of the PDS, and was concerned to preserve the central role of Marxism in the formation of party policy (Patton, 2011, p.39), despite demands from both inside and outside the PDS for the party to distance itself from orthodox positions (Hough, 2005, p.145).

Although the Statute recognised and indeed promoted inner-party plurality, democratisation of internal structures also presented a challenge for the PDS. Not only did the party's policy programme have to appeal to existing and potential voters, it also needed to embrace the respective interests and perspectives of the various interest and working groups. As such, the document — as well as subsequent PDS programmes — covered a broad range of themes, and identified an array of key underpinning values: individualism, solidarity, justice, meaningful work, freedom, democracy, human rights, peace and preservation of the natural environment (PDS, 1990). Echoing the party's new commitment to plurality and democracy, the PDS also declared its pledge to the primacy of parliament, transparency, opposition to state repression, and a 'constitutional ban on neofascism, racism, anti-Semitism, chauvinism and war propaganda' (Moreau, 1994, p.69). By 1993, these policies were grouped together as peace, freedom, democracy and social justice.

The programme declared itself rooted in the German and international workers' movements, as well as in socialism, anti-fascism, pacifism and humanist and religious perspectives. In so doing, the programme tried to convince the electorate that the PDS was calling for a humane GDR (Moreau, 1994, p.69) characterised by peace, social justice and solidarity. The programme placed the party and its aims within the tradition of, among others, Marx, Engels, Bernstein, Kautsky, Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Gramsci, which 'resonated among party traditionalists who remained ideologically and emotionally attached' to the ideas of these 'intellectual founding fathers' (Patton, 2011, p.39).

At the same time, even though written in the context of the Volkskammer elections, by identifying these aims, values and traditions, the programme could also be seen as a statement of intent regarding a unified Germany. The eclectic character of the programme's 'communist, green, social democratic, feminist as well as radical and



grassroots democratic elements and demands' illustrated the party's attempt to appeal to those among the western left who condemned the state socialism of the GDR, but who favoured a grassroots, extra-parliamentary approach to socialism (*ibid.*, p.40).

All in all, the 1990 programme was a hasty drawing together of a diverse array of themes and traditions, with the objective of satisfying the 'eastern socialist milieu' (*ibid.*, p.39), whilst attracting a new voter base that was critical of state socialism and the SED; furthermore, with an eye on the future, it also had to appeal to the its potential electorate waiting in the West.

### **1.2.1. The Representation of Eastern Interests**

The PDS had opposed the GDR's absorption into the existing jurisdiction of the Federal Republic and instead had called for a draft of a new constitution for a united Germany whose adoption would require the approval of the people via a referendum (Patton, 2000, p.154). However, it became clear that unification would take place in form of the West's 'annexation' of the East. Party Chair Lothar Bisky described unification as a successful 'change of elites' which denied Eastern Germans the opportunity to genuinely influence policy making (*ibid.*).

The PDS declared itself a socialist party for the whole of Germany and set out its demands for the unification process in its 1990 programme, published ahead of the final Volkskammer elections in the GDR. Reflecting the changes and uncertainty of the time, the *Wende*, the fate of the East and the question of unification were predictably important themes of the programme. Ultimately, to achieve the genuine unification of two equal states, rather than a wholesale annexation, the PDS insisted it was necessary for both states — not just the GDR — to undergo transformation. Although the party acknowledged and accepted in principle the Social Market Economy of the Federal Republic, it nevertheless expected the Federal Republic to reciprocate by recognising and striving towards core values that characterised the GDR. The party described democratic socialism as an 'integral part of human progress' (PDS, 1990) and drew attention to several achievements and values of the GDR that should be preserved in a future unified Germany, such as anti-fascism, comprehensive social security, the right to work and state childcare. The party also warned that these principles, as well eastern interests in general, would be afforded no protection under the existing laws in the Federal Republic, and that it was therefore imperative for the

GDR to enter unification negotiations not as a subordinate but as an equal and sovereign actor (Patton, 2011, p.40).

In the wake of unification, much of the initial optimism had waned, giving way to disillusionment and so-called *Ostalgie*, or sentimental longing and nostalgia for the GDR. The PDS too had had to adapt to the context and realities of unified Germany, and continued to pursue its strategy of building up an organisational and electoral basis in the West where for the small but growing western membership the PDS was no longer merely a 'project'.

Nonetheless, in its 1993 programme and beyond, the PDS continued to strongly emphasise its identification with eastern Germans, their social and economic plight and specifically what it saw as the discrimination against people from, or still living in, the former GDR. For instance, the party condemned the expropriation of eastern property, the disparity between eastern and western pensions and the fact that certain eastern qualifications and accreditations were not recognised in unified Germany (Patton, 2000, p.151). Therefore, in the section 'The Federal Republic of Germany' it claimed that, as a result of government policy,

*Widespread regions in the eastern German Bundesländer have been de-industrialised; agriculture has been largely destroyed. Social and human poverty have reached shocking proportions. The scientific, economic and cultural potential of the GDR has been dismantled (...). The policies of the established parties mean that the former citizens of the GDR will be people whose basic rights are restricted for years, if not for decades. (PDS, 1993)*

Further evidence of the party's distinct position on eastern interests could be found in a section of the programme calling for an end to the 'cold war in Germany'. To remedy the exclusion of eastern Germans, the PDS called for the establishment of an elected eastern German chamber, independent of the Bundestag or Bundesrat (PDS, 1993), charged with the specific task of representing the interests of eastern Germans, including pensions, property and access to services, and defending these against erosion as a consequence of the unification treaty. With this demand, the PDS again brought to the fore its solidarity with the citizens of eastern Germany. Yet in an endeavour to emphasise the nationwide rather than purely eastern engagement and focus of the PDS, it also extended the scope of its message to the western states by

warning that the implications for the German social state would be felt across the whole of the republic:

*The exceptional crisis in eastern Germany is thus intensified and serves the ruling elite as a lever with which to dismantle democracy and social welfare throughout Germany. (PDS, 1993)*

Nonetheless, despite the party's declared ambition to 'contribute to the dialogue and cooperation of the left in the Federal Republic of Germany' and beyond, as well as its desire to 'campaign for the emergence of broad, leftist movements' (PDS, 1993), Meucher-Mächer (2005, p.21) claims that the 1993 programme essentially confirmed the PDS in its role of communicator of primarily eastern interests.

After the 1994 European election, the PDS was also represented in the European Parliament. The party became a member of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) confederate group within the Parliament. Although critical of the EU and its institutions, which the group considered 'elitist, bureaucratic and intrinsically linked to corporate capitalism' (Hough, 2005, p.154), the PDS deputies used their mandates to represent eastern German interests at European level, for instance by arguing the case for EU structural funds to be allocated to areas of eastern Germany.

Both in terms of policy and language, the PDS was clearly orientated to representing eastern interests. In the East the PDS had, from the outset, assumed the role of the 'caring party' (*Kümmererpartei*); a substantial contributory factor of PDS success in the East was the ability to represent and articulate interests not just in parliament and in manifestos but also in very practical and tangible ways. The local party organisations provided services to citizens, for example in the form of advice concerning the laws and regulations of the Federal Republic, assistance with welfare and pensions and finding accommodation. In fact, the party was uniquely equipped to offer this kind of support; it was represented in nearly every locality in the eastern states and many of its members were retired civil servants and administrators able to donate time as well as expertise (McKay, 2004, p.57). Conversely, it could be argued that the motivation was less about supporting citizens in need of help per se, and more about demonstrably helping eastern citizens specifically, in order to exploit a territorial-cultural cleavage (*ibid.*, p.51). This was, after all, fertile electoral ground for the PDS.

Meanwhile, a gathering of eastern PDS mayors resolved to concentrate on 'real politics', claiming the reason they had been elected was not anything to do with the class struggle or democratic socialism, but because they were engaged with the everyday concerns of the people. Yet it was precisely this regional focus on 'real politics' in the eastern states that would emphasise the tension between representing the interests of eastern core voter and the strategy of establishing the party in the western states.

This conflict line was exemplified in what became known as 'The Letter from Saxony'. In 1996, Christine Ostrowski (MdB from Saxony) and Ronald Weckesser (leader of the PDS group on Dresden city council) published a document that argued for an abandonment of the party's westward expansion strategy, which, despite heavy investment of material and personal resources, had so far failed to yield promising results. The document argued that the PDS should instead promote itself as an eastern German catch-all party (*Volkspartei*); individual PDS sympathisers in the West were urged to cooperate with the party at federal level, rather than seek to establish formal regional PDS organisations in the western *Länder* (Hough, 2001, p.35). The document's authors believed the official policy of westward expansion represented an obstacle to what they saw as the overarching objective of the PDS, namely consolidation as an eastern people's party (McKay, 2006, p.53).

In its vision for the PDS as a catch-all party, the document also proposed a more pragmatic approach to policy. Above all, it claimed, modern socialism should be defined by the everyday experience of people in the East. This concept of modern socialism shared common ground with the Social Market Economy that had become established in the Federal Republic. Furthermore, alongside recognition of the crucial role of small and medium size enterprises in rebuilding the eastern economy (*Aufbau Ost*) was the demand for a halt on immigration and the 'normalisation' of the property question, in other words an acceptance of privatisation and private wealth and property (Behrend, 2006, p.68). Defending the document, Ostrowski claimed that people did not want to be 'fobbed off' with party manifestos and oft-repeated critiques of capitalism. People, she stated, were neither left nor right but simply wanted practical answers — answers which many in the PDS were not prepared to give due to what Ostrowski described as their elitist arrogance towards the people (Hartung, 1997).

According to the document, the main drivers of policy should be the experience of local politicians, as it was this group of people that had contributed significantly to the

transformation of the PDS from '*herrsüchtige Staatspartei*' (power-addicted state party) to '*dienstbereite Bürgerpartei*' (citizens' party ready to serve). The trusted and elected mayors should therefore not be obliged to justify themselves along the lines of ideology (Behrend, 2006, p.68). Harald Buttler, PDS mayor of Berlin-Marzahn, had been sharply criticised within the party for accepting proposed spending cuts instead of mobilising a campaign to protest the measures. According to Buttler, the opportunity to influence policy was more important than party propaganda and the risk of a spending cap and while he considered the PDS to be left of the SPD, he insisted that he was simply concerned with local politics (*ibid.*). The document's authors argued that the priority was not positioning the PDS to the left of the SPD; it simply needed to be distinct as a party of the middle ground. They thus concluded the future lay not in class struggle or a radical rejection of capitalism, but on a path along which landlords and tenants as well as new eastern enterprises and their employees could find common cause (*ibid.*). Ultimately, Ostrowski and Weckesser envisaged the PDS fulfilling a role in the East similar to that of the CSU in Bavaria, but on the left, rather than on the right; as a strong, regional party it could hope to exert greater influence over national government (Hough, 2001, p.35). A follow-up document urged the party leadership to recognise that although the PDS wanted western votes, western voters obviously did not want the PDS (McKay, 2006, p.53).

Both documents met with criticism from individuals in the PDS leadership, including Wolfgang Gehrcke (who said they had 'nothing to do with socialism') and Andre Brie (who had challenged the stance on western expansion strategy), as well as the Communist Platform and western party members (Behrend, 2006, p.69). However, the eastern PDS went on to consolidate its position in the six eastern states and by 1994 was no longer an opposition party.

First, in 1994, the SPD's Reinhard Höppner was elected Ministerpräsident (Prime Minister) of Saxony-Anhalt. The SPD formed a minority government with the Greens that depended on the votes of PDS deputies to pass legislation. This agreement marked the beginning of PDS 'toleration' of SPD-led government. In 1998 the PDS formed the first full 'Red-Red' coalition as a junior partner with the SPD in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (and was re-elected in 2002). Meanwhile, in the city-state of Berlin, the PDS regional party organisation had also long since set its sights on the opportunity to enter into government responsibility. At the launch of the 2001 election manifesto, the leader of the PDS-Berlin promised less talk of political dogma, fewer 'wish lists and castles in the air', and more focus on concrete and above all

'responsible' reforms (Liebich, 2001). With a strong result in the election, the PDS entered a coalition in the SPD-led Berlin regional government.

In the early 1990s, the PDS had been written off as a party likely to die out 'on the fringes of political life' (Hough, 2005, p.143) but just over a decade after unification, the party had established a broad electoral base in the East and was directly involved in policy-making in half of the eastern states. Yet the policies often advocated and practised by the eastern party organisations were hardly typical of the policies one might expect of a party that identified itself as socialist. The tension between the 'real politics' of the PDS-East and the drive to establish the party in the western states became an enduring one that split opinion within the party. Although the socialist ideology of the GDR had been described as a 'cultural marker of the east that contrasts with the prevailing political culture of western Germany (Patton, 2000, p.155), it was in fact a perceived abandonment of socialism by the PDS-East that prompted the most vociferous criticism from party counterparts and activists in the West.

### **1.2.2. Socialism and Social Justice**

In its 1990 programme the PDS identified itself as a socialist party open to all people and movements who strived for a society characterised by social justice and solidarity. Although this statement did not establish the PDS as an unequivocally class-based party, the programme went on to emphasise the 'interests of all workers' as a core principle (Höpcke, 2005, p.247). This principle featured in subsequent programmes too, but from 1993 was supplemented by the additional assertion that the PDS offered a political home to those who wanted to 'resist capitalist society' and who 'fundamentally rejected' the prevailing conditions, as well as to those whose resistance was combined with efforts to positively transform and gradually overcome such conditions (PDS, 1993). It was this very issue — whether to strive to overcome capitalism or seek its reform — that formed the crux of an enduring tension within the party.

The 1990 programme acknowledged the economic efficiency of capitalism and praised its capacity for technological and scientific progress. Other notable accomplishments achieved under capitalism included representative democracy, the rule of law, human rights and civil society (Patton, 2011, p.40). According to the programme, a Social Market Economy that was genuinely orientated towards the greater good as well as for the benefit of the individual was not in fact a contradiction of socialist values (Höpcke,

2005, p.249). For Neu (2011, p.10), the aspiration to a market economy and a meritocracy in which each person is able to determine their professional and social role according to their individual talents and abilities belied a somewhat liberal approach, rather than a distinctly socialist agenda.

However, the PDS presented a stark critique of capitalism's inherent inability to create social justice. The party took an interventionist approach to the economy, and set out to achieve its key goal of social justice through state regulation and redistribution (Land and Possekkel, 1995, p.113). For example, the programme stated the objective of a constitutional right to work (PDS, 1990). Public ownership of the key means of production was also emphasised, although the programme simultaneously recognised the value of competition arising from various forms of ownership, so long as these served the goal of social justice (Höpcke, 2005, p.93). Alongside labour, nature too was to be understood as a source of social wealth; consequently, an ecological restructuring of society was required in order to break from the one-sided exploitation of nature and essential natural resources (Patton, 2011, p.40). The pathway towards achieving a market economy determined by social justice and ecological sustainability would be one of grassroots activism, rather than of the violent overthrow of existing capitalism (*ibid.*).

Moreau (1994, p.70) identifies this combination of recognition and criticism of capitalism as indicative of the self-contradictory character of the programme. However, the programme was very much a product of the prevailing and dominant ideas, as well as hurriedly drafted ahead of the first all-German election (Behrend, 2006, p.49) and in this respect the 1990 programme should be understood within the context of the *Wende*. Against the background of the previous autumn's mass protests and with unification impending, perceived failure to recognise democracy, human rights and the achievements of the Federal Republic's Social Market Economy would have risked the PDS appearing significantly out of touch with the political mood of the time. Secondly, to have any chance of surviving in a unified Germany, the PDS needed to appeal to leftist voters in the West too, particularly those sceptical of unification. A reformist approach to achieving social justice, an economic policy based on ecological sustainability and an emphasis on grassroots activism and democracy could be reassuring and palatable to social democrats and the environmental movement in the western states. However, no less essential was reassuring voters in the PDS core constituency in the East, many of whom were concerned about their future in the Federal Republic.

Defending the values that formed the very essence of socialism, the PDS warned that despite the impending demise of the GDR and the apparent victory of capitalism, these values — and therefore socialism itself — would not be swept aside:

*Socialism as an expression of age-old human ideals — social justice, solidarity, freedom for the oppressed, help for the weak — is immortal, even if its opponents declare it dead one hundred times. (PDS, 1990, cited in Patton, 2011, p.40)*

The themes of socialism and (eastern) identity were similarly intertwined in the 1993 programme. Here, the PDS insisted 'no apology' was required for the post-war attempt by millions of people to build a better society, and defined its understanding of socialism as:

*(...) a movement against the exploitation of humans by humans, against patriarchal repression, against the plundering of nature, for the preservation and development of human culture, for the assertion of human rights, for a society in which citizens can conduct their affairs democratically and rationally. Socialism is (...) a system of values, in which freedom, equality and solidarity, human emancipation, social justice, preservation of nature and peace are inexorably connected. (PDS, 1993)*

The programme also stressed that the responsibility for the waste, destruction and discrimination in the eastern *Länder* lay not just with the terms and conditions of the Federal Republic's '*Anschluss*' (annexation) of the GDR, but above all with the very nature of capitalist society itself. The chapter 'The Contemporary World' held the capitalist production and political system responsible for preventing the realisation of the citizens' movements' democratic and socialist ideals, and went on to identify overcoming the capitalist models of production, distribution and consumption as the greatest challenge facing the modern world. Once again, such statements fuelled the party's opponents' view that it was '*rückwartsgewandt*' (retrospective and backward-looking).



*Every economic conflict, inevitable even in a free and democratic society, is re-interpreted as a class conflict. The PDS manifests itself therefore as a party that seeks to extend an ideology that worldwide had failed by 1989-1990 at the latest. (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, 1995, cited in Patton, 2008, p.2)*

Criticism from within the PDS left wing, especially the Communist Platform, centred on the programme's 'incurably social-democratic character' and related in particular to paragraphs declaring the PDS's openness towards 'broad leftist movements' and a 'renewal of socialist politics' (Behrend, 2006, p.52ff). However, Behrend (*ibid.*, p.53) points out that although social-democratic and reformist traits are undoubtedly evident in the programme, the predominant accents remained unmistakably anti-capitalist and socialist, while Neu (2011, p.12) notes that overtly anti-capitalist rhetoric featured more heavily than it had in the 1990 programme. Furthermore, the Communist Platform itself, despite its attempts to block conference's adoption of the programme, would go on in subsequent policy discussions to defend the solid, socialist and anti-capitalist basis of the 1993 programme. In fact, Hough *et al.* (2007, p.25) even assert that many aspects of the 1993 programme 'represented a step backwards, illustrating how the KPF and other left-wing orthodox forces were still able to influence party policy' and cite as evidence the programme's extensive defence of the GDR's real-existing socialism as a justifiable endeavour in the construction of a new type of society, as well as the ongoing commitment to socialism as a 'legitimate aim in itself and how a state built on socialist principles would solve many of the ills of the (capitalist) world' (*ibid.*).

This extensive critique did not fully develop into a comprehensive set of concrete policies, though. Hough *et al.* (2007, p.25) observe that firstly, when drafting the 1993 programme, the party was far more concerned with its own political survival than what it would set out to do in office — which at the time was a far-fetched notion to say the least. Secondly, the party lacked the 'time and expertise' needed to formulate thorough policies. Meanwhile, Olsen notes that the 1993 programme, like its predecessor, combined orthodox Marxism, social-democratic reformism and New Left ideas. The glue holding together 'these disparate versions of socialism' was the 'nationalistic/regionalistic/GDR nostalgic tenor of the entire document' (Olsen, 2002a, p.209). A similar thread ran through the 1994 Bundestag general election campaign, which blamed dominant capitalism for the premature curtailment of the citizens' movements of 1989, thus preventing the fruition of their ideas of democracy and freedom. Capitalism

was also held responsible for ecological destruction, militarisation and the impoverishment of the developing world.

However, despite the PDS's sometimes strident criticism of capitalism, a shift in the party's strategic goals was also taking shape. In February 1994 Gysi presented his 'Ingolstadt Manifesto', in which he declared that the PDS had 'arrived' as a party, also in the West (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.23). The claim triggered further inner-party debate that once again focused on the PDS's role (if any) in the western *Länder*, but also speculated whether 'arrived' (*angekommen*) might also be an indication that the party was finding its place in the political mainstream at the expense of socialism and principled opposition. For it was at this time that the PDS began its transformation from a party of opposition to a party of government responsibility in the eastern states. Electoral success had begun at local level in June, when Horst-Dieter Brähmig became the PDS mayor in the town of Hoyerswerda. In keeping with the 'real' politics approach, Brähmig would go on to justify privatisation, the sinking of wage costs and cuts in local services in order to defend '*Standort Deutschland*' (Germany as a business location) (Behrend, 2006, p.66). The real watershed, though, was the PDS agreement to 'tolerate' the Red-Green government in Saxony-Anhalt. The party's office-seeking goals were then realised with the formation of the first full Red-Red coalition in 1998 and then again in Berlin 2001.

The PDS controlled three ministries in the Berlin coalition government. Seen from the perspective of 'real politics', their role could be seen as providing the 'last line of defence' against the very worst aspects of a series of harsh but necessary measures. Berlin's annual tax revenue amounted to some €8 billion, but its debt was a massive €53 billion — an unwelcome reality which, insisted supporters of the Red-Red coalition, simply could not be ignored. Under the previous coalition of SPD and CDU, the city had also experienced a serious and ruinous banking scandal, and corruption in the construction sector was rife. Through its subsidy of public sector housing, state funding had flowed into the pockets of shareholders and investors, rather than assisted poor tenants rent homes at socially sustainable prices. The PDS-Berlin cited the urgency of this problem, as well as progress made in reducing construction sector sleaze, in defence of the government's decision to reduce funding and privatise a share of the state's public housing stock. However, other measures implemented by the Red-Red government also included the privatisation of selected state enterprises, a rise in the price of water, cuts in various public facilities and services, and reduced budgets for culture and education (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.106ff.).

Resisting earlier attempts to recast the PDS as an eastern catch-all party, a group of members, several of whom were based in the West, published a statement in *Neues Deutschland* newspaper under the heading 'In großer Sorge' (with great concern)<sup>11</sup>. The statement accused the PDS leadership of serious misdeeds, including pursuing a headlong course towards social democracy and a 'reformists versus Stalinists' vendetta among the party membership. Three specific points were highlighted: first, a deviation from the role of principled opposition; second, an abandonment of the class struggle and the sidelining of the property question in favour of a new social contract; and third, a restriction of inner-party pluralism (*ibid.*). The thirty-eight signatories and their supporters went on to form the Marxist Forum within the PDS, citing their concern over the future of the party's oppositional role, (versus government participation), the unresolved property question and class conflict in contemporary society<sup>12</sup>.

The political course of the Berlin coalition also attracted a great deal of criticism, the main source of which was once again the left wing of the party and the western regional organisations. One of the key concerns raised was the apparent lack of serious discussion at federal level of whether toleration or coalition actually contributed to achieving the party's stated objective of social justice. Furthermore, it was necessary to evaluate the relationship between negotiated compromise — the PDS as the 'lesser evil' — and dwindling credibility as a socialist party (Wagenknecht, 2001, p.12). Nevertheless, the commitment to office-seeking goals was confirmed in the 2003 Chemnitz programme. After a warning from Gysi that the 'dogmatic left' had to recognise that they were out of step with the new programme (*ibid.*), the PDS stated the intention to build a centre-left alliance working towards 'forward-looking, democratic, social and ecological alternatives' and to 'overcome the intellectual and political hegemony of neoliberal ideology and politics' in Germany and the EU (PDS, 2003). The PDS argued that socialist politics needed to take account of the prevailing conditions, so that protest and resistance were combined with engagement in tangible reform measures. The immediate priority was to improve standards of living and to take steps towards greater social justice and democracy; only then would it be realistic to aim for a more fundamental and comprehensive restructuring of wealth and power to break the dominance of profit over society (*ibid.*, p.13).

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<sup>11</sup> Reprinted in Beinert, H. (ed.) (2005): *Die PDS - Phönix oder Asche?*, p.227.

<sup>12</sup> The Marxist Forum remained a grouping within the Left Party, although it has not been recognised as a federal alliance. The MF set out to promote the anti-capitalist character of the party through discussion, seminars and theory papers, as well as to develop strategies for overcoming capitalism.

Drafts of the programme as well as the final version adopted at the Chemnitz Conference prompted a critical response centring primarily on the nature of socialism and the feasibility of capitalism's reform. During the discussion, a subtle but important reformist shift in core values was also detected in some of the terminology. For example, the term '*Freiheitsgüter*' (literally 'freedom goods') was frequently mentioned in the programme to describe the ability to develop according to capacity and needs, and to develop productive forces and moral standards — this ability determined whether people were free. Criticism centred not only on the use of rather vague concepts, but also the use of the word 'goods' (*Güter*), which was interpreted to mean something which can be bought, sold, given or received and therefore considered insufficient to describe a right that involved struggle, conflict or achievement (Höpcke, 2001, p.250). In addition, a draft of the programme emphasised 'access' (*Zugang*) to these 'goods'. Once again, the wording was problematic: socialism was not merely about 'access to' or 'use of' common goods; it was about influence over their production by those who produced them. As such, the term was perceived to neglect a fundamental principle of socialism, as 'access' suggested the equal opportunity of use, but said nothing about participation or influence (Wawzyniak, 2001, p.39)<sup>13</sup>. A further dispute over wording concerned the concept of freedom. The PDS had consistently acknowledged that freedom, along with equality and solidarity, formed the very foundations of socialism. The 2003 programme added that equality without freedom was repression; the critical response observed the failure to state that freedom without equality was likewise repression. This was considered a grave omission given the widespread lack of freedom caused by inequality driven by capital and militarism (Höpcke, 2001, p.250).

In the Chemnitz programme, the PDS acknowledged that economic growth under capitalism had resulted in environmental degradation and 'deformed' consumption. The party was committed to increasing domestic demand and among the concrete proposals designed to achieve this aim was a plan to return to full employment. This was to be accomplished through a fairer distribution of work that would first limit the working week to forty hours and then introduce a reduced working week of thirty-five hours and, eventually, thirty hours. The party rejected any decrease in wages or social transfer payments as not only economically damaging but also socially ruinous.

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<sup>13</sup> The principle of 'access' (*Zugang*) would later feature in the SPD welfare reform, which was based on equality of access (to the labour market) rather than equality of outcome (see Chapter Three).

Another demand was a minimum wage and PDS support of trade union engagement for higher pay (PDS, 2003).

Although the party claimed that the dominance of profit was incompatible with social justice, entrepreneurship and the interests of profit were cited as important prerequisites of innovation and efficiency (*ibid.*). However, Wagenknecht argued that the goal of 'a market economy but not a market society' was rather too close for comfort to the 'Third Way/*Neue Mitte*' position advocated by Schröder and Blair<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, by promoting the interests of profit, the party had surrendered not only its goal of overcoming capitalism but had also squandered the opportunity to even rein in capitalism (Wagenknecht, 2001, p.13). Another criticism was that in its praise for entrepreneurship and profit, the programme had failed to mention the associated exploitation of workers (Höpcke, 2001, p.31).

Whenever a political party drafts and debates a new programme it is of course commonplace for members and activists to engage in an (often forensic) analysis of the proposals, and for objections and amendments to be put forward. However, the criticisms and arguments cited in this section go some way to indicate the depth of the unresolved tension within the PDS over its core socialist values and orientation; in fact, the Chemnitz programme itself admitted that the socialist profile of the PDS was the subject of ongoing development and debate. Yet it also stated in very clear terms that a priority was parliamentary strength and that the party's track record of toleration and coalition in eastern states was proof of PDS '*Politikfähigkeit*' in a set of difficult conditions (PDS, 2003).

### **1.2.3. Antimilitarism and Peace**

The third key theme reviewed in this chapter is antimilitarism and peace. The PDS adopted a clear position on this issue in its 1990 programme, as the process of unification was still taking shape. The party considered it imperative that unification should unfold gradually and, moreover, within the context of wider European disarmament. The programme aspired to a demilitarised Europe of social, cultural and regional diversity; it also called for recognition of the Soviet Union's decisive role in the development of the GDR and its achievements, as well as its contribution to European stability in what was then a phase of change and upheaval (Moreau, 1994, p.69). The

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<sup>14</sup> See page 52 for an explanation of the Third Way/*Neue Mitte*.

party later argued that in retrospect the sovereignty Germany regained as a result of the Two plus Four Treaty of 1990<sup>15</sup> had been used to 'normalise' German foreign and military policy, to justify Germany's dominant role in the EU and to provide a rationale for war (PDS, 2003).

Throughout its existence, the PDS was consistent in its demand for the dissolution of NATO, and advocated Germany's unilateral withdrawal from the Treaty as a first step. The party argued for a comprehensive ban on the development, production and the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, and also opposed the development of any new types of weapon. In addition, there was to be blanket ban on weapons exports — a policy that if realised would have far-reaching consequences for Germany's economically important weapons manufacturing and export industry (PDS, 1993).

A further demand was the immediate cessation of all German military assistance and, crucially, the ban on German military participation beyond the borders of the Republic or involvement in domestic conflict. Critical of capitalism's failure to secure peace, the party rejected military action to end conflict and instead called for efforts to tackle social causes. Over the longer term the PDS envisaged the complete demilitarisation of Germany and Europe — and did not seek to establish Europe as a military force to rival the USA (*ibid.*). Already perceived as a political 'outsider', the PDS also found itself increasingly at odds with the position of other political parties over the issue of peace and antimilitarism, as Germany's own foreign policy and military role became the subject of growing scrutiny and debate against the context of conflict and challenges at the turn of the century.

In 1998, the freshly elected SPD-Green federal government coalition took the step of aggressively deploying German military forces for the first time since the founding of the Republic. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green) had urged that at the close of the twentieth century Germany's responsibility was not to pacifism ('no more war'), but to humanitarianism ('no more genocide'). In fact, this paradigm shift, the most vociferous supporters of which were the Greens, saw it as Germany's special duty to prevent holocausts from ever occurring again (Solty, 2007, p.5). Fischer argued that Serbia was intending to commit genocide against Kosovo Albanians, but the claim of a

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<sup>15</sup> The Two Plus Four Treaty — the 'Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany' — resolved the international dimension of unification (including the question of whether and under which conditions the Federal Republic's NATO membership could include the East). The USA, the Soviet Union, Britain and France terminated their rights and responsibilities with respect to Germany, giving the united country full sovereignty (Auswärtiges Amt, 1990).

threatened holocaust also raised the question of whether first steps were about to be taken towards a return of German military interventionism (*ibid.*). The PDS opposed military action, questioning the legitimacy of the NATO resolution (acting without the explicit approval of the UN Security Council), the credibility of the humanitarian objectives (since humanitarian agencies would have to withdraw in the event of military intervention) and warning against escalating violence that would lead to militarism becoming the sole means of influence (Gysi, 1998).

Gradually, the PDS also faced internal challenges to its previously unambiguous position. At the party's Münster conference in 2000, a debate took place in response to UN military intervention in East Timor. A leadership motion proposed the party assess on a case-by-case basis whether to support military interventions sanctioned by the UN Security Council, rather than reject these outright as a matter of principle. Although Gysi insisted that the motion did not pave the way for future participation of Germany's army (the Bundeswehr) in such interventions, conference instead backed an opposing motion which bound the PDS to reject, without exception, UN-mandated military deployments (PDS, 2000).

As a result of the defeat, both Gysi and Lothar Bisky resigned from the party leadership. Explaining his decision to stand down, Gysi later reflected that this had been the first time the overwhelming majority of conference had voted against a leadership proposal; furthermore, he was also concerned that sections of the party portrayed the rejection of the proposal as a 'victory' over the leadership (Gysi, 2001, p. 293).

In the wake of the 2001 terror attacks in New York, Germany declared unequivocal solidarity with the USA and also agreed to deploy its troops in Afghanistan. Military intervention and aggression contravened the constitution (Deutscher Bundestag, 2012, (Article 26)), and also challenged beliefs held deeply by many Germans that the Bundeswehr should be engaged for defensive purposes only. Yet the SPD-Green government's 'proactive and interventionist' foreign and security policy, according to defence minister Peter Struck, considered that German interests could also be defended on distant foreign territory (Green *et al.*, 2008). Foreign Minister Fischer also supported the stationing of German troops in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Bundestag debate on Afghanistan was combined with a confidence vote for the government; the PDS was the only parliamentary group to vote unanimously against military action. The head of the parliamentary group, Roland Claus, said the PDS would not give in to the

Chancellor's 'coercion of parliament' and remained opposed to war as a means of fighting terrorism' (Claus, 2001). The antimilitarist position of the PDS was endorsed by its partners at European level. The GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament shared the principle of the 'unambiguous rejection of the military adventures of NATO and the United States', and sought to bring about an end to militarisation of the European Union as well as the production of weapons that support the militarisation of others (Hough, 2005, p.154). The affiliated Party of the European Left, too, echoed the aim of the PDS to form alliances to oppose war, capitalism and globalisation (*ibid.*).

Despite the opposition among the population and indeed much of the PDS to military aggression, some leading figures in the PDS took a more supportive approach to what was described as 'humanitarian' intervention in certain circumstances. Following the NATO military action in Afghanistan, PDS Chair Gabi Zimmer did not unequivocally rule out PDS support of German participation in a subsequent six-month United Nations ISAF mission in the country<sup>16</sup>. For Zimmer, the decisive factor was whether the mission's objective would be solely peacekeeping, or whether German troops would become involved in 'picking up the pieces' in the aftermath of military action — deemed a step too far towards participation in the logistics of war (*Spiegel Online*, 2001). This echoed concerns within the party that in US-led NATO military action, the chief role assigned to the Bundeswehr would be clearing up the land mines and unexploded bombs left behind by US air strikes (Heltzelt, 2002). Eventually, the PDS parliamentary group opposed German participation.

In 2003, the new programme adopted at Chemnitz retained the commitment to the dissolution of NATO but also lifted the earlier clause passed at the Münster conference that had rejected, as a matter of principle, any UN military intervention. The PDS recognised that the UN Security Council would as a last resort need to sanction military action for the purpose of 'averting threats to world peace' but insisted that this right should not be misused as a result of pressure from or in the interests of powerful nations (PDS, 2003). Yet the acceptance of UN-mandated military intervention was perceived as a weakening of the PDS's commitment to social rather than military solutions to conflict, and met with opposition, particularly from the left within the party, who argued that international law was frequently undermined and that UN resolutions were conveniently used or simply ignored to serve prevailing interests (Hetzelt, 2002). The programme itself also acknowledged that violations of international law, together

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<sup>16</sup> International Security Assistance Force: The mission was to support the Afghan government in the rebuilding of the country and to stabilise its security.



with the 'war on terror' and the resulting 'preventive wars' had enabled the USA to achieve hegemony over the world by military means (PDS, 2003).

In May 2002, US President Bush addressed the Bundestag on the subject of foreign policy. As he was about to begin, three members of the PDS parliamentary group unfurled and displayed a large banner bearing the words 'Mr. Bush + Mr. Schröder stop your wars'. The banner was quickly bundled away by Bundestag officials and after some momentary unrest and shouts of disapproval at the protest from other deputies, President Bush continued his speech. But in a move that both shocked and infuriated many in the party, the head of the PDS parliamentary group, Roland Claus — who had earlier voiced the party's opposition to war in the Afghanistan debate — issued an apology to President Bush on behalf of the PDS members (*Spiegel Online*, 2002).

Although a single incident, the Bundestag protest and subsequent apology symbolised several of the contradictions and conflicts within the PDS. First, although the party defined itself as the party of peace and non-violence, its parliamentary leader had apologised to a US President who was widely regarded within the party (and beyond) as a warmonger (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.40). Winfried Wolf, one of the deputies who protested in the Bundestag, later warned that the PDS position as the 'consistently anti-war party' (PDS, 2003) had crumbled wherever it became an obstacle to power. Indeed, ahead of Bush's visit, the SPD-PDS Berlin regional government had prohibited members of the Senate from participating in any of the street protests organised for the event, an order with which the PDS deputies dutifully complied (Wolf, 2004), even though the PDS-Berlin party had cited the commitment to antimilitarism as a key factor in its electoral success that year (Alexander, 2002). This in turn highlighted the distance between the PDS's rhetoric and its actions, particularly when in a position of responsibility — Thomas Flierl, a PDS member of the Berlin Senate, said that he 'recognised the difference between government and party' (*ibid.*) — and intensified the party's growing credibility gap.

Furthermore, the controversy reinforced the entrenchment of the various factions within the party. Peace was to be a core issue in the PDS in the 2002 Bundestag federal election, but was in danger of being undermined by the acquiescence of the Berlin regional party. Furthermore, the deputy Prime Minister in the SPD-PDS coalition in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania argued that should the PDS ever be in a position to form a federal coalition with the SPD, it should consider accepting a compromise in its foreign policy. In other words, a party that unequivocally rejected military deployment

was not fit for governmental responsibility at national level — the PDS policy of peace was therefore seen as an obstacle in the way of governing with the SPD (Hetzelt, 2002). However, Zimmer had declared that an alliance with the SPD at federal level would be ‘simply wrong’ (*ibid.*).

In its initial efforts to establish a base of supporters, activists and voters in the western states, the PDS had sought ties with the peace movement. Despite the ambivalence of western extra-parliamentary groups towards the PDS, the party’s rejection of German involvement in military action would actually create a clear distinction between the PDS and all the other parties represented in the Bundestag, including the Greens. The party’s antimilitarism was therefore an important political basis from which to build and strengthen links to peace campaigners and voters, especially in the West. According to a peace activist in the western state of Bremen, the PDS was ‘a federal partner for the peace movement. It was the only party in the Bundestag that was solid in its opposition to military intervention of the Bundeswehr’ (Bremer Friedensforum, 2003, p.11). Peace and antimilitarism represented a further line of tension within the PDS: the pragmatic, office-seeking wing of the party feared that principled opposition to military intervention was an obstacle preventing a future (federal) coalition with the SPD; conversely, any perceived weakening of this position raised doubts about credibility. Moreover, ambiguity concerning the commitment to antimilitarism threatened to further hinder the PDS’s long and onerous efforts to present itself as a reliable partner for social movements in the western states.

### 1.3 PDS Strategy and the Western States

In 2002, the PDS published a paper that reflected on the respective achievements and mistakes of the party and its leadership since its (re)foundation in 1989 (Brie *et al.*, 2002, p.1). Throughout that period, the PDS had continued to pursue its strategy of establishing a political and electoral base in the western states. However, some basic figures reveal the extent of the party's persistent organisational weakness in the region. The combined western party organisations consisted of just 4,000 members and accounted for three per cent of the entire membership (Olsen, 2002b, p.148). As a result, the income from subscriptions collected from members was minimal, leaving the party unable to fund the establishment of party offices. Party meetings had to be held in local pubs and activists could afford only the barest resources for campaign work. With so few members, local parties were not able to fill officer posts at all, let alone with competent people. Consequently, neighbouring local associations often had to combine forces to form more feasible organisations, the downside of which was that it was difficult to mobilise members over a wide geographical area (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the party suffered from a high turnover of members, which in turn also contributed to the problem of finding engaged and competent activists to lead the campaign in the western states. In 1993, western party organisations had demanded the establishment of a western umbrella organisation (*Regionalverband West*) and a special conference of western regional organisations to address the specific set of problems the party was facing. Neither the regional association nor the conference materialised. This section of the chapter sets out the underlying causes of the PDS's organisational and electoral weakness in the West, focusing specifically on the party's 'easterness', its uneasy relationship with other political and social movements in the region and the role of the national leadership.

The 2002 paper found that by 1993 the leadership had managed to execute the transition from state party to democratic, leftist party formally, structurally and programmatically (Brie *et al.* 2002, p.3). Yet it also recognised as a serious flaw the failure to immediately distance the party from the resources and the legacy of the SED. Merely renaming the party had cast doubt on the authenticity of the PDS's democratic credentials. Furthermore, by maintaining structures associated with a crumbling regime and a state that would soon cease to exist, the party had also alienated younger

members, which in turn jeopardised its future sustainable growth and renewal (*ibid.*). In fact, writing for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Spehr (2002) went so far as to argue that what had previously been the main strength of the PDS — its ties to the GDR and distinctly eastern identity — could even become a liability for the party, in that it overlooked the opportunity to relate to a new generation of younger voters who had grown up in the unified Federal Republic.

Brie *et al.* also identified a departure from the informal 'project-like' atmosphere that had characterised the party early on in the western states. In its place was increasing emphasis on parliamentary and administrative processes and a centralisation of decision-making (Brie *et al.*, 2002, p.3). In addition, the tighter administrative and policy control by the federal party diminished the influence of the volunteer and activist-based IGs and AGs. Although a compromise was reached which created a space for the orthodox left (including the Communist Platform) within the party, the national leadership continued to pursue its goal of *Handlungsfähigkeit*<sup>17</sup>, particularly within the eastern states. This shift contributed to the divide between the eastern core membership who prioritised office-seeking goals within the region and the more loosely organised western left. According to the paper, this was a barrier which had never been overcome (*ibid.*).

Also illustrative of the concentration of decision-making was the national leadership's strategy to contest the 1994 'super election year'<sup>18</sup> with a PDS 'Open List'. The rationale for this election strategy was that particularly in the western states the PDS was not strong enough to challenge the conservative forces within the country, either on its own or within an alliance of smaller socialist/communist orientated groups. The party therefore needed to attract high-profile independent candidates noted for their commitment to principles and objectives compatible with those of the PDS, namely a socially just, peaceful and democratic Germany. However, candidates would also need to articulate the interests of citizens in the East, thus appealing beyond the traditional socialist-communist voter group (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.65). But opening the list to independent — and potentially non-socialist — candidates met with controversy among western members, who feared they would be manoeuvred from the list.

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<sup>17</sup> Capacity to act — here meaning the capacity to form a functioning coalition government with the SPD at *Land* level.

<sup>18</sup> 'Super election year' — in addition to the general (Bundestag) election, there were also European and a number of regional (*Land*) elections.

In the 1994 Bundestag election, the party was able to increase its support and enter parliament for the second time. Nationwide, it only achieved 4.4% of the votes, thus falling short at the five per cent threshold required to enter parliament, but through securing four direct mandates (including a Berlin seat won by the list candidate, author Stefan Heym), the party gained thirty seats, proportionate to its share of the vote, with twenty-six of its representatives coming from the open party lists. In the run-up to the election, the PDS had been all but written off as an '*Auslaufmodell*' (obsolete model), an eastern protest party whose voter base would crumble with signs of economic improvement. Earlier success at local level and now an increased parliamentary presence at federal level appeared to contradict this analysis. However, success was still very much restricted to the eastern *Länder*, where it achieved almost 20% of the vote, compared to just 1% in the West (Olsen, 2002a, p.200).

Intent on westward expansion, the national leadership keenly focused its attention on regional elections in the western states. Hopes were particularly pinned on Bremen, Germany's smallest state, where the ruling 'traffic light' coalition of SPD, FDP and Greens had collapsed, bringing forward the Bürgerschaft election to May 1995. Campaigning under the slogan, 'Left after the traffic light!' ('*Nach der Ampel Links!*'), the PDS believed Bremen would provide the party with its most promising opportunity to date to finally establish an electoral foothold in a western state, make the transition to parliamentary practice and demonstrate the party's political competence in the West (Probst *et al.*, 2008, p.3). The city-state was struggling with long-term unemployment problems and public spending cuts, but also had a high proportion of young voters, especially students and Green voters. However, neither the campaign nor the crises facing the state convinced voters to support the PDS. Instead, a new citizens' group called Arbeit für Bremen (Jobs for Bremen) provided voters dissatisfied with the main parties' approach with a local, fresh, untainted but right-wing alternative to tackling unemployment and the budgetary problems. Meanwhile, the younger voters appeared to remain loyal to the Greens. Despite the resources and hopes invested in the campaign, the PDS achieved only 2.4% of the Bremen vote and failed to enter parliament. Bremen delivered a serious blow to the federal leadership, which was left with no other realistic prospects for entry into a western state (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p. 62). Moreover, the disappointing result in the target state only cemented the already entrenched image of the PDS as an eastern interest party.

A chronic problem facing the party was the failure to become firmly anchored in social movements in the western states and moreover, the lack of important close ties with

the trade unions. In an interview with *Neues Deutschland*, Bodo Ramelow (campaign manager for the 2005 elections, and later responsible for steering the fusion process between the PDS and WASG) acknowledged that the PDS was not the natural partner for the unions, adding that even the DGB leadership appeared to shun the PDS, a large party with an eastern tradition (*Neues Deutschland*, 2005). Much of the western left had developed a critical stance towards the GDR and although the PDS had broadened its appeal to extend beyond former functionaries and eastern Germans dissatisfied with unification, the party remained distinctly 'eastern', both in terms of its programme and its language. In addition, the PDS sought to preserve and promote what it saw as the positive values and achievements of the GDR, but the western image of the PDS remained one of SED successor party — in short, the embodiment of a GDR legacy with deeply negative associations in the western states. Furthermore, in the context of the West's prevailing anti-communism, which was evident not only among conservative elements but also among the social democratic left as well as trade unions, the PDS was frequently labelled 'extremist' and found itself in the sights of the Bundesverfassungsschutz (Office for the Protection of the Constitution)<sup>19</sup>. All in all, as the trade unions and other movements in the West remained largely unaware of the party's political work or for what it stood, and the existing prejudices or perceptions remained unchallenged and were even reinforced (*ibid.*).

Parties emerge from conflicts within society and articulate these tensions. The SPD grew from the workers' movement, as an expression of the tension between capital and labour, while the Greens formed from the ecology, anti-nuclear and peace movements, and are most closely associated with the cleavage of post-materialism that emerged in the West. Yet the PDS, as an eastern party — and the successor to the SED — did not emerge from the workers' movement in western Germany. Trade unions and the SPD regarded the party as too extreme, but for the more radical western left the PDS was too moderate, having set its course on a parliamentary route of capitalism's reform, with only a long-term goal of socialism. As the successor to the GDR's ruling state party, the PDS appeared too traditional and rigid for the informal extra-parliamentary social movements. Brie acknowledged that the PDS had been rooted in a party that was clearly anti-emancipatory, riddled with dogmatism and favoured repression of, rather than engagement with, social tensions and movements. Given this heritage, it was expecting a lot of the western left to accept that the PDS could ever genuinely stand for something new (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.74). When the WASG emerged,

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<sup>19</sup> The monitoring of selected Left Party organisations and individual members continues today.

primarily from the unions and left wing of the SPD based and largely in the West, here too, the relationship with the PDS was an uneasy one.

Behrend (2006, p.65) argues that although the former GDR had been largely restructured according to the positions and practices of the 'victor' (the Federal Republic), a large number of easterners held onto the principles of egalitarianism and solidarity. Many of these people joined and voted for the PDS, a left-wing party. In contrast, these positions and values were less prominent in the West where, according to Behrend, prior to the *Wende*, the left was commonly portrayed as work-shy and politically naïve (*unbedarf*). Events in central and eastern Europe and especially in the GDR had impacted heavily on the left in West Germany, which had already been grappling with dilemmas and challenges of its own<sup>20</sup>. The scope and pace of change robbed the left of any opportunity to consider at length its own response: 'The Third of October as date of accession and the all-German elections in December 1990 could be not be delayed, let alone prevented, by the political left' (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.11). Furthermore, some elements in the western left considered they had 'won' over the East; a position that stood in the way of developing closer relationships with the PDS or with its eastern members (Behrend, 2006, p.65). In short, the movements and activists with whom the PDS sought to build alliances were themselves already divided, with little clear direction.

In addition to the PDS's very limited appeal to western left-wing social democrats and trade unionists, a further obstacle was the modest reward that could be expected of relationships developed with other left-wing groups in the western states, such as the DKP. For example, even though the DKP was quite solidly established, it provided little in the way of members or indeed votes, as it was 'electorally marginal' (Olsen, 2002b, p.149). Before the PDS banned dual membership there was a brief flurry of activity as experienced and well-organised supporters or members of other leftist organisations joined the party (*ibid.*). The problem was that the continuation of factional conflict spilled over into the PDS, adding to the sense of disorientation within the western party organisations.

At federal level, too, the PDS continued to be divided over its political and strategic direction. In 2002, the PDS suffered a disastrous defeat in the Bundestag election, failing to either clear the five per cent hurdle or gain three direct mandates.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Meucher-Mäker (2005, p.11) describes the dwindling of the western leftist intellectual movement, the crisis of Euro-communism and a long-term decline in the trade union movement, brought about by conservative and neo-liberal policies.

Consequently, the party failed to qualify for status as parliamentary group or even as a group in the Bundestag. The sole and rather isolated PDS representatives throughout the legislative period were Gesine Löttsch and Petra Pau, both of whom had been elected directly by their constituencies in eastern Berlin. The party was therefore stripped of the important financial and material resources as well as debating time entitlements reserved for the parliamentary group. A particularly painful example of the PDS's curtailed influence was the debate on the Agenda 2010 proposals. When the government's proposals for sweeping employment market and welfare reforms were debated in the Bundestag, the PDS, no longer a parliamentary group, was not entitled to refer the Hartz recommendations, a central and highly controversial component of Agenda 2010, to the Constitutional Court for judicial review and was therefore unable to effectively oppose the reforms as it would have wished. The party struggled to maintain its visibility and relevance at national level, which cast even further doubt on the PDS's credibility as anything other than an eastern regional party.

Following the decision of Gysi and Bisky not to seek re-election (in the wake of the Münster conference defeat) the PDS was led by Gabriele (Gabi) Zimmer, until then the chair of the Thuringia regional organisation. Zimmer was supported by three deputies: Peter Porsch (leader of the PDS Saxony), Petra Pau (Bundestag member and head of the Berlin party) and, more surprisingly, Diether Dehm, who had until just a few months before been a longstanding member of the SPD, based in the western state of Lower Saxony (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.38). A characteristic of Zimmer's leadership was that the central party executed only minimal coordination of the regional party organisations. Due to Germany's federal system, the regional organisations in the *Länder* play an influential role within political parties. A significant part of the problem was that the party executive itself represented a diverse range of sometimes opposing positions, particularly concerning the ever-controversial issue of government participation. Among the executive were eastern members with tried and tested experience of 'real politics' and government at *Land* level (e.g. Helmut Holter and Petra Sitte<sup>21</sup>), members of the generally pragmatic reform wing of the party, as well as members who wished to see a more socialist and opposition-orientated PDS (such as Rouzbeh Taheri and Sahra

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<sup>21</sup> Helmut Holter - leader of the PDS in Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania and the first 'Red-Red' coalition. A firm believer in the necessity of governmental responsibility in order to bring about real change, Holter was described as a 'social democrat through and through' by his SPD counterpart in the coalition, Harald Ringstorff. (Uhlmann, 2011). Petra Sitte was one of the architects of the 'toleration' model in Saxony. Also a proponent of governmental responsibility, Sitte said she sometimes wished that the 'bold class warriors' in the party were forced to hold office, even for just half a year, to see how difficult it really was. (Zöller, 2004).



Wagenknecht<sup>22</sup>) (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.39). Even the three deputies each stood for a different political direction of the party. Although the composition of the executive might have raised the profile of inner-party plurality, the following examples illustrate that the resulting tension and inconsistency did not provide the ideal conditions in which to steer the party towards a coherent political and strategic direction.

Firstly, the existing PDS programme dated back to 1993. Since then, the party had gained experience of government at *Land* level in the East; Germany itself had also changed, not least in its role in military action. But the process of drafting and debating a new programme in time for the 2002 election was a fraught and arduous one; the new programme was not adopted until 2003, by which time the PDS no longer constituted a parliamentary group at federal level. Secondly, despite (and because of) the party's experience of governmental responsibility in the East, Zimmer's deputy, Diether Dehm, strongly advocated an oppositional role for the PDS, and actively sought to strengthen the party's alignment to extra-parliamentary movements, particularly in the West (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.40). This '*Uneindeutigkeit*' (ambiguity) in the vertical structure — from the federal leadership to the regional organisations in the *Länder* — gave rise to an environment of '*lose verkoppelte Anarchie*' (loosely coupled anarchy) that took root on the horizontal dimension, in other words, among the PDS's various *Land* organisations (Hough and Koß, 2008). This in turn created space for conflicts surrounding the strategic and political aims of the PDS to grow and develop into sub-groups and factions within the party. As a result, inner-party disputes not only intensified, but also became personalised, particularly with regard to and even amongst the leadership itself.

After the party's defeat at the General Election, the Gera conference supported Zimmer's strategy of '*gestaltende Opposition*' (constructive opposition). The conference also gave rise to the *Geraer Dialog*, a forum within the PDS that sought to facilitate dialogue with the aim of socialist reconstruction of the party, and was critical of what it saw as a creeping accommodation in the PDS of capitalism and the social market

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<sup>22</sup> Rouzbeh Taheri was a member of the PDS Berlin but left the party to join the WASG to protest against the policies of the SPD-PDS coalition in Berlin. He later planned to stand an alternative list of WASG candidates directly against the PDS Berlin (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.39). Sahra Wagenknecht was a prominent member of the Communist Platform (KPF) in the PDS and became deputy leader of the Left Party. Opposed to the coalition in Berlin, Wagenknecht was among those for whom credibility was not about the ability to compromise, but the ability to resist attacks on social and democratic rights (Wagenknecht, 2007).

economy<sup>23</sup>. But the disputes intensified, and the leadership descended into accusations and counter-accusations. In June 2003, an extraordinary meeting of the PDS conference took place in Berlin specifically to address the state of the party and elect a new leadership. At the conference, Zimmer stood down as leader and openly addressed the level of stagnation and conflict within the party leadership, pointing out that she had been elected to serve the interests of a party of democratic socialists, not to take on the role of ringmaster. Key areas suffering from a 'strategy deficit' were the debate on the party programme, the theoretical and practical discussion of reform alternatives, and concepts for party reform. According to Zimmer, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the executive was incapable even of agreeing on a suitably motivating, inspiring message to accompany the publication of the long-overdue draft programme. 'The draft was intended as the basis of discussion up until the programme conference. [The message] was rejected by the majority of the executive. As a result, the publication went ahead with no comment from the executive of the PDS. I still believe this is no way to inspire either members or sympathisers' (Zimmer, 2003).

An earlier survey of members found that the chief motivations for joining and remaining in the PDS were the party's eastern identity, its position to the left of the SPD and Greens and its home for anti-capitalist politics (thus echoing the main streams within the party). However, the paper asserted that these reasons, though completely valid, were actually quite vague and unlikely to resonate with ordinary voters; instead, the party needed to offer convincing and concrete policies (Spehr, 2002). Furthermore, the paper argued for a coherent policy on coalitions and supported the goal of a future coalition at federal level with the SPD and Greens, with a limited number of clearly stated and achievable conditions (*ibid.*). The office-seeking position was confirmed at the Berlin conference, where the reformist wing of the party was able to regain the upper hand. Delegates voted for a 'perceptible return to politics' and defeated a proposal from the party's left, including the Communist Platform, seeking to commit the PDS to principled opposition and to play no part in implementing Agenda 2010 cutbacks and other attacks on social welfare. Zimmer's replacement was Lothar Bisky, who was generally regarded as a safe pair of hands and who enjoyed respect and broad acceptance across the various streams within the party. Also supporting the findings of the paper, Bisky warned delegates that the return of a PDS parliamentary group in the next legislative period would be possible only if the party ended its ongoing

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<sup>23</sup> Following the Berlin Tempodrom conference, a number of Geraer Dialog members left the PDS. Later, those who remained went on to support the collaboration with the WASG. The Geraer Dialog became a formally recognised group within the Left Party.

ideological debates and instead concentrated efforts on concrete policies (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.44).

Bisky was also convinced that the party had to continue its efforts in the western *Länder*. Yet while the demands set out in the 'Letter from Saxony' that the PDS should abandon the western states to consolidate its role as an eastern regional party were roundly rejected, there was no denying that organisationally, electorally and culturally, the PDS was still not a western party (Patton, 2000, p.151). The PDS had worked hard to increase its presence at basic grassroots level; by 2002, just as its vote in the East collapsed in the Bundestag election, the party had over one hundred seats in city and local councils in six of the ten western states (Olsen, 2002b, p.150). This was of course snail-like progress and the danger remained that even a strengthened grassroots base might not make the jump to regional (*Land*) level. The DKP, which Olsen (*ibid.*, p.151) describes as the 'forerunner' of the PDS (although the party was, unlike the PDS, established in the West), had also gained a number of seats at local level but never succeeded in making an impact in regional or federal parliaments. Moreover, while the number of western votes for the PDS increased, the voter share stubbornly remained at just over one per cent — certainly nowhere near the party's target of the three per cent required to help the PDS achieve the electoral threshold nationwide. But in the absence of an identifiable core electorate in the western states, the painstaking process of establishing a grassroots base appeared to be the most realistic opportunity for the PDS to build its western electorate (*ibid.*).

## 1.4 Towards a New Left Party

### 1.4.1. Agenda 2010 and the Hartz Reforms

It was during the most troubled period for the PDS that Chancellor Schröder's government announced the Agenda 2010 measures. After three terms of Helmut Kohl's CDU-FDP government, the SPD was returned to power with the pledge to tackle Germany's growing and increasingly long-term unemployment. The SPD election campaign had set out the party's proposed solutions to the job market problem, promising a combination of reform and social justice. Achieving 41% of the vote, the party managed to increase its share of support from white-collar workers and former CDU voters (Gibowski, 1999, p.23). The SPD formed a coalition with the Greens, led by Joschka Fischer.

Although the model had been tried and tested at *Land* level, this was the first Red-Green federal government. During its first term, the coalition attempted to overcome the *Reformstau* (reform bottleneck) that came to characterise the closing phase of the previous government, but experienced a deterioration in its relationship to the business sector, which blamed social-democratic policies for contributing to higher wage costs and worsening unemployment (Camerra-Rowe, 2004, p.6). To tackle the problem of unemployment, the then SPD Finance Minister, Oskar Lafontaine, favoured a reflationary approach, which included urging the European Central Bank to reduce the price of borrowing to help stimulate demand, especially among low income groups (Anderson, 2009, p.5).

In 1998, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder drafted a manifesto known as the 'Third Way/*Neue Mitte*', arguing that in a modern, globalised society where most people had 'abandoned the worldview represented by the dogmas of left and right', the role of social democracy was to promote maximum flexibility whilst maintaining a minimum of social standards (Blair and Schröder, 1998). Furthermore, the document challenged the left to focus on the supply side of the labour market in order to tackle problems such as unemployment and inflexibility. The manifesto also called for limits to 'tax and spend' policies and instead for the generation of a thoroughly modernised public sector in which the state should step back from the provision of public goods and permit the market to produce them more effectively (*ibid.*).

Therefore, whereas Finance Minister Lafontaine pursued reflationary, counter-cyclical policies to stimulate demand, Chancellor Schröder was ideologically committed to supply side solutions for the labour market. It was a conflict that could not be overcome and resulted in Lafontaine's abrupt resignation from the government. However, Lafontaine's exit from government further weakened the SPD's left wing; consequently Schröder faced fewer obstacles to the implementation a series of austerity measures that would prove unpopular not only with the Keynesian left inside the SPD but also with the party's core social-democrat constituency (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.137).

In an effort to tackle Germany's persistent and related problems of high and especially long-term unemployment, welfare/poverty trap<sup>24</sup>, as well as the burgeoning cost of welfare, the Red-Green coalition embarked on a series of reforms known as Agenda 2010. Once again, a supply-side approach was adopted and the programme aimed to reform welfare by reducing unemployment benefit and public health insurance provision; it also focused on the job market, proposing to loosen labour protection laws, raise the official retirement age and cut the level of state subsidies to industry. Supporters of Agenda 2010 welcomed the introduction of measures such as increased spending to enhance the provision of day-care facilities and an expansion of all-day schools, which were designed to improve accessibility to the labour market, especially for women and people in the eastern states (Camerra-Rowe, 2004, p.22).

An important element of this extensive 'modernisation' package was the Hartz commission on reform of the labour market<sup>25</sup>. The first three parts of the Hartz concept (Hartz I, II and III) focused on, inter alia, vocational training, new types of employment (such as the mini-job) and the reform of employment agencies and job centres. However, it was the fourth arm of the recommendations, Hartz IV, that proved the most controversial. Hartz IV, approved by the Bundestag in 2003, ushered in the merger of welfare benefits awarded to the long-term unemployed (*Arbeitslosenhilfe*) with means-tested income support (*Sozialhilfe*), as a financial 'incentive' for people unemployed for longer than one year to re-enter the job market. The reform package also included a raft of workfare measures designed to get people back into the workforce, with eligibility and level of welfare payment contingent on compliance with these measures. However, in practice, the Hartz programme essentially amounted to a significant

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<sup>24</sup> In this context meaning the barriers and disincentives to work allegedly created by means-tested welfare payments.

<sup>25</sup> The commission was headed by Volkswagen board member Peter Hartz - hence its name. However, the official title of the commission was 'Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt – the Committee for Modern Services in the Labour Market'.

reduction in the welfare benefits paid to some of the poorest people in society (Green *et al.*, 2011, p.138).

Agenda 2010 and the Hartz reforms represented an important shift in the relationship between the SPD and its social democratic interests and constituencies. Signs of the transformation were already evident in the 2002 Bundestag election, in which the SPD performed rather weakly among the sections of the electorate upon whose support it had historically depended, namely trade unions and blue-collar workers. Conversely, gains were made among skilled and professional workers and voters in the eastern region. Here, the large trade unions did not mobilise workers to the same extent as they did in the West and, in a region stricken by high and long-term unemployment, were sometimes criticised for failing to represent the interests of workers who were either unemployed or facing job insecurity. For instance, in 2003 the IG-Metall union campaigned for the introduction of shorter hours (without loss of pay) in the East in order to bring working conditions in line with those in the West. The campaign collapsed, not least because the proposed measures were perceived to undermine jobs, rather than help create them (Camerra-Rowe, 2004, p.18).

The Agenda 2010 measures met with large-scale opposition. Among those resisting the measures were trade unionists, the left and people either already affected by or fearful of facing the consequences of Hartz IV. But although a large number of PDS members participated in the mushrooming protests, the party did not play any significant role in the actual initiation and organisation of the early demonstrations in 2003 (König *et al.*, 2007, p.19). When the resistance to Agenda 2010 took shape, the PDS did not lead, it followed. As former PDS Deputy Chair Katina Schubert confirms: 'In 2003 (...) as it all began and the big demonstrations were held in November in Berlin, we were all taken completely by surprise. But by 2004, we were there, too' (*ibid.*).

That the early protest movement emerged and flourished in a series of western cities whilst effectively bypassing the PDS once again exposed the party's weak links to social movements; it was 'not an organic product of western Germany' (Olsen, 2007, p. 206) and even in 2003 still lacked a firm anchor in civil society in the western states. As a response to Agenda 2010 the PDS presented an alternative concept, the '*Agenda Sozial*'. Proposals included tax reform, a minimum monthly pension of €800, a *Bürgerversicherung* (citizens' health insurance), a minimum monthly wage of €1,400 and an increase in the standard rate of unemployment benefit ALG II to €400, both in

the eastern and western *Länder*<sup>26</sup>. The party also opposed the introduction of the *Praxisgebühr*, a €10 quarterly fee payable to each medical practice attended<sup>27</sup>. Even though the party had identified and costed concrete alternatives to Agenda 2010, the problem was that, bereft of a parliamentary group in the Bundestag and therefore a strong, visible presence in federal politics, it was difficult for the PDS to attract much attention to Agenda Sozial. Furthermore, the protest to Hartz IV was unfolding not in the form of rival policy documents but on the streets. Put simply, the PDS, for all its criticism of capitalism and its agenda for social justice, was unable to mobilise opposition to a radical attack on welfare and employment conditions.

Instead, the direct response to Hartz IV came from a new formation called the Wahlalternative (Electoral Alternative). The group, mainly based in northern Germany, was headed by economist Axel Troost, *Socialism* journal editor Joachim Bischoff and public service union Ver.di leader Ralf Krämer. It convened in March 2004 and launched a website with a 'call to action' for like-minded opponents of Hartz IV (Olsen, 2007, p.208). Meanwhile, a second group of Hartz IV opponents formed in Bavaria. The Initiative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit (Initiative for Labour and Social Justice) was led by SPD members and union leaders Klaus Ernst and Thomas Händel, and consisted of several members of the IG-Metall union, which had close ties to the SPD (*ibid.*). The leaders of the two organisations met in the summer of 2004, uniting to form the Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit (WASG). By the end of the year, the newly formed interest group — which was not yet a political party — managed to attract over 5,000 members and grew into an alliance of social democrats (who by then had either left or been expelled from the SPD), trade unionists, peace activists and, in the western *Länder*, leftist organisations such as Linksruck, who had long since adopted a critical stance towards the PDS<sup>28</sup>. In this alliance, Solty identifies a weakness in certain aspects of the WASG's membership profile: trade unionists, disillusioned SPD members and organised workers fearful of a decline into Hartz IV

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<sup>26</sup> At the time, the standard ALG II stood at €311 in the East and €345 in the western states.

<sup>27</sup> In Germany it is common to visit a variety of different doctors/practices, depending on the nature of each individual health issue. Therefore, it was likely that patients had to pay the fee more than once, to different practices, during any given quarter. The PDS argued that people on low incomes might try and save money by not visiting the doctor, thus potentially risking their health — also a potentially greater financial expense for the state in the long term. In other words, the claim that the *Praxisgebühr* would generate savings lacked credibility.

<sup>28</sup> An 'undogmatic trotskyist' group with roots in the Sozialistische Arbeitergruppe (SAG); Linksruck was affiliated to the International Socialist Tendency and closely associated with Tony Cliff and the British SWP. In 2007, the organisation dissolved, after several members joined the WASG and, post-merger, the Left Party, even though Linksruck had been a long-standing critic of the PDS.

represented a rather specific and '*besitzstandswahrende*' group; in other words, they were primarily keen to protect their own specific vested interests rather than pursue a greater principle or vision (Soltz, 2007, p.7). Although this allowed the WASG to avoid becoming too 'confined' in terms of ideology, it also potentially limited the opportunity for the alliance to develop a comprehensive identity beyond the immediate set of particular demands (Dietzel *et al.*, 2005, p.33).

Indeed, unsurprisingly, given its roots in the trade union movement, the WASG programme was mainly concerned with improving working conditions and employee rights. This aspect of the programme prompted some criticism, including from within the PDS, that the WASG was rather nostalgic for the social democratic class compromise of the 1970s, an era of welfare state expansion through rapid economic growth. Schubert, a former member of the SPD before joining the PDS, summarised this particular form of social democracy as heavily '*étatiste*' (state dominated). In other words, 'It relies on the creation of social justice through redistribution (...) but this was always coupled, at least partially, with an authoritarian concept of the state and an authoritarian approach to immigration and asylum policy' (König *et al.*, 2007, p.7).

The WASG committed itself to the principles of the social welfare state, which it regarded as a major achievement of civilisation, and one which needed to become more comprehensive in order to take into account developments such as technical advancement, social dislocation, different working patterns, the role of women and transformations in family life (Bischoff and Radke, 2005). Key policy areas included the introduction of a minimum wage, the stimulation of domestic demand, shorter working hours as a means of tackling unemployment, tax reforms (including a higher rate of tax for top earners and a tax on financial transactions) and the introduction of a citizens' health insurance programme. Relating specifically to Hartz IV, the WASG called for an extended period (more than one year) of unemployment benefit paid to people who had for much of their lives paid into the social security system, after which a reinstated *Arbeitslosenhilfe* (merged with *Sozialhilfe* under the Hartz reform) would come into effect (Dietzel *et al.*, 2005, p.18).

Though there was certainly some common ground with the PDS's *Agenda Sozial*, there were some contrasts between the two parties. The PDS, in its programme, unequivocally held dominant capitalism responsible for the 'threat to human civilisation', poverty, war and ecological destruction; driving this imperialistic dominance were the governments of a few countries, the leaders of a handful of global



corporations and financial capital (PDS, 2003). The WASG, however, did not place significant emphasis on capitalism itself; its central theme was social justice (*Soziale Gerechtigkeit*) and it was more concerned with concrete threats to living standards. For the WASG, the social state was being destroyed by 'the politicians in charge' and the policies of the established parties. Although it did hold neoliberal policies responsible for high unemployment and cuts in social spending (WASG, 2005), the WASG tended to avoid the '*Systemfrage*' (questioning the whole political system). However, in terms of the key policy areas — social justice, eastern interests and peace — both parties shared similar aims and policies. The main area of dispute, though, concerned government participation versus principled opposition, with the WASG generally favouring the latter. The impact on the cooperation and merger process is discussed later in this chapter; first it is time to turn to the catalyst which propelled the two parties towards that common trajectory.

#### **1.4.2. The NRW State Election**

In May 2005 elections were scheduled for Germany's most populous federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), traditionally an SPD stronghold. To participate in the election the WASG membership voted to establish the movement as a political party. The outcome of the election would play a significant role in determining any future relationship between the WASG and the PDS. If either party cleared the five per cent electoral threshold but the other failed, the successful party would be encouraged to go it alone and abandon any notion of collaboration (Olsen, 2007, p.209). Particularly for the PDS, this was a rather unlikely prospect, given the party's disappointing record of election results in the western states. Secondly, success for both parties (also improbable) could result in heightened competition and rivalry, therefore also hindering any prospects for cooperation. Finally, the failure of both the WASG and PDS to clear the threshold would compel the parties to constructively reassess their relationship (*ibid.*). As it happened, the PDS share of the vote declined to an exceptionally poor 0.9%, while the WASG attracted 2.2%; thus neither party managed to gain seats in the NRW parliament.

Although the result was disappointing for the PDS and WASG, the overall outcome of the NRW election in fact proved pivotal for the cooperation between the two parties. The SPD lost control of its heartland state, the latest in a series of defeats at regional level, and not entirely unexpected, since the party had already suffered losses in the previous year's municipal elections in NRW. Nevertheless, the NRW defeat was a

serious blow to the Social Democrats and speculation began to grow within the SPD about a shift in the party's political direction. Chancellor Schröder instead decided to take the unusual step of calling an early General Election (*ibid.*). Solty (2007, p.7) argues that in so doing, Schröder intended to 'pull the rug' from under any debate and thereby also pre-empt the coup rumoured to be hatching within the party. The decision was also intended to 'strangle at birth' the growing social protest to the left of the SPD, especially the WASG. Although the General Election was deemed unwinnable for the SPD, an incoming conservative-liberal government could be expected to retain (and perhaps even push further) the majority of the SPD-Green Agenda 2010 measures. In fact, compared to an abandonment of Agenda 2010 and a return to more traditional social democracy, a defeat by the CDU actually constituted the 'lesser evil' for policy maximisers in the SPD committed to the supply-side transformation of welfare and employment. What is more, a period in opposition would also allow the party to renew and regroup and presumably reaffirm its commitment to Agenda 2010 (*ibid.*, p.8).

The results in NRW highlighted the inability of both PDS and WASG to clear the five per cent threshold independently and therefore raised concerns about the outcome of the early General Election called for that autumn. German electoral law does not permit two (or more) parties to form an electoral alliance, whether by running joint lists or pooling the votes gathered for separate ones, in order to overcome the threshold together (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.144). There was, though, provision for a party to open its lists both to independent candidates and/or those from other parties — a strategy with which the PDS had been familiar (the Left List) since the 1990s. On the other hand, under this rule, only the name of the list 'owner' may appear at the top of the list and state reimbursements of campaign expenses are paid only to the list owner, which in this case would be the PDS. Lack of time was also a significant factor, since electoral law stipulates that a party must declare to the Federal Election Commissioner its intention to participate in the General Election at least ninety days before polling takes place. This procedure requires the party to submit its statutes, manifesto and proof of statutory appointment of its executive. Also, in the case of early elections, the Interior Ministry is able to reduce these notice periods (Dümde, 2005). Thus, with no time to conclude a formal merger, the WASG and PDS, if they wished to avoid 'strangulation', would have to achieve a complex manoeuvre requiring no small measure of trust and successfully address a number of tensions between the two parties in order to cooperate in September's General Election (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007).

### 1.4.3. The Dynamics and Tensions of Cooperation

*Post-communist on one side, post-social democratic on the other; East German on one side, West German on the other; established on one side, up and coming on the other. In what way should they now grow together, what united them? (Jünke, 2007, p. 313)*

The cooperation between the PDS and WASG did not get off to an auspicious start. Ramelow, chair of the PDS in Thuringia and responsible for steering the negotiations with the WASG, described the complex process ahead as a 'kamikaze mission' (Berg, 2005). The challenge was nothing less than 'the formation of a new left, the framing of a through-going critique of the reigning neo-liberalism and the reaching of an agreement on a political programme which would embody both credibility and the capacity for mobilisation' (Jünke, 2007, p.311). Furthermore, PDS chair Bisky stressed that for the PDS itself, the General Election essentially amounted to a question of survival; a second legislative period with no parliamentary group and convincing federal presence would effectively destroy the prospects of becoming anything but an eastern regional party (Berg, 2005).

On 17 July in Berlin, the PDS gathered for an extraordinary conference on the cooperation process. Faced with time pressure on the one hand and meeting the requirements of electoral law on the other, delegates voted for (another) renaming, this time to 'Linkspartei.PDS'. The aim was to seek a 'cooperation agreement with a perspective for a merger' (Gysi, quoted in Berg, 2005, p.57). The WASG, for its part, would not contest the elections as an independent party; instead, its candidates would join the PDS open lists, even though this strategy had previously been rejected by the WASG membership (Dümde and Strohschneider, 2005). Nonetheless, despite several unanswered questions and misgivings from within both parties, the agreement was signed on 10 June by Bisky and Ernst, representing the PDS and WASG respectively.

A significant driving force behind the cooperation, and one which cannot be overestimated, was the declaration both by Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine of their intention to stand as candidates in the General Election. Gysi agreed to stand as a direct candidate for Berlin Treptow-Köpenick, a seat whose narrow loss in 2002 had deprived the PDS of its crucial third direct mandate and therefore group status in the Bundestag (Olsen, 2007, p.209). This decision marked Gysi's return to the forefront of the PDS, following his unexpected resignation from the Berlin Senate, and battle with

serious health problems. In *Disput*, the monthly PDS membership magazine, Gysi gave several reasons for his decision to stand as a candidate. One factor was his close relationship with Lafontaine (rumours of their cooperation had been circulating in the PDS for some time). Also, the previous handover to the next generation of leaders in the PDS (in other words, to Zimmer and her deputies) had not been a success. Further, opinion polls showed that support for the PDS had stalled at around 4% of the nationwide vote; as an indicator of the party's prospects of re-entering the Bundestag as a full parliamentary group, this was a far from encouraging statistic. The General Election thus represented both a challenge and an opportunity in which he would be fully committed to bringing about a Left alliance of PDS and WASG (Gysi, 2005, p.6). In his statement, Gysi clearly signalled that his return to the PDS was conditional on the reassertion of his authority and influence in the party, and that the resulting cooperation would be driven by both he and Lafontaine (Olsen, 2007, p.209).

Of the well-known Social Democrats who had declared their interest in the WASG, the PDS was particularly keen to attract Oskar Lafontaine onto its open lists. A poll published in *Spiegel* on 24 May 2005 showed that a substantial 18% of respondents could see themselves voting for a party in which Lafontaine played a leading role. Conversely, only 14% of the SPD members who participated in the survey said they would vote for a party headed by Lafontaine (see Table 1.1 below). However, here it is important to bear in mind that some SPD members had never forgiven Lafontaine for his sudden resignation, either as Finance Minister or as SPD chair. Moreover, he had also just announced in the daily tabloid *Bild* his departure from the party itself, after thirty-nine years. Explaining his decision, Lafontaine said that he considered his membership of the SPD to be over once and for all if the party entered the General Election on a platform of Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV. Further, he declared his willingness to stand as a candidate for a new left alliance of the PDS and WASG. 'It makes no sense for two small parties, the WASG and the PDS, to compete to the left of the SPD' (Oertel and Strohschneider, 2005). Envisaging a new left-wing alliance, Lafontaine said he was prepared to participate in the event of a joint PDS/WASG electoral list in order to oppose the policy of social dismantling pursued by the Bundestag parties (*Bild*, 2005). Unsurprisingly, the statement fuelled feelings of resentment and betrayal amongst many Social Democrats, who (again) held Lafontaine at least partly responsible for the troubles within their party. Initial responses from the SPD to Lafontaine's announcement ranged from dismissive ('leftist splinter groups

have always failed and merely strengthen the political right') to cautious (the WASG 'has already achieved a formidable result')<sup>29</sup>.

**Table 1.1 Percentage of voters, SPD supporters and PDS supporters who would consider voting for a party led by Oskar Lafontaine**

In the next Bundestag election, could you imagine voting for a party in which Oskar Lafontaine plays a leading role?		
	Yes	No
All respondents	18%	73%
SPD supporters	14%	79%
PDS supporters	50%	36%

Source: Berg (2005, p. 57)

The joint comeback of Gysi and Lafontaine added a strong element of personality politics but also significant impetus to the campaign (König *et al.*, 2007, p.10). Yet the *Spiegel* survey also showed that only half of the PDS respondents to the poll, which took place just a few days before the first round of cooperation talks between the PDS and WASG, could see themselves voting for a Lafontaine-led party. Although Lafontaine undoubtedly created welcome interest in the new alliance, the massive publicity surrounding his exit from the SPD also increased the pressure to cooperate, whether desired or not, and seemingly at any price (Heunemann, 2006, p.49). Prior to Lafontaine's announcement of his decision to stand as a candidate for the WASG, Ramelow stated that if he (Lafontaine) were genuinely seeking a new political home, rather than a mere publicity opportunity, then he would be welcome in the PDS; after all, the party was operating an open list for the General Election. Ramelow also stressed that he was keen to preserve the PDS as an entity, rather than cast the net wide to attract yet another *bunte Truppe* (*Neues Deutschland*, 2005)<sup>30</sup>; meanwhile, Gysi insisted that Lafontaine 'had to jump' (Berg, 2005, p.57). These statements showed that PDS was clearly reluctant to make far-reaching changes to the structures it had built up since 1990; they also hint at the contradictions and structural tensions that emerged in the cooperation process.

<sup>29</sup> Rainer Wend (SPD economics expert) and Dieter Wiefelspütz (SPD interior policy spokesperson) quoted respectively in Oertel and Strohschneider (2005).

<sup>30</sup> '*Bunte Truppe*' means 'chequered troop' – the term was originally used to describe the various streams and interests in the early PDS ('Gysi's *bunte Truppe*').

Gohde (2006, p.139) considers that most of these tensions concerned organisational matters rather than political differences, with conflicts centred on 'recognition, fear of absorption and loss of control, and on identity and mutual respect'. Important in this context were the size and identity of the cooperating parties. In 2005, the PDS had just over 61,000 members nationwide, although this number had fallen year on year since 1992, when membership had totalled over 146,000 (PDS, 2005)<sup>31</sup>. By contrast, membership of the newly formed WASG stood at approximately 12,000. Although the PDS was by far the larger party, its membership was, of course, predominantly based in the eastern states, while the WASG was stronger in the West. At first glance, combining forces presented an ideal opportunity for the parties to balance the disparity, utilising their respective strengths to complement each other. But for the members of both parties, there was much more at stake than numbers.

The western regional organisations, after years of political marginalisation, were now ideally suited to field candidates with a real chance of becoming elected to the Bundestag, but only because of cooperation with the WASG (Gohde, 2006, p.138). As a result, some of the western regional organisations viewed the process as a threat to their own — and hard-won — identity. Even the renaming of the party to simply 'Linkspartei' met with a degree of resistance in some states which insisted that the suffix '.PDS' was essential for maintaining party identity and as a statement of political aims<sup>32</sup>, especially as explicit mention of the term 'democratic socialism' was absent from the WASG programme.

The western PDS had managed to build up its membership base slowly but steadily, from a mere 617 in 1992 to 5,956 in 2005 (PDS, 2005). These figures were modest when compared to membership numbers for the eastern party but, as explained in Section 1.3, had been achieved in a challenging political environment, and in the face of repeated opposition from sections within the party itself. Indeed, taking a positive view of the PDS experience in the western states, one of the outcomes was a group of committed and resilient activists who were now well placed to build the new Linkspartei in the western *Länder*. Also, although electoral success had remained elusive, the PDS had managed to remain a nationwide party of sorts, at least in terms of party organisation and membership. Had the party not developed these organisations, there

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<sup>31</sup> 1992 was when the PDS began to publish membership figures for east and west, as well as nationwide.

<sup>32</sup> All but three western regional parties were subsequently known as 'Linkspartei.PDS'.

would have been no structural basis for the rapid construction of the Left Party (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p.68). But running deeper than the organisational challenges and extending way beyond the limited time window was the question of the political character of the new party.

Following the PDS's General Election debacle in 2002, little positive progress had been made in terms of 'regrouping' or redefining the party's political identity. The Chemnitz programme far from quelled the often bitter disputes within the various factions of the party, particularly surrounding the meaning of socialism as well as regarding the increasingly divisive question of government participation versus opposition. Had Schröder not sprung the early election and instead held on until 2006, König (2007, p. 10) doubts whether the PDS would have ever have managed to get any cooperation with the WASG off the ground. Yet in 2005, in the sudden glare of media attention and spurred on by two ambitious, driving personalities, everything was suddenly moving quickly, albeit in a rather top-down process that left little opportunity to address fundamental political issues. In an interview with *Neues Deutschland*, the former chair of the trade union IG Medien, Detlef Hensche, called on everyone on the left 'of good will and of sound mind' to stand together for the new party (Dümde and Strohschneider, 2005). This and similar urges to seize the narrow window of opportunity prompted the following response from the Communist Platform:

*Let's assume that all the obstacles to founding a new party can be overcome. There still isn't the slightest guarantee that this collaboration would bring about any movement to the left — besides the rhetoric over the coming months (...) This isn't 'just' an organisational-structural matter. Above all it's about determining content. (Brombacher et al., 2005)*

In the rush to participate in the early General Election, there was a very real sense that political content was being bypassed. These issues underline the east-west tension and relate closely to some of the key policy areas outlined earlier in this chapter.

One such tension centred on the PDS heritage as the former state party of the GDR. This was of course nothing new and was a subject frequently raised by political competitors and the media. The party had taken various steps of its own in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (confronting and coming to terms with the past); for example, during her leadership, Gabi Zimmer issued an official apology for the forced union in 1946 of the KPD and SPD to form the SED, the forerunner of the PDS. The

PDS programme, too, focused on both the positive and negative legacy of the GDR and which lessons and values the party had learned from this experience. The 2003 Chemnitz programme stated that 'the socialist idea has been damaged through its misuse as justification for dictatorship and repression. The experiences of the GDR, including the insight into the causes of its collapse oblige us to rethink our understanding of socialism' (PDS, 2003). On the other hand, as we have seen, many of the party's policies (and indeed the language in which they were written) were critical of the unification process and explicitly represented eastern interests — both aspects had earned the party its substantial support in the eastern states. However, the cooperation process with the WASG also revived some of the entrenched anti-communism the PDS had long encountered in the West, particularly among the traditionally SPD-affiliated trade union movements. In addition, the characterisation of the PDS as an extremist party was still very much in evidence a decade and a half after unification; during the implementation of (and subsequent protests against) Hartz IV, the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* warned that 'Bisky, Gysi, Lafontaine and the [extreme] right stir up the fears from which they profit. (...) On 19 September in Brandenburg and Sachsen, thirty-five to forty per cent could vote for the anti-Hartz front of PDS, NPD and DVU (Geis, 2004)<sup>33</sup>. Meuche-Mäker (2005, p.73) points out that the target audience of this statement was unlikely to be the respective electorates in Brandenburg and Saxony; rather, it was aimed at western readers, intellectuals and elites, in order to add fuel to the belief that, where totalitarianism is concerned, 'red equals brown'.

Moreover, sections of the WASG did not welcome the idea of sharing a party with (former) SED members, let alone those who may have had connections to the Stasi (König *et al.*, 2007, p.22). Perhaps mindful of the SED's own history, WASG members feared that the PDS was merely seeking 'useful idiots' in the western states, which would see the new party inevitably becoming absorbed into the more established and considerably larger PDS (Olsen, 2007, p.210). Conversely, the PDS's organisational strength and material wealth presented an attractive prospect for the up-and-coming WASG, prompting Gohde to suggest that the old and 'wallflower-like *Fräulein* PDS', for all her faults, nonetheless came with an attractive 'dowry' (Gohde, 2006, p.137).

However, the major issue that clearly managed to concentrate attention on political content and direction was government participation. Of the SPD-PDS (Red-Red) governing coalitions in the eastern states, Berlin became the focal point of the tension between the PDS and WASG. The state coalition presented the Berlin PDS with a high-

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<sup>33</sup> Both the NPD and DVU are extreme right parties.



profile and symbolic opportunity to demonstrate its *Regierungsfähigkeit*, something that office-seeking sections of the party were keen not to forfeit in the cooperation with the WASG (Olsen, 2007, p.212). But the other side of the coin was that as junior partner in the governing coalition, the PDS-Berlin also shared the responsibility for implementing the Hartz IV measures. In a Communist Platform article critically evaluating the performance of the PDS-Berlin and the rationale for government participation, Hecker (2005) set out the opposing positions on the implementation of Hartz IV: on the one hand, it could be argued that Hartz IV is federal law, and that the political role of the PDS as junior partner in a governing coalition was to minimise the negative impact of its implementation to the best of its abilities. On the other hand, Hartz IV represented 'the most perfidious social scam' in the history of the Federal Republic, in that it claimed to create jobs, but in reality set out to create a low-wage sector in the interest of greater profits. The article concluded that the true role of the PDS should not be one of mere damage limitation, but that of 'a strong parliamentary opposition, united with extra-parliamentary movements' (*ibid.*).

In 2004, the WASG-Berlin called for the SPD-PDS coalition to resign. The Berlin branch of the WASG had been founded by Rouzbeh Taheri, a former PDS member, who felt the coalition was untenable. Taheri explained that 'the assumption of "governmental responsibility" where there is absolutely no real influence (...) is actually the highest degree of irresponsibility' because poverty is not alleviated, but merely made more governable. He also argued that an honest yet supportive 'no' was capable of triggering debate in society, and could therefore be both responsible and constructive (Augstein, 2007). The WASG, together with large sections of the western left and indeed much of the PDS (and the Communist Platform in particular) shared the view that the politics of the PDS in Berlin could not be supported, either in terms of its overall aims or in relation to its specific policies. Lafontaine described the actions of the PDS-Berlin as an 'aberration', while Klaus Ernst (later co-chair of the Left Party) said that the Berlin party's decision to remain committed to government showed it was 'losing the plot' (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.111).

To sum up, while the WASG emerged out of the protest against the neo-liberal policies of the SPD-Green federal government, in the case of the WASG-Berlin, the new organisation was also a response to the policies of the Red-Red governing coalition. Jünke (2007, p.313) observes that in the context of the new leftist cooperation, this led to the paradoxical situation in which the WASG contributed to the fall of the SPD-led national government, while the PDS, in the two *Länder* where it held office, was

subservient to the same party of Social Democrats. At the same time, PDS cooperation with the WASG intensified the strategic and political focus on the West (the stronghold of the WASG) and greater ideological emphasis and diversity of strategy beyond the office-seeking goals of the eastern PDS.

#### **1.4.4. The New Left Party: The Framework Programme**

As the debates and disputes continued among the memberships of the respective parties, strong public interest was focused on the new Left alliance. In the Bundestag election the Left gained an extremely respectable 8.7% of the second vote; more than the PDS had ever achieved, and most probably more than the share either party could have hoped to gain individually. As a result, the Left won 54 seats in the Bundestag (ahead of the liberal FDP), and over half the Left deputies were based in the western states (Olsen, 2007, p.210). One of first challenges was to find a legal solution to the union of the PDS and WASG.

The safest route in legal terms was to execute a merger (*Verschmelzung*) on a similar basis to that between two companies. This solution required the smaller entity (in this case the WASG) to dissolve and merge with the larger entity (the PDS). The advantage of the merger, as opposed to the foundation of a completely new party, was that it safeguarded against subsequent legal disputes, for example concerning party assets, the eligibility of state subsidies and the legal status of the PDS-affiliated Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Both parties had to change their legal status to associations (*Vereine*) for the merger process to proceed (Neu, 2007a, p.8). The organisations held parallel conferences to discuss and approve the common articles of association, including the programme framework, statute, rules of arbitration and finance as well as the merger contract itself. A qualified majority of three quarters was required at each congress before approval for the merger of the PDS and WASG to form the Left Party was gained in a referendum of both memberships (*ibid.*).

The framework programme was a brief document that outlined the basic political values and aims of the Left Party. A full programme followed two years later in 2007. Although the framework functioned as a basic orientation, it was the product of the long and difficult process of negotiations and therefore, despite its brevity, provides some useful insights into the influences that shaped the cooperation and into the longer-term direction of the Left Party. The following paragraphs highlight the Left Party's position

on the core themes of eastern interests, socialism and peace, as stated in the programme framework.

### Eastern Interests

Like the PDS programmes that preceded it, the framework emphasised the necessity of addressing the interests of the eastern states. However, the influence of the WASG was also evident, as the section title referred explicitly to a new beginning for 'East Germany and structurally weak areas of West Germany' (DIE LINKE, 2007). The text reiterated the opportunities that had been lost with the GDR, including the education system, comprehensive childcare and economic gender equality, and criticised the destruction of easterners' economic, social and cultural potential as a result of unification; it claimed that the achievements and experiences of citizens of the GDR had been dismissed, rather than regarded as an enrichment of the Federal Republic. Instead, the framework argued that the East had become a region dependent on transfer payments, while the constant race to the bottom to create conditions attractive for business had resulted in massive inequality at the expense not only of the eastern states but also the structurally weak areas in the West (*ibid*).

The framework called for regional policy to take into account the development potential of each individual region and for a cooperative approach to tackle the problems associated with structurally/economically weak, rural and peripheral areas. The most concrete policy, though, once again focused on eastern interests, and the demand for the pay and pensions of eastern citizens to be equal with those in the West (*ibid*).

### Socialism and Social Justice

The framework's statement on the 'Social, democratic and peaceful reforms for overcoming capitalism' featured a reference to Marx. It declared that the Left Party aimed to overcome all forms of ownership and power in which 'man is an abject, enslaved, abandoned and contemptible being'; notably, these were the same goals the SPD had cited at the time of its formation (*ibid*). The specific positions reflected policies that had appeared in PDS programmes, but also demonstrated the trade-unionist roots of the WASG as well as the circumstances that had led to the two parties' cooperation. There was to be a shorter working week with no reduction in pay; employment patterns such as job-sharing would enable men and women to achieve a balance between their working and private lives. The framework also called for the introduction of a minimum wage, a strengthening of employee rights and measures to prevent the exploitation of internships. Corporation tax and the top rate of income tax

would be raised. Unsurprisingly, there was special focus on the Hartz welfare and employment market reforms. Here, the demand was unequivocal: the abolition of Hartz IV. Instead, the Left Party aimed to introduce guaranteed social security provision and a system to ensure that jobseekers were only offered roles commensurate with their qualifications and experience, and remuneration in line with industry standard rates. Furthermore, the Left Party intended to maintain essential services in the public sector, such as education, health, social care, transport and utilities (*ibid.*).

The programme also focused its attentions on ‘ending the neoliberal Zeitgeist’ (*ibid.*). Here, the Left Party envisaged a ‘new collective movement’ (*Sammelbewegung* — echoing the early PDS strategy for becoming established in the western states) that combined parliamentary work and extra-parliamentary activism. There was also an explicit reference to governmental responsibility. On the one hand, the party defended participation in government as a means of political action and influence. However, the programme also set out some general conditions to be met: first, any Left Party participation in government had to improve the situation of disadvantaged people and increase political codetermination; secondly, a coalition should have a clear left-wing character and lead to genuine political change. These rather ambiguous statements were then made more concrete in the third condition, namely that the terms of government participation would have to comply with the Left Party’s programme. Specifically, this meant no privatisation of essential public services and no cuts to jobs or social services. The programme also demanded an end to the sell-off of social housing — contrary to the policy practised by the Berlin state coalition (*ibid.*).

#### Antimilitarism and Peace

Once again, the framework’s basic position was an evolution of PDS policy. Unchanged was the rejection of any German military involvement abroad. As this chapter has explained, the PDS — or at least some of its more pragmatic, office-seeking members — had wavered over the question of UN-mandated military interventions. But the framework programme was quite clear: the Left Party categorically ruled out support for such action, a position it said was ‘based on experience’ (*ibid.*).

Also like the PDS, the Left Party was clear in its call to dissolve NATO and for an end to the military capacity of Germany and the EU. It was opposed to the development of a bipolar world centred on the USA and Europe. Instead, the military capacity in both Germany and the EU was to be non-aggressive and non-interventionist, with no development, sale or stockpiling of weapons. Finally, the programme also tackled some

more recent developments and committed itself to banning the use of German bases to support military action abroad or for the purpose of renditions (*ibid.*).

Having set out the Left Party framework programme, the document acknowledged that there were several unanswered questions and policies in need of further development. Among the list of questions highlighted for future discussion included the opportunities and instruments available for the democratisation of the economy and the extent to which (and how) the ownership of the means of production should be socialised. The document also asked if it was sufficient to provide social security based on need, or whether it was time to consider creating an unconditional basic income as the right of all citizens. Other themes included the feasibility of full employment, challenges to public ownership and more detailed conditions of government participation; also identified as a future point of discussion was the role of class interests and the class conflict. The broad range of questions and themes to explore illustrate the diversity of traditions and interests that were by now gathered in the Left Party (*ibid.*).

## **Summary**

Looking back at the PDS from the final months of the GDR right up to the emergence of the WASG, the party repeatedly appeared to be in danger of confirming the predictions of its demise. This chapter has outlined the principal factors: despite the efforts and resources invested in establishing an organisational and electoral base in the East, the strategy of *Westausdehnung* did not yield convincing results. Potential cooperation partners in the form of existing left-wing groups in the western states regarded the former GDR party of state socialism as too authoritarian, too rigid and simply too 'eastern'. In the East, the party enjoyed considerable support among former functionaries and, later, eastern Germans disillusioned with the realities of unification, but these groups did not provide the PDS with a sustainable electoral base. Organisational and electoral strength in the eastern states paved the way for the PDS to gain experience of government responsibility, but the compromise required was unacceptable to the party's left and particularly to the western party organisations. The party leadership, meanwhile, favoured government participation in the eastern states yet also remained committed to the strategy of western development; periods of minimal vertical coordination did not help to quell the tension in the party at regional level.

The chapter has also identified and outlined the PDS's three main policy areas: the representation of eastern interests, social justice and peace. Disputes frequently took place over the compatibility of principles and pragmatism; on the whole, though, the party remained consistent in its demand for a better deal for the East, its criticism of capitalism and opposition to militarism. But even when the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms were implemented, the PDS seemed incapable of harnessing the mood of opposition and challenging the SPD as a socialist party; on the other hand, it is just as doubtful whether the WASG could have mobilised support over the long term.

Adopting a more retrospective and holistic view, it can be argued that the experience of the PDS in the western states was not exclusively one of failure. Before unification introduced the PDS to the western states, the existing West German left too had been unable to develop into a credible political force. The struggle of the PDS to overcome this structural weakness, as well as its own inadequacies and contradictions, produced the motivation and opportunity for the party to cooperate with the WASG and then, as Die Linke, to transform the German democratic socialist left. But the question that follows is why the Left was successful in 2005 and, moreover, what explains the newly merged party's ability to establish an electoral base in the western states. To answer these questions, the research now considers the strengths of two theoretical approaches. The next two chapters set out each theory in detail and identify key aspects to be applied to the case of the Left Party in a selected western federal state, Bremen.

# Chapter Two: Explanatory Framework I - Cartel Theory

## Introduction

This chapter introduces the first of the two theoretical frameworks explored in the thesis. The overall aim of the chapter is to identify the aspects, characteristics and developments within Cartel Theory that might explain the success of the Left Party in Germany's western federal states.

Section One sets out the basic principles of Cartel Theory. It is argued that in reaction to social and economic change parties have faced a series of coordination dilemmas whose responses have in turn provided the catalyst for further change. The nature of party evolution can therefore be understood as the 'answers' to these dilemmas. Certain key features distinguish the cartel party type: first, there is an interpenetration of parties and the state. Secondly, there is a high degree of cooperation between political rivals in reaching common decisions. Finally, the cartel system's development is largely contingent on the extent of state support available in that country, and finds the most fertile ground in those political structures with a tradition of cooperation and accommodation. Parties become increasingly anchored in the state and, accordingly, more remote from civil society. This break with civil society is rewarded by the access to resources offered by the state, such as subsidies and funding. As a consequence, parties are no longer the democratic agents, but the democratic principals. The characteristics of the cartel party constitute a distinct contrast to previous models, yet considering various social and political context, cartel theorists argue that they constitute the next stage in a dynamic evolutionary process.

Given that the core of these developments is the growing identification of parties with the state, Section Two takes a closer look at the various state resources and incentives available to parties, as well as how these represent a formalised source of support for 'insiders' and, simultaneously, act as a barrier to 'outsiders'. Focusing on the German state in particular, the specific privileges and subsidies at the disposal of parliamentary parties are also described in this section.

Important challenges and refinements to Cartel Theory are discussed in Section Three. One criticism argues that parties' embeddedness in the state is not necessarily

symptomatic of their remoteness from civil society, but instead a natural consequence of the state's own reach in society. An additional challenge centres on the inherent weakness of unrepresentative parties and the subsequent threat to the cartel from newcomers. The section then turns to a further development of Cartel Theory that applies the concept of the economic oligopoly to explain why and how political leaders curtail the policy supply and safeguard against the risk of external challenges. It argues that parties are motivated by the goal of maintaining power and influence and therefore 'collude' to restrict the range of policies on offer. This concept of Cartel Theory also predicts certain features of leadership and representation within parties and the consequences for electoral competition.

These characteristics are discussed in greater depth in Sections Four and Five. Section Four considers the issues of leadership and representation, especially in terms of decision-making and the relationship between the different 'layers' of the party and the distribution of power. There is a strong emphasis on the parliamentary party (or the party in office) and the ascendancy of the party in central office as the party leadership acquires greater independence from the party basis. Essentially, power is concentrated among the leadership, while the grassroots membership is confined to lending formal support and legitimacy to the party. Section Five is concerned with parties' conscious decision to narrow the supply of policy and the resulting impact on electoral competition. Parties signal their intent to restrict policy and manage voter expectations using language framed in the concept of globalisation and the rhetoric of 'no alternative'. Meanwhile, challengers likely to overcome electoral barriers are invited to become 'socialised' into the cartel. As a result, with little to distinguish between the parties and their policy offer, the democratic process itself becomes a means to ensure the cartel's continuity. Both Sections Four and Five are illustrated using examples from the German context and, where relevant, the PDS/Left Party. To conclude, the chapter identifies the specific aspects of Cartel Theory to be further explored in relation to the Left Party in Bremen.

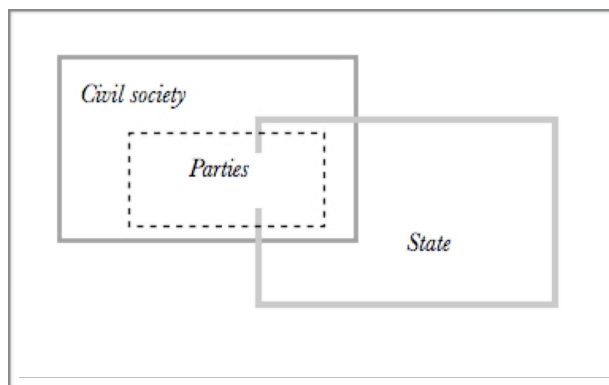


## 2.1. Parties' Changing Relationship with Civil Society and the State

Katz and Mair (1995) construct their theory of cartelisation in response to the broadly accepted view that parties are understood within the context of their relationship to civil society (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.6). In their view, this approach produces two misleading outcomes; firstly, the mass party model becomes a kind of benchmark for evaluating other types of model; secondly, it neglects the role of parties' relationship with the state (*ibid.*). Their dialectic approach explains how the mass party model and later variants such as the catch-all party directly reflect a specific notion of democracy and therefore become outdated when this notion is no longer characteristic of society. In other words, each new party type is not only a reaction to what has gone before, but is also the catalyst for further change in that a new party type stimulates a reaction which subsequently brings about further development. The result is again a new party type, which in turn triggers a new set of reactions. Therefore, party models are not stations along a linear route of development towards some end point, but merely one stage in an ongoing process (*ibid.*). Furthermore, while the dialectic is driven by changes in the relationship between parties and civil society, it is also a consequence of the changing interaction between parties and the state, a factor which plays an increasingly important role in an 'ever closer symbiosis between parties and the state' (*ibid.*) and provides the conditions for a new party type, that of the cartel party.

The dialectic approach is again applied in the identification of three specific 'coordination dilemmas' which need to be overcome by the parties, and whose solutions in turn create new challenges (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.34). The first dilemma is internal and refers to the organisation of members in assemblies and parliament, for example, Germany's regional *Land* parliaments or the Bundestag. The second dilemma is external and focuses on the coordination and mobilisation of grassroots activists (or party on the ground), particularly at elections. Finally, parties also need to solve the network dilemma, which combines both the internal and external challenges and is concerned with the optimum coordination of the parliamentary party *and* the numerous and diverse supporting activists (*ibid.*, p.35). Like the changing relationship between parties and the state, each coordination conflict and solution, as well as the new challenge that arises as a result, can be clearly traced as the catalyst of evolution in party structure and organisation. Therefore, this chapter's account of each stage of party evolution also considers the nature and impact of the related coordination dilemmas.

The development of parties is seen from the perspective of the relationship between the party organisation and the state. There are four distinct stages, each consisting of a series of stimuli and responses. The first stage dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At that time, suffrage and political activity in general were the reserve of a privileged few. These 'groups of men' were understood to act in the public interest and bear the responsibility for defining and implementing policy (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.9). This concentration of power and activity rendered a complex and extensive party organisation largely unnecessary, since those whose role was to influence the state were by nature of their social status and privilege already equipped to fulfil this function directly. In terms of the relationship between party, state and civil society, the separation of civil society and the state was far from distinct, since people in politically powerful positions in the state simultaneously enjoyed influential status within civil society and vice versa, resulting in the 'interpenetration' of state and civil society (*ibid.*). Where organisations did emerge, for example in order to exert influence in parliament, these parties occupied a position along the interface between state and civil society. Owing to the small circle of individuals involved, this party type is known as the cadre or elite party.



**Figure 2.1. The cadre/elite party interpenetrating both civil society and the state**  
(Katz and Mair, 1995, p.10)

However, the onset of increasing industrialisation and subsequent urbanisation also saw a climb in the number of people fulfilling suffrage requirements. Furthermore, existing restrictions on working class organisation were no longer enough to prevent mobilisation along political and industrial lines (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.9). As a result, and to accommodate the increased number of participants in the political process, parties began setting up mass membership structures, supported by formal party organisations. Not surprisingly, much of this new activity took place among people who had previously not qualified for the franchise, and could therefore be seen as the

reward for their struggle to gain a voice and exercise influence and ultimately control over state structures (*ibid.*, p.10).

Coordination dilemmas are already evident in these changes and developments. The cadre/elite party type consisted of a small and loosely organised network surrounding individuals who already enjoyed a degree of power and influence in society and connections to state structures. Therefore, their coordination dilemma was essentially an internal one, concerned with the organisation of these members, particularly at constituency level, and establishing a disciplined structure and authority in order to secure parliamentary majorities (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.35). However, the growing demand among the population for increased political rights, particularly the campaign for expanded suffrage, opened up an external challenge. Although internal issues surrounding parliamentary majorities persisted, the extra-parliamentary pressure on parties became an increasing problem for parties now faced with an expanded electorate. Furthermore, the extension of suffrage to a large section of the population led to an increasing range of policy demands, which compounded this external coordination pressure (*ibid.*, p.36). In short, the conditions had transformed, giving rise to a new series of challenges to the cadre/elite party model.

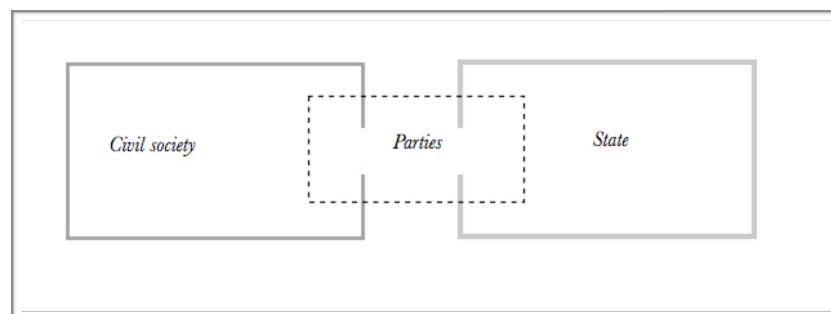
Comparing the cadre/elite party type with the newly emerging and growing parties, several contrasts are clear. At the heart of these differences is that while the former relied on the 'quality' of its supporters, in other words their position and influence in both civil society and the state, the new mass party counted on quantity in a number of aspects. First, what these parties lacked in terms of wealthy patrons, they made up for through the considerable number of subscribed members. Second, rather than rely on the influence of powerful individuals, mass parties organised their ranks and embarked on collective action (*ibid.*). What is more, lack of access to the established commercial press was overcome by the production and publication of party newspapers and other channels of communication (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.10). To put it simply, the mass parties shifted the focus of activity from the state to the party and gained their strength from organisational rather than individual influence. Whereas the cadre/elite party type was 'of parliamentary origin held together by exchanges of influence or material rewards among its leaders', the mass party constituted 'the archetypal party of extra-parliamentary origin' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.35).

Turning to the role of civil society in relation to the party, the mass parties enabled the extra-parliamentary aspect or 'face' to become first recognised and then formalised by

means of the party organisation. That is to say, even when the party won enough votes to participate in government, this extra-parliamentary element endured, maintaining a platform for activists to continue the struggles and campaigns. However, since the mass party's strength lay in its structure and organisation of members, it also promoted unity and insisted on discipline, actually to a far greater degree than that necessary in the cadre/elite party with its narrowly concentrated political activity (*ibid.*, p.36). Mass parties also broke with the past in that they explicitly declared their intention to represent the interests of a specific section of society rather than act on the behalf of a purported 'national interest' as pronounced by the cadre/elite parties (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.10). Consequently, the mass party acted as agent on behalf of particular social groups, becoming a forum for these groups to articulate their interests.

The mass party emerged as a result of the extension of suffrage to the majority of citizens; therefore, it can be understood as a response to a new conception of political circumstances. In turn, the mass party model altered the relationship between citizens/voters and the state. Whereas elections had in the past presented a limited number of voters with a limited choice of trustee, they now provided the means of selecting representatives or delegates from the mass parties (*ibid.*, p.11). Moreover, the function of elections was transformed from the means of gaining formal consent from the population to be governed into a method for holding delegates in office accountable to voters.

Figure 2.2 below shows that in the second stage of party development, the state is distinct from civil society, with the mass party performing a 'bridging' function between the two entities. The parties remain based in civil society, thanks to their broad membership and activists, despite the fact they simultaneously penetrate the state, for example by way of parliamentary representation or occupation of ministerial office.



**Figure 2.2. The relationship between civil society, parties and state in the mass party model**  
(Katz and Mair, 1995, p.11)

Not only the mass party model's conception of democracy but also its very organisation presented a challenge to the older, established parties. During a time of limited suffrage, these parties had been well served by an informal network of supporters who could be counted on to mobilise when necessary (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.11). Yet in this new environment some parties found it difficult to adapt to the organisational structures, such as the representation of specific sections of society. Groups with traditional ties to the older type parties were often minorities or specific groups, such as farmers and industrialists. The dilemma was compounded by a general reluctance on the part of leaders, accustomed to occupying positions in the traditional establishment, to accept the rise of the increasingly extra-parliamentary nature of party organisation (*ibid.*). A deterrent to adopting the mass party model also existed in the form of material resources. The traditional parties were still in a position to rely on substantial contributions from individual supporters and continued to enjoy 'sympathetic access to the "non-partisan" channels of communication' (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.12). As a result, while they often constructed organisations resembling those of the mass party, in so far as they included registered members, formal structures such as a party congress and a party newspaper, the parliamentary party remained rather aloof from these structures, which were mainly served by the mass organisation (*ibid.*).

Nonetheless, it was the approach to ideology that would form a pivotal stage in this evolutionary process. The restructured traditional parties did indeed open up to the recruitment of members on a mass basis, but since their 'natural' constituency was formed of various minority interest groups, new support had to be won from a much broader range of the electorate. Therefore, the key for the traditional elite parties was not to offer an ideology as such, but to remain committed to the notion of a single, national interest which would also manage to intersect with various groups across society (*ibid.*).

While the traditional parties were in the process of formulating their response to the challenges forced upon them by the mass party model, the mass parties themselves were facing their own difficulties. Many of the welfare and social measures ('club goods') introduced to benefit certain sections of society had gained broad acceptance as a norm, and become accepted and available on a more or less universal basis (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.12). Furthermore, improvements in social conditions, increased mobility and the spread of the mass media meant that parties found it more difficult to claim they represented only very specific interests; these interests were shifting and

were no longer limited to narrow and defined groups. Added to this was the diminishing solidarity, or at least the perception of such, between the formerly 'natural' constituency and the party once leaders of mass parties had acquired experience of, and subsequently a taste for, government and the power of office (Katz and Mair, 1995, p. 12), whereby voters feel that elected politicians have lost touch with 'the real world'.

The role of leaders in office forms a prominent part of Katz and Mair's Cartel Theory. In the specific context of mass party leaders in office, it is argued that it was important for these leaders to maintain their position in order for them to continue formulating and implementing policy they believed to be in the interest of their supporters among the electorate. Yet at the same time, leaders were faced with the need to appeal to a considerably broader section of the electorate than their previously defined constituency. Meanwhile, the very nature of office and the business of getting things done required parties to work alongside or even cooperate with their electoral opponents (*ibid.*). Both the broadening of policy and the cooperation among professional politicians are key aspects of Cartel Theory applied to the Left Party in this research. Here they are placed within the broad context of party evolution; Sections Four and Five of the chapter then return to consider both themes in detail and frame them in the German setting.

The mass party was the party type that embodied the extra-parliamentary character of organised political participation, and proved to be a great success, with several of the former cadre/elite parties embracing many of its features. Mass parties had generally adopted one of two methods of dealing with problems of external coordination concerning supporters and activists. The first of these was to reaffirm party identity and loyalty throughout the ranks, emphasising not only the close association between party and defined social groups, but also the threat of other parties or groups (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.36). Alternatively, parties could make policy commitments to the benefit of their specific client groups and aim to deliver these once in office. However, occupation of public office demanded the successful coordination both of the parliamentary party and the large basis of members and activists; in other words, it required a strong party in central office (*ibid.*, p.37). Thus, the mass parties' electoral success was, at the same time, the catalyst for another type of coordination dilemma, namely how the party could manage to secure reliable majorities in parliament (internal dilemma) and, through its central office, still maintain and organise its considerable group of activists and extra-parliamentary supporters (external dilemma). This combined challenge forms the network dilemma.

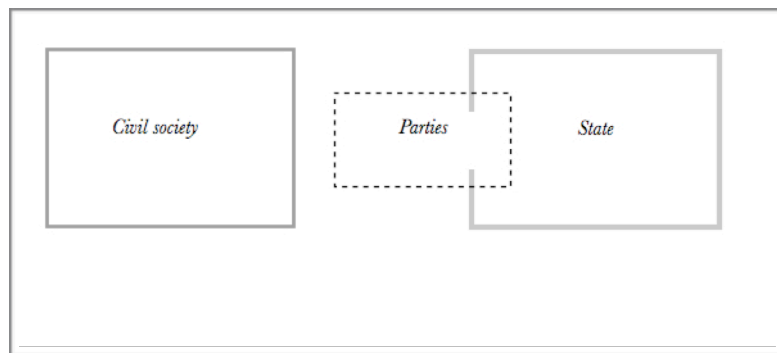
In order to overcome this problem of network coordination, the mass party underwent a shift in its own democratic structure. Until this point, the basis had at least in principle exercised authority over the leadership in the form of the party congress. Yet because it was impossible to expect the congress to convene on a permanent basis, a less unwieldy committee or group was formed from within the congress (*ibid.*). In theory, this committee remained answerable to the party basis, but in practice was able to act and make decisions independently, therefore overcoming the network coordination problem, but consequently also superseding the grassroots membership base in the process (*ibid.*).

It is therefore possible to detect the beginnings of a third stage in the evolution of parties. The traditional party, in response to the success of the mass party model, identified a way forward which came to be adopted by the mass parties themselves, resulting in a new 'catch-all' model (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.12). In this model, while parties continued to maintain a membership base, the relationship between the party was not based on articulating the interests of a clearly defined group in the form of an ideology; rather, because of the need to appeal to various groups right across society, the party came to regard its members and supporters as a broad collection of individuals (*ibid.*, p.13). The new catch-all party model was therefore characterised by diminishing ideological differentiation on one hand and, subsequently, growing policy consensus on the other. As a result, the requirement of maintaining a loyal and distinct section of the electorate became less compelling, a condition compounded by further advances in mass communication, particularly television, as this enabled parties to appeal to the electorate en masse, rather than limit themselves to mobilising core supporters via party publications (*ibid.*).

In the view of the cartel theorists, the catch-all party model therefore developed as the result of two elements. First, the cadre/elite parties' answer to the challenge of the mass parties impelled them to establish a party basis similar to that of their rivals but, unlike the membership of the mass party, one without the at least nominal control of the leadership. A further difference was that while the mass parties' success was based on clear identification with defined sections of the population and the provision of public sector services and welfare, the former elite parties were unable to successfully pursue this strategy. Historically, they lacked the extensive and dependable clientele, and the 'club goods' inspired little loyalty among largely well-off voters (Blyth and Katz, 2005,

p.37). In short, the catch-all model provided a strategy that gave the struggling cadre/ elite parties a reliable networked structure.

Like its cadre/elite party and mass party predecessors, the catch-all model represented a new conception of democracy and a shift in parties' relationship to the state and civil society. In this model, parties cease to act either as agents of civil society who first influence and then penetrate the state, or even as a bridge between the two entities (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.13). Instead, they set forth the demands from civil society to the state and simultaneously act as agents of the state to justify their policies to the public, in other words to civil society. Katz and Mair (*ibid.*) refer to this brokering role as a 'Janus-like existence' and point out that although mass parties also fulfilled a similar brokering function, this had not diminished ties between the parties and the specific aggregated interests they represented. By contrast, precisely this phenomenon would constitute a fundamental attribute of catch-all parties (*ibid.*).



**Figure 2.3: The catch-all party acting as broker between the state and civil society**  
(Katz and Mair, 1995, p.13)

Cooperation between the catch-all parties and various groups was not completely severed, though, and as a result formal links did continue to exist, one important example being the ties between social democratic parties and trade unions. On the other hand, trade unions had since become accustomed to dealing not only with their 'natural' social democratic allies, but also bourgeois parties if these happened to hold office. What is more, as agents of the state, social democratic parties would also defend policies which they claimed unavoidably conflicted with the interests of trade unions (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.14). Thus, the parties' brokering role strengthened the pluralist notion of democracy, in which parties represented various and often competing interests. In order for this approach to work, parties had to remain open to a broad



range of interests. Subsequently, the focus of elections shifted away from a choice between clearly defined policies based on specific interest groups and ideology and instead towards a competence-based choice between 'teams of leaders' (*ibid.*).

As far as the implications for the relationship between the parties, civil society and the state are concerned, Katz and Mair (1995, p.14) suggest the parties may in fact have their own set of interests, which are quite different to those of either civil society or the state. Parties perform a service in the form of their brokering role, which requires them to appeal to the electorate on one hand and, on the other, to manipulate the state in order to deliver policy in the interests of their clientele based in civil society. If they do this successfully, the parties are recompensed, for example with positions in public office and the vindication of their policies. In other words, parties are able to use the power and resources of the state as a means to achieve their own distinct interests (*ibid.*).

So far, Cartel Theory has explained that club goods, previously an integral factor in the mass parties' appeal, became established as basic and universal elements of the welfare state, reducing the identification and loyalty between specific sectors of the electorate and the party. The results were two-fold; there was less compulsion for the party to remain focused on the interests of the basis and core constituent groups and, secondly, leaders sought to appeal to a much broader electorate. This would eventually see party leaders detaching themselves from the constraints of the grassroots organisation and instead intensifying their pursuit of catch-all electoral appeal. However, a weakness of the catch-all model is its instability, since it is based on offering ever-fewer public goods whilst striving for the support of ever-broader sections of the electorate. As the resulting network problems became more acute, the answer was sought in a new model that allowed parties the opportunity to liberate themselves from commitments to the ongoing provision of public goods.

To sum up, the various shifts in party strategy and type were partly caused by factors such as industrialisation and growth, as well as the expansion of suffrage and the development of the welfare state. Confronted with these factors and their associated coordination dilemmas, the parties went on to modify their organisational form and strategy. Thus the development of these party types can be seen as both an evolutionary response to specific conceptions of democracy (Katz and Mair) and as a series of adaptations in order to survive changing circumstances and dilemmas (Blyth

and Katz). The cartel party model constitutes the most recent stage of this evolutionary process.

The models described above and represented in figures 2.1–2.3 form a dynamic process of parties drifting away from civil society and towards the state. The dialectal approach of this development therefore implies that, if continued, parties could in fact sever their relationship to civil society to such an extent that they actually become part of the state apparatus itself (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.14). According to Katz and Mair, precisely this development took place from the mid-1970s onwards.

A number of social, cultural and political changes are cited as contributory factors of parties' increased anchoring within the state. One development that occurred in the 1970s was a growing preference among sections of the electorate for the far more concentrated and targeted range of interests put forward by specialist groups (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.15), for example in the New Social Movements that sprang up around issues such as peace, feminism and the environment<sup>34</sup>. This trend diminished participation in party activity because such organisations were able to offer a fresh and attractive prospect and alternative to parties; they offered a limited and even single policy focus and a more direct, immediate approach that contrasted with the perceived jadedness and aloofness of the national political party hierarchy (*ibid.*). The consequences for parties were not limited to dealignment among voters; party membership itself diminished in terms of numbers as well as active engagement, since social movements offered activists alternative channels for campaigning on particular issues. At the same time, confronted by falling subscriptions and rising costs of party activity (for example, as a result of the increasing professionalisation of campaigns), parties found themselves forced to consider alternative financial resource channels. Extremely important in this respect is the provision of state subventions to parties (*ibid.*). The following section therefore explores the type of resources the state provides, their impact on parties' relationship to civil society as well as the implications for political representation and competition.

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<sup>34</sup> Interests addressed by these groups include, for example, the environment, peace and feminism. Chapter Three discusses party dealignment in the context of Social Cleavage Theory.

## 2.2. The State and its Resources

Cartel Theory explains that the elite parties were formed and supported by a network of influential individuals during an era of limited franchise. Consequently, the cadre/elite model did not require intense campaigning and remained largely self-financing. But in light of the expanded suffrage and participation that characterised the era of the mass party, it then became necessary to conduct extensive campaigns and maintain communication channels, supported by a subscription-paying membership. While membership remained an important resource for catch-all parties, support was also found elsewhere to finance the costly professional expertise increasingly utilised for campaigns conducted in non-partisan media networks. The cartel model pursues this approach to an even greater degree; increasingly professional and centrally managed campaigns require substantial finance, which is secured from the available state resources.

Although public funds had already been used to financially support selected parties, state subsidies paid directly to parties, including those outside the legislature, first appeared in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Federal Republic of Germany was the first European country to introduce party subsidies in 1959. This occurred as part of the country's post-war democratisation process, and the special responsibility of parties is enshrined in the Basic Law (constitution) (Ashton, 2006, p.4). Many other western European states followed suit to varying degrees and introduced their own subsidies system shortly afterwards. A key feature of the new approach was that finance was available to all parties that fulfilled certain criteria; as a result, even those parties not represented in parliament became eligible to receive state subsidies (Scarrow, 2006, p.620).

There were two main motivations behind the introduction of state subsidies to political parties. The first is based on a positive view of parties, which considers funding to be a means of support enabling parties to fulfil an essential role as representative of interests, mediator of conflict, and vital component of the continued success of democracy. As new, pro-democratic parties emerge as a result of these subsidies, the quality of democratic competition is improved, since these new parties, through their participation, acknowledge and lend support to the democratic system (Scarrow, 2006, p.621). The second motivation adopts a less favourable view of parties and regards state subsidies as the means by which to address their over-reliance on donations from

corporations and individuals. Subsidies allow parties to operate without excessive obligations toward these sources and thereby help to improve democratic standards (*ibid.*). However, the rules for eligibility vary from country to country and, moreover, the scope and impact of the subsidy are also difficult to define. For example, even though a payment may be specifically intended to support staff working in the parliamentary party, the same payment might also be of secondary benefit to the extra-parliamentary organisation of that party, in that it can now allow resources previously earmarked for the parliamentary work to be released to fund extra-parliamentary activities (*ibid.*, p. 623).

Although there are different categories of subsidy, the type most closely associated with impact on political competition is the payment intended for extra-parliamentary work; it is also the type of funding often considered effective in addressing over-reliance on corporate/private donations (*ibid.*, p.624). There are three rules concerning the eligibility and payment of subsidies: the first is the payout threshold, which can either apply exclusively to parties represented in parliament, or can also include parties who fail to gain parliamentary seats. Thresholds can be set in different ways, for example, based on candidate nominations and vote total or share (*ibid.*).

Secondly, the payout principle refers to the basis upon which subsidies are paid. The most common principle is to distribute the available sum according to the voter share of each party fulfilling the threshold criteria. Alternatively, parties might receive a specified amount per share, a system which rewards high voter participation. Furthermore, it is possible for a flat rate to be paid to all parliamentary parties or those who gain a particular number of seats. While this method benefits small parliamentary parties, it does disadvantage the very smallest parties who do not overcome the payout threshold (*ibid.*).

Finally, there is the payout purpose. In some countries, subsidies come with explicit conditions for their use, although sometimes no specifications are made. Here, too, there may be an impact on electoral competition if the payments are made specifically as a reimbursement for election campaign expenses. This is because small parties could find it difficult to raise sufficient money to finance their campaign up-front, thus restricting the scope and impact of their activities (*ibid.*, p.625).

One of the main criticisms of public funding of parties is linked directly to a main argument of Cartel Theory, namely that it can deliberately constrict competition. Given

that it is usually parties represented in the legislature or in government that determine the eligibility for state subventions (payment threshold) as well as the distribution of the subsidy (payment principle), this valuable resource is not exogenous. As a result, subsidies give politicians a tool which they may use to serve their own self-interest.

In Germany, parties have access to state funding proportionate to their share of the vote. Once in power, ruling parties are able to grant opposition parties a degree of influence, for example in the form of patronage positions. However, even if this patronage is utilised, power remains firmly within the grip of the governing party or coalition. Katz and Mair (1995, p.17) identify Germany as providing favourable conditions for the development of the cartel party type, not least due to the provision of state subsidies and privileged position enjoyed by parties in relation to the state. Thanks to the decentralised structure of the Federal Republic and the special representative and educational role assigned to parties in the Basic Law, German parties were able to use their dominant position in federal and regional parliaments to expand their influence both within state areas (such as administration and the judiciary) and public services (public media, state universities, public sector businesses). Thus, they created what has become known as the *Parteienstaat* — a state determined by and characterised by political parties (Detterbeck, 2008, p.30).

This process began in the late 1950s. As the welfare state expanded and economic activity grew, the state and parliament were faced with greater responsibilities and challenges. In response, parliamentary parties expanded their expert and professional staff, which in turn increased the demand for organisational resources (*ibid.*). German parties are therefore described as 'self-appointed beneficiaries' who are anchored in the state and benefit from three major forms of state resources (*ibid.*, p.28). First, salaries and allowances are provided for a team of staff fulfilling secretarial, research and PA roles; secondly, party-affiliated and state-funded political foundations use seminars, meetings, projects and publications to build a linkage between the party and society and provide a source of recruitment; thirdly, there is a system of reimbursement for regional and national electoral campaigns (the payout purpose). Since 1992, this funding has been based on a party's success in elections (payout threshold) and corresponds to membership fees and donation (payout principle) (*ibid.*, p.29).

One striking aspect of this development, and one which is highly significant for understanding the significance of Cartel Theory in the case of Germany, is that it did not take place within the context of a crisis among the parties, such as the network

dilemmas described in Section One. In fact, the parties began to seek additional and alternative sources of income at a time when they had been successful in consolidating their position in the political marketplace. Between 1961 and 1983 only three parties were represented in the Bundestag federal parliament (the CDU/CSU, the SPD and the FDP), while the same parties also dominated the regional parliaments, underlining their stability. Furthermore, both the CDU and SPD, the two largest parties, managed to more than quadruple their membership, which meant they not only gained valuable revenue from subscriptions, but also deepened the reach of their roots in society (Detterbeck, 2008, p.30).

However, the two-and-a-half party system was eventually broken. First, the Greens became an established presence at regional level, and then went on to become a partner in the national government for two terms. Secondly, after 1989, the PDS became a significant force in the eastern states and gained seats in the national parliament, while the Left Party, following the merger of the PDS and WASG, is strongly represented in the Bundestag. Overall, membership of German parties gradually declined over the years (see Section One for an explanation of this general decline) and party alignment decreased across portions of the electorate, both in eastern and western states. This is especially pronounced at regional level, where it is not uncommon for small parties to muster some success, even gaining seats in legislatures, notably in the city-state of Bremen. Therefore, from the 1980s, German parties began to display the conditions Katz and Mair associate with Cartel Theory: with shrunken support from voters and members, they had to focus on securing state resources in order to maintain their organisational strength. Consequently, their ties to society became looser and more firmly anchored in the state. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that membership continues to play an important role within German parties. The CDU and SPD, for example, obtain 20% and 25% respectively of their national budgets from membership subscriptions. Furthermore, since 1994, state funding has been linked directly to membership fees.

Since payment thresholds are most commonly linked to parties' electoral performance, subsidies naturally favour and perpetuate those parties who either hold governmental office or are represented in parliament — in other words legislators — while at the same time potentially constituting a barrier to both parties or electoral alliances failing to meet the set criteria. Nonetheless, even though some countries adopt quite formidable electoral thresholds and maintain a system of state monopoly of financial resources, such tools are not a particularly new phenomenon and add to an array of

long-established state resources at the disposal of parties, including the power of patronage. The extent to which subsidies impact competition has been outlined by Scarrow (2006) and is summarised in the following table:

**Table 2.1: The likely impact of public subsidies on party competition**

	Payout amounts	
Payout threshold	Small	Large
Low	Favours small parties and new competitors	Favours small parties and new competitors
High	Little impact	Hurts small parties and new competitors

(Scarrow, 2006, p.625)

Cartel Theory asserts that subsidies constitute a barrier preventing newcomers from entering the parliamentary arena and reduce the impact of challengers, such as small or new parties, to the established political constellation. Yet while low payout amounts might be of little consequence to larger parties, if the threshold is set low, even a modest amount of funding could prove to be a vital financial resource to a small party. In fact, subsidies, especially in a party's formative years, could prove the make or break factor for future survival. Without this resource, a small new party could die out before it has a chance to develop a sound voter base or electoral credibility (Scarrow, 2006, p. 625). On the other hand, if there is a sizeable payout amount with a corresponding threshold, small parties could suffer, as the subsidy would only be available to the larger parties with a substantial share of seats in the legislature (*ibid.*).

It is quite common for European countries with a system of political subsidies to fix the payout threshold at a lower level than that of the electoral barrier. Moreover, alterations to the threshold display a clear downward trend (*ibid.*, p.627). In Germany, for example, when the subsidies system was first introduced in 1959, the payout threshold required parties to gain seats in the lower house, the Bundestag (i.e., it was set at the electoral threshold). In 1967 the payout threshold was lowered to 2.5% of the list vote and, since 1969, has required parties to gain 0.5% of the list vote for the Bundestag (*ibid.*, p.628). Citing the introduction of state subsidies for parties in (West) Germany, Koole (1996)

refers to the *Etatisierung*<sup>35</sup> of party finance and how this created a degree of *Chancengleichheit* (equality of opportunity), which served to cushion and preserve smaller parties. It was in this environment that the Greens managed to achieve significant electoral success, which, argues Koole, adds to the difficulty of identifying any cartel, perhaps beyond the rhetoric of such challengers themselves (Koole, 1996, p.517). Therefore, taking into account the fragmentation and number of parties to have emerged, any attempt by established parties to keep out newcomers has failed.

The political landscape can be influenced by subsidies in two ways; first, the survival or absence of the newcomer and, second, the precedent this sets for subsequent parties. A lack of realistic prospects of even a modest measure of success could deter the formation of new parties (Scarrow, 2006, p.629). Furthermore, there are also implications for measuring the well-being of a democracy; the existence of small and unpopular parties lends credence to the more successful parties' claim that having competed against a broad range of parties they genuinely reflect the electorates' general political preferences. On the other hand, increasing numbers of small parties results in what might be regarded as more 'wasted' votes, i.e., votes for parties which fail to win seats (*ibid.*).

Research focusing on European democracies has yet to establish an identifiable link between the introduction of subsidies and the various payout thresholds on the one hand and, on the other, the proliferation or survival of small parties, even among those countries such as Germany, where the threshold was lowered<sup>36</sup>. The data obtained in comparative analysis of these countries therefore does not support the assertion that subsidies stifle and squeeze out small, marginal parties. However, despite the absence of hard evidence of a conspiracy among established parties to exclude challengers by introducing subsidies, it can nevertheless be argued that the specific nature of financial resources, even if they do not actually prevent the emergence of newcomers to the party system itself, still puts them at a distinct disadvantage and therefore impedes their entry into parliament and other positions of power (Katz and Mair, 1996, p.531). For example, subsidies paid after the election are of little help to small parties struggling to run their election campaign. Subsidies can even involve an element of risk for small new parties. German parties confident of achieving the required share of the vote are able to apply to the Federal President for an advance payment on the subsidy.

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<sup>35</sup> From the French 'état', meaning 'State'; in other words, party finance became increasingly state-orientated.

<sup>36</sup> See Scarrow, 2006, pp.631ff.



This advance is invested in producing a bigger and better election campaign with the aim of enhancing the parties' electoral performance, on the understanding that the subsidy amount is to be paid back should the party fail to achieve the payout threshold. Therefore, tempting though the advance funding might be for small parties, it also means they are potentially faced with the ruinous scenario of having to pay back the entire amount if the campaign fails to attract the sufficient voter share (Ashton, 2006, p.6).

In addition, large and established parties are in the fortunate position of attracting financial resources in addition to their direct subsidy, even though private donations may be outlawed (Scarrow, 2006, p.635). Small parties are unlikely to enjoy this wealth, and find it difficult to make significant inroads into the competitive political environment, unless one of their campaign issues becomes increasingly significant and thus a strong mobilisation platform, or if there is a crisis among the established parties themselves.

Finally, a system of direct subsidies that favours the participation of small parties (a low payout threshold for example) might result in the party competitive environment remaining fragmented. In this case, there are several small parties that have few prospects of electoral breakthrough (because of the higher electoral threshold), but are nevertheless sustained because they qualify for direct subsidies. This too could potentially provide a tool with which established parties maintain a cartel. The reason for this is that the subsidy provides political opponents with an incentive to organise in small factions and therefore a disincentive to join forces with parties or groups with common policy ground. Consequently, there is a reduced likelihood of opposition uniting in a broad front to challenge the established (cartelised) parties (Scarrow, 2006, p.629).

It is not only financial resources that provide parties with a powerful self-preservation tool. As the volume of electronic media increased, its distribution generally became more restricted and subject to stringent state control and regulation. The result is that parties which have penetrated and become agents of the state were in the privileged position of accessing this information, while parties outside the state had no such guarantee. Given the importance of electronic media as a channel of political communication, its access or denial constituted a powerful weapon in the hands of the established state parties (Ashton, 2006, p.11). Furthermore, parliamentary groups in the Bundestag have the power to approve or refuse applications from smaller parties

who do not qualify for full *Fraktion* status and the privileges associated with parliamentary groups. As Chapter One has explained, following unification, the established Bundestag parties denied this status to both the Greens and the PDS, thereby restricting their access to committees and debating time.

As such, it was the drive to enhance the parties' own positions, allowing them to meet the demands placed on them in terms of organisation and funding, that initiated the adoption of practices associated with the character of the party cartel. This drive was assisted by the emphasis on consensual politics and the relative absence of deep political cleavage between the parties<sup>37</sup>. These conditions eased the path towards allowing the parties to negotiate the shaping of institutions and processes according to their common needs (Detterbeck, 2008, p.30).

In Germany, it is inter-party agreement and cooperation that account for much of the dependence on state resources. By the 1980s, the established parties (CDU/CSU, SPD and FDP) had between them been able to extend the subsidies available to themselves and their affiliated organisations. Ashton (2006, p.11) observes that it was the CDU that introduced the subsidies system, chiefly as a means of obstructing the SPD from entering the federal government. Once the SPD achieved governmental power (in a Grand Coalition with the CDU), both parties maximised the level of state funding due to them. Despite the Greens' early criticism of this 'self-service mentality' (*ibid.*), the party soon learnt to rely on the same system of funding after it too entered the Bundestag in the 1980s. These subsidies enabled the party to establish its own affiliated political foundation (the Heinrich Böll Stiftung), recruit paid staff and, moreover, support the transformation of activist volunteers into professional politicians. The PDS/Left Party has also utilised and benefited from state resources. Following the 1998 national election, the PDS qualified for full parliamentary group status and consequently the entitlement to greater financial resources in order to support its parliamentary group, the right to speaking time in parliamentary debates and to participation in parliamentary committees. The PDS also followed the example of other parties and established its own affiliated political foundation, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Therefore, placing this development within the context of Cartel Theory, the Greens and PDS fitted the description of the 'outsider' parties who 'proved to be increasingly willing to play according to the established rules, e.g., accept the parties' need for public funding' (Detterbeck, 2005, p.186). Yet the PDS also declined to

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Three for a full discussion of parties and social cleavage.

cooperate in a number of cross-party initiatives and plans regarding party funding, and was also the only party in the Bundestag not to support a proposal which, had it been allowed by the Constitutional Court, would have raised the qualifying (payout) threshold for state reimbursement of electoral expenses (Detterbeck, 2008, p.36). It also opposed a bill that aimed to introduce heavier penalties for parties violating party finance, arguing that there should instead be a complete ban on corporate donations and a cap on the overall amount of donations permitted to parties (Scarrow, 2006, p. 665). In this respect, although the party certainly benefited from state resources, the PDS/Left Party can be understood as positioned somewhere on the fringes of the 'cartel' in terms of its stance towards excluding others from such advantages (Detterbeck, 2008, p.29).

Thanks to their role as legislators and occupiers of ministerial office, parties are able to turn to the state as an obvious and accessible source of support (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.15). Subsequently, they are in a position to draw upon the state resources made available and utilise these in such a way as to ensure their own continuity and ability to withstand challenges from new and opposing forces (*ibid.*, p.16). As a result, the state provides an established, formalised source of support for 'insiders' and simultaneously acts as a barrier to 'outsiders'. Having first penetrated the state, parties then proceed to formulate the policies of the state. Upon arriving at this point, parties are no longer mere agents of the state who broker and defend policy between civil society and the state; the consequence of their absorption is that parties actually *become* the state (*ibid.*).

This development is not without its dangers for the parties involved. First, they rely on the perpetual availability of the state resources. Legislation might be passed which restricts or withdraws certain resources, while a party suffering electoral defeat might find itself not only excluded from parliament or government, but also barred from access to valuable state resources, whether in the form of subsidies or access rights to media and committees (*ibid.*). In the past, electoral success or failure shaped a party's political objectives. For example, following a heavy electoral loss, unpopular policies would be scrutinised and amended or dropped accordingly. However, during this latest stage of development, because elections are contested not on grounds of ideology and defined constituencies but according to the perceived competence of leadership teams, electoral outcomes exert less influence on political objectives (*ibid.*, 16). Similarly, while mass parties could count on their sizeable membership as a substantial and valuable resource (for example income from subscriptions) even during periods when they were

out of office, the new model compels parties to maintain their access to state resources in order to survive.

Even before Cartel Theory was developed, warnings about the toning down of electoral competition had been raised by Smith (1989, p.83, cited in Ashton, 2006, p.6), who singled out the subsidies system as a disincentive for parties to recruit and retain subscription-paying members, and pointed to the reliance on expensive professionally run campaigns as a route to greater bureaucracy and state dependency. The result would be less competitive choice between the parties (Ashton, 2006, p.6). Placing these developments in the German context, Detterbeck considers that when regarded from a systemic rather than organisational perspective:

*Cartelisation may be less suited to explain the development of individual parties than to explain the extension of inter-party cooperation and the move towards the state. While talking about the cartel party organisations in Germany does not seem to be particularly plausible, it makes perfect sense talking about a German party cartel. (Detterbeck, 2008, p.38)*

Although parties require ongoing access to state resources in order to safeguard their own future, this does not in fact require them to compete against each other. In the past, competition between parties could be quite fierce, as they battled one ideology or a set of policies against another. However, with the focus on leadership competence rather than ideology, parties can put forward what are little more than variations on a very limited policy range and still secure participation in parliament and/or government coalitions. In this way, it is possible for parties to mutually share in state resources and safeguard their own survival, particularly in democracies with a culture of cooperation and consensus building among the political parties. These are the conditions from which the cartel party emerges.

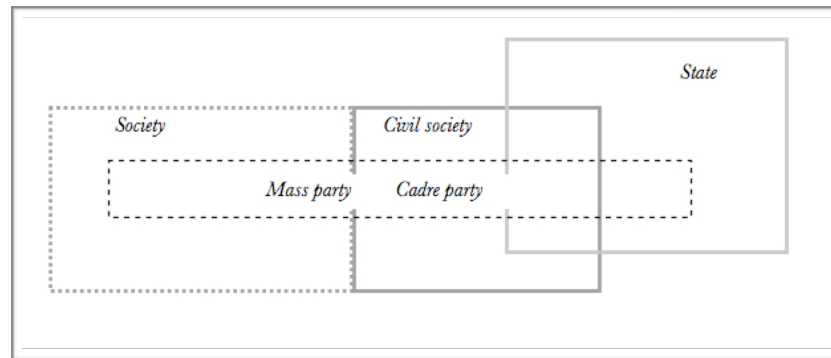
## 2.3. Challenges and Developments in Cartel Theory

### 2.3.1. Civil Society and the State

Since Katz and Mair's original account of parties' evolution, and the emergence of the cartel party type, Cartel Theory has been the subject of challenges and refinements. This section considers the key developments, beginning once again with parties' relationship to the state. Koole (1996) argues that despite the closer relationship, parties' growing identification with the state is not necessarily an outcome of a shift away from civil society; rather, the distinction between state and civil society has diminished (Koole, 1996, p.510). A differentiation is made between society and civil society, with the right to vote the criterion for membership of the latter. As suffrage was extended in the late nineteenth century, civil society grew as it incorporated more people (i.e., citizens eligible to vote), but at the same time, the state penetrated further into civil society itself. Social welfare had once been a matter for family, church and workers' organisations, but this was transformed into a role for the state, with the consequence that a large amount of people depended on the state for their income, either as recipients of welfare payments or as salaried employees in the public sector (*ibid.*). Also, as the state intervened in society through its provision of social welfare, parties' close association with the state meant that they too also naturally interacted with society (Detterbeck, 2008, p.34). Increasingly, because of its proportions and reach, the state became an obvious object of criticism concerning all manner of personal dissatisfaction. The key point, however, is that even though 'the state' is often described as outmoded and even undesirable, especially in the drive towards deregulation and privatisation, it remained 'omnipresent and its responsibility for the (personal) welfare of its citizens has grown to enormous proportions' (Koole, 1996, p. 510).

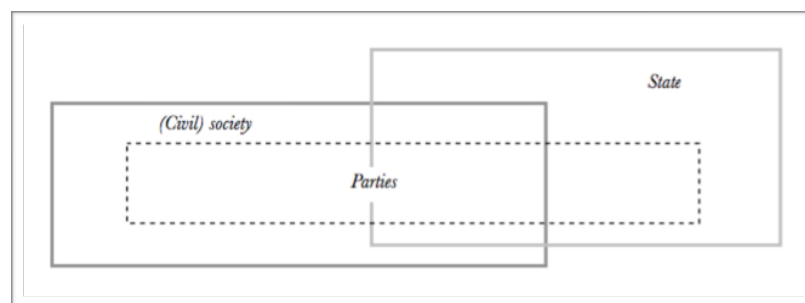
This trajectory is illustrated in the next series of diagrams. First, Figure 2.4 shows that the mass and cadre/elite party types were only partially based in civil society and even less in state structures. Koole's distinction between society and civil society is also represented in this figure. At this stage, the mass parties concentrated on garnering support among members of disenfranchised society with the intention of one day transforming these people in to voters, while other parties sought to maintain a civil society characterised by the limited suffrage of the time (Koole, 1996, p.511). Parties could therefore be categorised into two types; the mass parties of social integration (often, but not exclusively, socialist/social democratic) and the cadre/elite parties,

consisting of individual representation or elite organisations based in a limited section of civil society (*ibid.*).



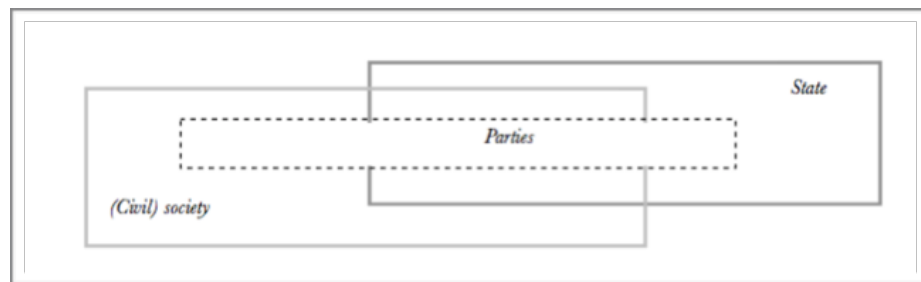
**Figure 2.4: The position of political parties before the introduction of general suffrage** (Koole, 1996, p.511)

With the introduction of general suffrage, parties needed to ensure support among the mass electorate if there was to be any hope of gaining representation in parliament or government. Regardless of whether the cadre/elite parties adopted all the characteristics of the mass parties, they still operated in an environment with a substantially enlarged civil society (*ibid.*). Civil society was in turn permeated by the state, as shown below in Figure 2.5, following the introduction of legislation and measures tackling sickness and incapacity as well as regulation of working conditions (*ibid.*, p.512).



**Figure 2.5: Position of political parties during the first decades after the introduction of general suffrage** (Koole, 1996, p.512)

One significant effect of the greater role of the state in civil society was the corresponding decline in the role of parties, which points to the diminishing ‘encadrement’ of the electorate. This developed into an increased sense of individualism in civil society, with much looser ties to parties, clearly defined groups and ‘natural constituencies’ (Koole, 1996, p.512). Instead, as Katz and Mair have also explained, a greater preference developed for organisations directly addressing single issues, as well as an increased reliance on the media, rather than party publications, for political information. Meanwhile, the lobbying power of trade unions and other large interest organisations enabled people to exert influence on the state whilst bypassing parties (Koole, 1996, p.512). The result of this is shown in Figure 2.6, which illustrates the diminished role of parties, and, consequently, far greater direct interaction between the state and civil society.



**Figure 2.6: The position of political parties today**  
(Koole, 1996, p.514)

This overlap of civil society and the state directly challenges a key assertion made of cartel theory, namely that parties become isolated from civil society (see Figure 2.6). Rather, the function of parties was to:

*(A)ct as a binder between state and society by offering voters a certain context for political orientation and a channel to voice approval or dissatisfaction, but are no longer vehicles for mass encapsulation.*

(Koole, 1996, p.513)

A further tendency casts doubt on the notion that parties anchor themselves in the state. Political power is located not only at the highest levels of the state, but also dispersed at various strata, for example among regional or local authorities (such as Germany’s federal states), in non-state organisations and, within the context of

globalisation and European integration, international bodies beyond the state itself. This carries major implications for parties seeking to gain and exercise control over the state, as it raises the following question: 'If political power is hard to locate, what does it mean to be in power?' (Koole, 1996, p.514). Because of the direct interplay between civil society and the state, parties cannot accurately be described as a mere 'broker' (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.16). Furthermore, the dispersal of power from the unilocus to various loci at various levels implies the state does not act as a monolith (Koole, 1996, p.515). Therefore, what is the rationale for parties to embed themselves in the state?

Katz and Mair (1996) respond to these challenges by pointing out that while greater party identification with the state does not necessarily have to result in actual separation from society, there is reason to believe disconnection nevertheless occurs. The interpenetration between state and society allows parties to shift their *focus* away from society and instead onto the state, complete with its resources (Katz and Mair, 1996, p.527). Here, the important factor is the electorate's perception of this process; parties' involvement with the state and its finances creates an *impression* of separation and distance from the electorate and therefore from society (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Katz and Mair clarify the meaning of (civil) society as not merely the population which is entitled to full citizenship, but also the organisations which grow out of society to convey and mediate the various interests in society itself, as well as those between society and the state (*ibid.*, p.528). It is this type of interpenetration between society and state which has grown over recent years and, importantly, far from transforming parties into 'binders', has actually undermined the linking role of the party between these two aspects. Citizens have a wider range of opportunities (including social movements, as well as courts of law and corporatism) through which interests can be aggregated and articulated. Because parties as a result become less embedded in society, they turn their attention to the state itself (*ibid.*).

According to Koole, rather than seek to identify the ideal type for a specific period of time as the next stage in an evolutionary process, the most useful approach would be to consider the conditions which give rise to a particular category of party, and which different circumstances produce diverging party types (Koole, 1996, p.520). Here, national characteristics need to be considered. For example, Germany's five per cent electoral threshold for entry into national and regional parliaments is cited as a clear example of a means of exclusion (see Section Two). Yet Detterbeck (2008, p.36) argues that Germany's history and particularly the chaotic political character of the



Weimar Republic is a plausible justification of this tool, rather than any self-interested desire for cartelisation. The threshold functions as a barrier to radical/extreme parties gaining a foothold in the party political system. Meanwhile, the electoral system of proportional representation, combined with the country's federal structure, has maintained the prospect for small and new parties such as the Greens to gradually establish themselves and achieve a parliamentary presence, most likely beginning at local/regional level. Even the system of state funding, also cited as evidence of cartelising tendencies, has proven helpful in facilitating the establishment of newcomers. The Greens were increasingly able to take advantage of this funding to develop the party's organisational structures and support election campaigns, and were subsequently rewarded with electoral success (and further financial resources) (*ibid.*).

However, while specific national circumstances undoubtedly play an important role, Katz and Mair maintain that an evolutionary element still exists in so far as party organisations develop according to a 'stimulus-response dynamic' (Katz and Mair, 1996, p.532). Yet this does not imply a single, pre-defined course for each and every party; rather, the cartel model forms part of a 'repertoire' of party types which political actors may utilise (*ibid.*), with the individual circumstances of the respective party system determining which of the available models is adopted. According to Smith (1996, p.72), even if the cartel party does not represent a new party type as a successor to the catch-all *Volkspartei* model, certain features are still conspicuous in the German party system, where parties act within a framework that imposes stringent regulation and simultaneously confers on them a privileged role in society. These characteristics, described above in Section Two, include the educative function of political foundations, a detachment from civil society (despite, in the case of Germany, relatively high membership levels), greater reliance on public funding, subsidies based on parties' electoral outcomes and the ability of parties to generate their own income and, finally, a system of patronage which sees party-related appointments at federal and *Land* level, including in the civil service and *Länder* banks (*ibid.*, p.73).

A further challenge to Cartel Theory argues that compared to the mass party, the cartel appears to be in a weaker position, at least in terms of membership, voter loyalty and political identity. It would be reasonable to assume that any new party type would be a successful one in relation to previous party types. Yet Koole (1996, p.516) is not convinced that the cartel party fits this description, since there is no trend of concentration in party systems; in fact, due to the increased volatility in voting (as the natural constituency and 'encadrement' weaken) there is a greater than ever chance

for parties to gain parliamentary representation. Furthermore, the system of state subsidies in the respective democracy may incentivise small parties to challenge the established parties. Two conclusions are derived: on the one hand, parallels have been drawn between the cartel model and the 'failure of parties' (Kitschelt, 2000, p.151). On the other hand, it can be argued that parties have in fact strengthened their position. Once again, Germany's Greens illustrate that not only does absorption into the state reward parties with valuable resources, this very phenomenon strongly underlines parties' ability to adapt to challenges and circumstances in order to ensure their continuity and prosperity (Koole, 1996, p.516).

Although stability and self-preservation are pivotal to the cartel party type, this model does still carry inherent risks. In the past, the role of the mass party was to act as a bridge between the state and civil society. However, the basis of Katz and Mair's analysis is that in the cartel model, the population is less able to utilise parties in order to make demands on the state, as these parties are now embedded in the state itself. Therefore, if people seek alternatives to parties, this could give rise to further popularity of single issue pressure groups (the failure of parties). Yet it is not unusual for the state — and certainly parties in office — to cooperate with large, established interest organisations such as trade unions and employers' associations; agreements can be reached whereby the organisation's support is promised in exchange for privilege and security. In short, the cartel can consist of more than co-opted parties and may extend to include non-aligned interest organisations. There is the subsequent risk that new, dynamic and possibly extreme groups capture the attention of a frustrated electorate, but even though the cartel is unable to prevent their emergence completely, it can certainly limit the challenge they pose. Electoral barriers can prevent small, new and special interest-based groups from competing in elections, while state subsidies may be awarded in accordance with electoral success. Once again, this carries a degree of risk in that it can fuel and reinforce protests from fringe parties, but while such threats can target particular policies or parties, they do not necessarily call into question the party political system itself; the cartel therefore remains secure.

### **2.3.2. 'Oligopolies' and the Restriction of Policy Supply**

The main challenges to Cartel Theory have so far concerned parties' relationship to the state and to civil society. There is also a threat that new parties capture the votes of an unrepresented and frustrated electorate. This risk is now explored in greater depth:

what compels political leaders to adopt strategy and policy choices which are non-representative of voter interests, and how does the cartel prevent defection? The explanation lies in developments in the global economy and subsequent shifts in expectations of government. To understand this cartelising tendency in party systems, it is first useful to consider why and how cartels emerge in the economic context.

The birthplace for the cartel is the oligopoly. This type of market structure is characterised by many buyers but only few firms. Secondly, these firms' products can be differentiated; on the supply side differences could refer to quality and performance, while on the demand side there might be 'imaginary' differences created by advertising to create brand loyalty. Third, it is also difficult for new firms to enter this market due to the prohibitive barriers in place, for example the economies of scale which could provide cost advantage for established firms, consumer preference for established firms' products (also a result of differentiation), or the established firms' ownership or control of crucial raw materials and market outlets (Pass *et. al.*, 1993<sup>38</sup>).

If a company suddenly reduces its prices it has a direct effect, namely reduced profit, on the others operating within the oligopoly. There is therefore an incentive to consider the reactions of competitors, to avoid price competition and to employ alternative mechanisms in order to maximise profit. Producers of a particular type of good might try to take control of the market by forming a cartel in which it operates and determines price and output levels for that good. The result of full cartelisation is the restriction of output in the industry concerned; both output and consequently price are maintained at a level for a profit-maximising monopoly. While producers collude to form the cartel, it is not necessarily a completely closed entity; it may indeed admit other, new producers on the condition that they observe and respect the practices of the cartel, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the cartel itself (*ibid.*)

As described above, cartel formation and maintenance is subject to the ever-present threat of exit, where each member has an incentive to leave the cartel. Given that the market is characterised by short-run elasticity, in other words is responsive to change, and because a potential cartel consists of a number of firms, this danger is magnified many times. Considering these factors together, Blyth and Katz (2005, p.39) acknowledge on one hand that the potential for a stable cartel is actually rather slim and that defection would be assumed to occur from the very start, but on the other, that there are also conditions which might reduce this threat, and in this respect they refer

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<sup>38</sup> Pass *et. al.* (1993), *Dictionary of Economics*. Search term: 'Oligopoly'.

to the equilibrium created by oligopolistic markets, whereby firms respond to each other and arrive at a point where they reach a mutually beneficial agreement on output levels and from which they have little incentive to withdraw (*ibid*).

Cooperation allows firms to make decisions based on full knowledge of each others' demand curve, which in turn enables them to establish their own level of output in accordance with those of the other firms. Again, this does not automatically result in a cartel, but it can provide conditions in which a cartel can develop. A firm might decide to raise its price or reduce its output, resulting in others following suit (at which point the firm becomes price leader). By following this lead, the firms can restrict output and achieve higher profits than those they might obtain by pursuing their own pricing and output policy (i.e., defecting unilaterally) (*ibid*). In short, cooperation creates the environment in which firms no longer have an incentive to defect.

A number of parallels are drawn between the above economic context, with its firms and quantities, and that of the political party. First, the oligopolistic economic market is compared to the competitive party system in which power is usually shared by a relatively small number of parties. Next, while economic 'quantities' refers to output, the output equivalent of political parties concerns policies. Consequently, policies represent 'quantities' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.40). However, although collusive tendencies to determine price and output rewards among economic oligopolies, how does the analogy explain how *parties* would 'fix' their output (policies) or why they would prefer to collude rather than to compete in order to achieve this outcome?

If it is indeed true that parties 'fix' their output of policies (thereby minimising their representative function), then there is a great incentive for one member of the cartel to break ranks and appeal to these preferences, thus attracting a large number of votes (Kitschelt, 2000, p.168). There would have to be a very strong overriding incentive to prevent defection and Kitschelt doubts that identification with the state or resources provided by the state fulfils this criterion. In fact, access to state resources could even provide an additional incentive to defect from a cartel, since the payout principle is usually based on electoral success. The prospect of state resources could actually provide challengers with an incentive to enter and participate in the electoral marketplace (Kitschelt, 2000, p.168), especially if the payout threshold is low (see Section Two above). Furthermore, there appears to be no obvious reason for parties whose aim is to achieve public office or at least to maximise their voter share to make a conscious decision to abandon voter preferences. In a highly competitive climate, the

approach most likely to attract voter support and thus deliver victory over competitors would be one of greater rather than less sensitivity and responsiveness to demands. If a substantial section of the electorate is unrepresented by the cartel members, one party could make a deliberate appeal to this disaffected group, increase its voter share and enjoy continued or greater access to state resources and the rewards of office.

One important phenomenon of Katz and Mair's cartel model is the growing relationship of solidarity and loyalty among professional politicians who through their cooperation in power share similar career goals and concerns, creating a close association of political parties at the expense of representation of traditional democratic principals. This is symptomatic of an ascendant party in public office and is underpinned by a sense of a common professional identity among parliamentarians, shared concerns such as job security after the next election and financial reward (for example, pay, subsidies and due allowances and expenses). In addition, a collegial relationship is developed through participation in cross-party committees.

However, Kitschelt (2000, p.157) points out that even assuming such a relationship exists, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that this sense of fraternity should inevitably be responsible for violating the representation of constituency interests. What is more, even if voter preferences are disregarded due to some sort of policy compromise designed to benefit the professional political class, this would imply the existence of a large group of voters whose preferences are not represented anywhere within the span of this compromise and, consequently, a majority that favours radical policies. Kitschelt doubts the plausibility of this 'dual-peaked' voter preference in advanced industrial countries, claiming there are no indications to suggest that there are progressively fewer voters located in the median policy position (*ibid.*). Also, given that becoming and remaining part of this association of colleagues depends on electoral success, it is not clear why parties would not choose to exit an unrepresentative cartel, appeal to the median position, maximise their voter share and continue to enjoy the rewards of public office (Kitschelt, 2000, p.168). Thus, the enticement to exit the cartel is a very powerful one.

### **2.3.3. Incentives for Cartelisation**

Blyth and Katz (2005) offer two explanations for parties turning their collective backs on competition and instead opting for collusion. The first is the fiscal limitation of catch-all

politics, while the second is based in the 'rhetoric and reality of globalisation'. Both of these factors in turn create the conditions for the formation of a party cartel.

#### Fiscal Limitation

A party system might consist of two successful catch-all parties. Both parties pursue policies designed to expand the provision of public goods and these policies have proven popular among the electorate, so it may be assumed that the electorate generally favours generous rather than restricted welfare and public goods provision. Even so, the population is only prepared to accept a certain fiscal burden. Eventually, parties face the prospect of either reducing the fiscal burden or restricting public goods provision, with both options threatening to lose voter share. Given that the previous basis for policy competition is no longer viable, electoral competition itself also becomes less feasible. Furthermore, a new network dilemma arises in this context (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.40).

Election campaigns no longer rely solely on the mobilisation and input of large numbers of members and activists, thus reducing the value of organisations such as unions, which were previously useful sources of mobilised support in the run up to elections. Instead, media marketing is favoured over and above mass participation. However, just as the electorate eventually considers a certain level of public goods provision too costly in fiscal terms, the party's grassroots organisation (the party on the ground) similarly reaches a point where it no longer accepts the expenditure for direct, professional media campaigns. The catch-all party's ability to provide party success and stability reaches its limit and is no longer the optimum model to 'promote party success and stability' (*ibid.*). The solution to this dilemma is sought in the cartel party model.

#### The Rhetoric of Globalisation

One extremely important incentive, again with an economic context, is globalisation, defined as 'the progressive disembedding of market transactions from regulation such that the role of the state — and thus the party — has diminished' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.41). As both exports and flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) become increasingly important for economic growth, states are less able to practise an independent monetary policy, as this threatens currency stability, an essential factor in an open economy. Furthermore, under the rule of globalisation, it becomes necessary to deregulate production, employment and financial markets in order to attract capital inflows (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.2), while at the same time restrict fiscal expansion, which

is of course the key support of welfare provision (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.41). What is more, it is essential for globalisation to maintain conditions favoured by international finance in order to prevent its defection to more favourable environments (*ibid.*, p.42). The consequence is that the fiscal tools which could be used to stimulate demand and maintain maximum employment fall out of favour with governments and parties whose economic policy is determined by the requirements of international market opinion. What is more, the fiscal constraints and deregulation restrict the scope of social democratic governments to implement a leftist redistributive policy programme (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.2).

A further important aspect of the theory is that economic agents collectively are fully aware of the economic system and therefore make only correct decisions. Therefore, it is assumed that while an individual market participant could make a mistake, there could be no error on the part of 'the market' as a whole (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.42). Conversely, market distortions are by their nature deemed inefficient (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.7). This concept is of great significance to the discussion concerning cartelisation because it sweeps aside any notion of choice or any possibility of alternatives, therefore 'limiting what is in fact demandable' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.45). For social democratic parties, which have traditionally pursued market interventionist policies, this means that such measures, whether intended to attract votes or boost economic growth in a particular sector, are also regarded as counterproductive (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.7). In response, the social democratic parties in particular pursued two strategic approaches that allowed them to 'reform social democracy back into power; or more appropriately, to cartelize it' (*ibid.*).

The first of these strategic responses was to redress the expectations of voters. As described above, parties (and in particular social democratic parties) found themselves unable to continually fulfil the demand for increasingly expensive public goods. Blyth and Katz (2005, p.43) therefore point out that the perceptions of globalisation provided parties with the opportunity to emphasise that it was the (infallible) market, rather than the state that was best suited to meet this demand for public goods. This can be understood as signalling intention and cooperation — the collusive element — which created knowledge among parties and provided them with justification for the mutual withdrawal from public good provision (i.e., joint maximisation and limiting output) (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.7). This occurred regardless of whether the parties were traditionally and ideologically supportive of or opposed to state intervention (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.43).

Discourse, too, plays a key role in what Blyth et al. (2010, p.8) describe as 'ratcheting down expectations'. For example, in the case of Germany, the concept of the '*Neue Mitte*'<sup>39</sup> created the justification for social democracy to cease producing public goods, because it was claimed the market could do so better and more efficiently. Supporting this justification is the notion of market infallibility. According to Blair and Schröder, 'The essential function of markets must be complemented and improved by political action, not hampered by it' (Blair and Schröder, 1998, p.2). Above all, the important consequence for social democracy was that it was absolved of the responsibility for the supply of public goods (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.8). The discursive process underpinning the *Neue Mitte* can be understood not only as downsizing voter expectations concerning the role and activities of the state, but also as a signal from the centre-left parties to those on the centre-right, indicating their commitment to narrow policy scope, or, in the language of Cartel Theory, a willingness to cease competition and to restrict output.

Although the SPD had traditionally been an advocate of collectivism, labour rights and the social state, the *Neue Mitte* declared that 'Modern social democrats want to transform the safety net of entitlements into a springboard to personal responsibility' (Blair and Schröder, 1998, p.10). Agenda 2010 also marked a significant step for the Greens, who demonstrated they had clearly 'arrived' in the political mainstream and could no longer be considered outsider challengers to a 'cartel' of established parties.

The downsizing of expectations is reinforced by a second approach, the externalisation of policy (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.7). This relates to the institutional framework, whereby policymaking is transferred to institutions with no direct accountability to those affected by its actions, thus 'truncating supply' of policy (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.45). One example of this is European integration, which obliges Member State governments (and therefore parties) to maintain their commitments to EU policy, which can also be interpreted as quotas limiting domestic policy output. Similarly, an independent central bank limits the scope of democratically elected governments to manage economic outcomes and is therefore regarded as a safeguard against political 'interference' in the economy (Blyth *et al.*, 2010, p.8). In both instances, voter preferences are unable to bring about change in an unpopular policy. In short, the institutional framework and

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter One for an explanation of 'The Third Way/*Neue Mitte*'.



externalisation of policy function as 'binding quotas' (*ibid.*) on policy output, which in turn 'effectively curtails the supply curve of policy, thus cartelising the party system' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.44). In fact the resignation of Oskar Lafontaine, who favoured reflationary economic tools to stimulate domestic demand, can at least in part be regarded as an illustration of the strength of EU institutions, and the ECB in particular, over national government (policy externalisation) as well as an indicator of the deflationary policy established in the eurozone. The consequences apply not only to policy output and the provision of public goods, but also to the political parties themselves. The curtailed supply curve allows parties to maintain the status quo, which in turn reduces the risk of defection, previously the greatest threat to the formation and maintenance of cartels. What is more, the restricted policy output resulting from the institutional framework allows parties to predict each other's policy and strategy, thus minimising the need for obvious inter-party collusion (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.45).

A further aspect of this transformation centred on the parties' strategy of re-orientating policy and funding towards those constituencies which place fewer policy demands on the party (lower production costs) and involve less risk (cost of losing an election). The method employed by these 'post-catch-all parties' constitutes a shift in the relationship between the democratic principal and the democratic agent (*ibid.*). The importance of the mass electorate (the democratic principal) for the parties (democratic agents) is greatly diminished, for the electorate has a considerably reduced ability to bring about change, to influence parties or punish unpopular or unrepresentative governments at the polls, as a result of the narrowed policy field and — as a consequence of the rhetoric of globalisation — because of the perception that no alternative exists. In addition, considering the fact that parties can secure funding from sources other than the party basis, Blyth and Katz (*ibid.*) therefore conclude that parties may no longer be regarded as agents, but as principals who periodically utilise the support of voters, themselves now transformed into a resource for endorsement on demand, to add a legitimising aspect to the party.

This section has described how established parties are concerned with two main objectives regarding party political competition. First, they need to reduce instability and secondly they must minimise the negative effects of elections. The exclusion of newcomer parties and cooperation between government and opposition parties are the respective means of achieving these objectives. The threat presented by challengers can be measured in terms of their appeal to voters, the degree to which existing alignments are upset if established parties adopt the appeal of these new groups (for

example, by adopting aspects of their policy offer) and their chances of overcoming institutional barriers such as electoral thresholds.

Furthermore, fiscal limitation and the rhetoric of globalisation provide parties not only with incentives but also the tools to act in the manner of an economic oligopoly. The chief incentive to collude and restrict output (policy) is the maximisation of 'profit' — in other words, security of tenure — whether governmental or public. Key tools at parties' disposal include the reduction in voter expectations and the externalisation of policy. As a result, the party is isolated from any defined constituency. These developments are of particular significance for social democracy. According to Blyth *et al.*, (2010, p.6), 'driven by organizational survival more than conviction, left parties began to *not compete* on the issue of unemployment'.

Arising from these conditions are four implications for parties, which in turn highlight the two key aspects of Cartel Theory (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.45). The first two implications concern the internal aspect of the party and closely recall the characteristics of the cartel party type described at the beginning of this chapter:

*Funding:* There will be a shift from reliance on the party basis towards resources made directly available by the central party (reliance on state resources).

*Internal organisation:* Measures will be taken to give the party leadership greater autonomy with regard to the party basis (ascendancy of the party in central office).

The third and fourth implications concern the conditions in the competitive political 'marketplace' or, in other words, inter-party competition. Here, the emphasis is on the establishment of a cartel of parties (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.46):

*Inter-party relations:* There will be growing cooperation and similarity among 'oligopolistic' parties in order to ensure that voter expectations are kept consistently low, thus absolving parties of responsibilities such as provision of public goods. Hand in hand with this, there is a strengthening of the institutional framework that facilitates the externalisation of policy.

*Policy area:* As parties converge and collude, ideology and principles will place increasing emphasis on managerial competencies as the chief differentiating factor between parties.

## 2.4. Party Leadership and Representation

This section focuses on internal implications of Cartel Theory in terms of leadership and representation within the party. The aim is to provide a more detailed account of these characteristics and, most importantly, to identify which features are likely to apply to the Left Party in the western states. These aspects will subsequently be explored in the Bremen Case Study.

First, it is necessary to briefly revisit the model of party evolution developed by Katz and Mair and consider the internal organisation of the party types. Whereas the cadre parties' membership and leadership were essentially one and the same, the mass party developed a large membership base centred around the articulation of specific interests and shared ideology. The party elite was expected to act in the name of the grassroots party, while structures such as the party congress or conference made the leadership formally accountable to the mass organisation. Later, the catch-all party began to seek support from beyond its own organisational structure and, no longer maintained solely by the membership, was able to gradually shed its reliance upon, and therefore accountability to, the grassroots membership. With power concentrated among the leaders, the catch-all party became characterised by a top-down structure of authority. In the cartel model, while party membership of course continues to exist, its chief role is to lend formal support to the leadership. Furthermore, as supporters and experts outside the party participate in decision-making processes, the relationship of accountability changes and party activists find themselves 'divorced' from their leadership.

Kitschelt (2000) doubts there is a party of two 'fronts' consisting of the leadership together with moderate, inactive members on one side and the more radical activists on the other, and instead argues it is more plausible that the leadership will simply seek the support of the party median, regardless of whether those individuals happen to be activists or part of the larger grassroots organisation (Kitschelt, 2000, p.158). After all, if the leadership persistently represents an unpopular minority view within the party, those members dissatisfied with the situation have the option of leaving the party (or threatening to do so). In addition, party statutes provide mechanisms for the censure of the leadership: 'Exit and voice mechanisms rarely permit national leadership levels to become entirely impervious to the control by a variety of external principals, be they

local activists, members or voters' (Kitschelt, 2000, p.159). Parties are therefore faced with a network dilemma; how, on the one hand, to maintain freedom and networks for leaders to engage in policy making based on negotiation and compromise; and on the other hand, how to meet the activists' demands for influence in the policy making process. As a result, German parties have to juggle two types of organisational identity:

*(T)hey are rational-efficient and professional service organisations focused on election campaigns and policy making as well as membership organisations focused on programmatic debates, social community and political participation. (Detterbeck, 2008, p.34)*

How do parties reconcile their sometimes conflicting roles as policy makers and membership organisations? One explanation focuses on the structure and coordination within the party itself. In the case of the cartel party type, the concentration of power is reinforced by its organisation as a 'stratarchy'. In this model, the local and regional office strata are maintained, manage their own affairs and are able to exercise independence concerning the issues that specifically affect them at sub-national level. At first glance, this stratarchy strengthens these organisations by granting them a degree of autonomy from the national party leadership (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.21). But if a local party threatens to mobilise members in order to protest against or contradict official central party policy, the national leadership is able to bypass the troublesome local branch and appeal directly to the general (and less active) membership. Nevertheless, given the increasing influence of national politics and public opinion of national politicians on the outcomes of regional and even local elections, leaders at sub-national level do of course have an obvious interest in shaping policy and leadership conduct at the central (national) party level. Koole (1996, p.518) therefore disputes the apparent readiness of local party leaders to accept the pre-eminence of the central organisation in return for autonomy over their own local matters. However, Katz and Mair (1996, p.532) argue that although it might indeed be feasible to imagine a challenge to the dominant central organisation if local party branches acted together, it is atypical to find a common initiative among party organisations at this level.

The party conference illustrates this point. The party executive presents a package of policies and amendments on which conference delegates are to vote. A delegation from the regional level can struggle to directly challenge a particular policy or strategy on the basis of its impact on local politics: it could be difficult to muster support among other regional delegations not similarly affected by the proposal, whereas the

leadership is able to draw support from the wider membership. Developments in technology have further supported this approach. Some parties (notably the Pirate Party) have either used or explored platforms such as Liquid Feedback to facilitate direct participation by ordinary members not attending conference in person; in 2011 the Left Party also launched a programme discussion using the Liquid Democracy platform. On the one hand, this formal empowerment of the grassroots membership naturally enhances democratic legitimacy. But on the other, it creates the means to circumvent organisations as well as activist groups at sub-national level, therefore securing the dominant role of the central leadership in the party (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.21).

The focus on layers of party organisation also has to include consideration of Germany's decentralised, federal structure. Although the federal system facilitates 'important channels of aggregating territorial interests and of resolving internal conflicts between the different party levels' (Detterbeck, 2008, p.32), it can also give rise to conflict and debate. Hough *et al.* (2007, p.49) observe that while parties are often discussed as unitary actors, differences and conflict between the internal structures and streams can manifest themselves. This arises particularly if the national party leadership fails to (or chooses not to) exert authority over, and provide clear direction to, the structures and organisations at sub-national level. Chapter One has described how under the leadership of Gabi Zimmer the approach of the PDS national executive was based on informality and only sporadic coordination between the national and regional organisations within the party. As a result, there was greater autonomy among the *Land* organisations (Hough and Koß, 2008). This was particularly the case following the 2002 general election, when the then PDS failed to clear the five per cent hurdle. The result of this failure was the dissolution of the national parliamentary party — the highest level of party in public office<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, the national executive itself was riddled with tensions and conflict between its members and the 'party in central office' was therefore weakened (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Hough *et al.* refer to the ongoing and unresolved debate concerning opposition vs. participation in regional governments as:

*(E)vidence that the sub-national level does matter. This takes on even greater importance when the groups/units adopt radically different positions towards such issues as government participation — and there is*

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<sup>40</sup> Only two deputies remained in parliament, and did not qualify for any group status.

*no issue that has proved as problematic for the Left Party in recent years as this one.* (Hough *et al.*, 2007, p.49)

The federal structure can therefore facilitate heterogeneity both vertically (between the federal party and regional organisations) and horizontally (among the regional associations), resulting in the ongoing existence of *Streitkultur* (culture of criticism and controversy) within the party. Nevertheless, even though German federalism has allowed leading regional politicians to adopt key positions and influence at national level, it is still the *Ministerpräsidenten* (Prime Ministers of the federal states) and other office holders who tend to dominate executive committees and policy making (Detterbeck, 2008, p.34). In other words, while federalisation plays an important role in determining power relationships within German parties, the ascendancy of the party in public office is still evident (*ibid.*, p.32).

The party leadership has a number of tools at its disposal with which to manage the coordination of the wider membership. In addition to recent conference technology, postal ballots are a further means of effectively dispersing the membership, since members act as individuals, rather than as an organised bloc. It may even be possible for members to 'leapfrog' the regional layer of the association and join the national party, a process which does not integrate the member into their local networks. Germany's federal structure means that members are formally registered in their respective regional association, but even at this level activists remain in the minority. More recently, parties have also taken steps to involve non-members in decision-making. The SPD, for example, sought to involve non-members in candidate selection and to open up its working groups and policy forums to include sympathisers outside the party, albeit with limited rights (representative roles on committees would remain the reserve of party members)<sup>41</sup>. All in all, an isolated and generally passive membership provides the party in central office with a win-win situation: on the one hand the party can legitimately claim to have a large membership basis, and on the other it is unlikely to experience a united challenge to leadership or policies, thanks to the rather atomised and passive nature of the membership.

The membership referendum is a further instrument available to the leadership. The referendum could naturally be welcomed as a positive step towards increasing inner-party democracy, and indeed German parties have, since the 1990s, used the

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<sup>41</sup> See Vogt, R (2011) and Castellucci, L. (2011) for suggestions on membership organisation reform in the SPD.

plebiscite as a means of engaging local members in the candidate selection process. But aside from matters such as personnel selection, this democratic tool has rarely been utilised for actual policy decisions at national level. Its chief function, therefore, appears to be to serve 'electoral and image-fed motives' rather than to transform 'internal power distribution' (Detterbeck, 2008, p.32).

During the cooperation between the PDS and WASG, the respective memberships of both parties took part in a referendum on whether to proceed with the formal merger. The proposed fusion did not enjoy universal support within the PDS, especially among those on the left of the party, and the vote gave ordinary members (beyond office holders and activists) the opportunity to participate in decision-making about their party's future. However, despite the misgivings of some activists and groups in the PDS, by the time the referendum took place it was highly unlikely that members would have voted to reject the merger. Prominent leaders such as Gysi and Lafontaine had been instrumental in bringing together the two parties and both wielded considerable influence in the media and within the respective parties. With ninety-six per cent of the members voting in favour of the merger, the outcome of the referendum strengthened the position and legitimacy of the party leadership.

Certain methods and styles of communication can also reinforce centralised power within a party. Cartel Theory was formulated at a time when political campaigning was becoming increasingly professionalised (see Section One). The expense and coordination involved in producing campaigns for television or for the national media required access to the resources (professional and financial) available to the party in central office. In turn, these professionally produced campaigns were able to appeal directly to individuals, thus circumventing local party organisations or activist networks. But as Blyth and Katz (2005) have pointed out, these professional channels of communication were also expensive, and were no longer able to deliver party success and stability, thus posing the leadership with a new network dilemma. Since then, however, technological advances have given rise to various forms of social media, such as YouTube, Facebook and the microblogging platform Twitter. The latter has proven particularly popular in the communication of political ideas. Furthermore, it has facilitated the coordination of activists and protests and allowed people to follow events as they unfold. At first glance, then, it appears that social media has shifted the focus away from political elites and has instead placed influence into the hands of activists and the electorate.

Yet there is some debate as to whether this technology actually promotes grassroots issue-based campaigns or whether it is in fact a tool by which prominent political figures are able to set their own agenda (Adi *et al.*, 2014, p.3). A study into the use of Twitter during a general election campaign in Sweden identified three broad categories of communication — dissemination of facts, updates on daily activities and statements for the purpose of self-promotion — and noted that these neither provided genuine insights into political processes, nor enhanced transparency (Larssen and Moe, 2011, p.733). The study also revealed that use of Twitter spiked following televised debates or media coverage of political events (such as rallies), suggesting that although it clearly contributes to the overall volume of political communication, Twitter builds on the representation of events and issues in the traditional/established media (*ibid.*, p. 741). Moreover, the timing of the peak in usage underlined the emphasis on parliamentary politics.

The use of this social media platform highlights some interesting questions that are relevant for Cartel Theory and specifically for the issue of party leadership and representation. For instance, Twitter allows people to follow (and therefore monitor) the activities of politicians. The other side of this coin is that it also offers politicians, very much aware of this audience, with a channel for augmenting the same messages already (or about to be) published in traditional media (Adi *et al.*, 2014, p.7). Also, while activity might increase during parliamentary elections, communication is by no means confined to election coverage and politicians are therefore able to ‘circumvent traditional media and continuously campaign throughout the year’ (*ibid.*, p.14). In addition, it facilitates the direct appeal to the broader membership whilst bypassing regional organisations and activists. What is more, Twitter’s brevity is ideally suited to the communication of catchy and sometimes emotive statements and soundbites (*ibid.*, p.7). It therefore allows the poster to appeal to his or her followers frequently and on a very direct and personalised level — and not necessarily on strictly political issues. In short, although social media can be seen as a means of ‘democratising’ political communication, Twitter, as just one example of this type of technology, is also a powerful tool in the hands of party leaders that is ‘more akin to one-way, top-down communication’ than a means of ‘actually engaging with the citizenry’ (Larssen and Moe, 2011, p.733).

But even though policy making and communication remain to a large extent the domain of the leadership, parties cannot *completely* ignore the demands among members and activists for participation in this process, and the leadership would presumably not wish



to see a sizeable exit from the party (Kitschelt, 2000, p.158). Credibility issues would also arise, possibly even triggering a leadership crisis. Dissent and the threat of exit are therefore important weapons in the hands of the party membership wishing to exert influence on the leadership. The PDS/Left Party itself is no stranger to inner-party discord. Disputes over policy and strategy have indeed prompted resignations from the party (notably concerning the perennial conflict over government participation but also the question of support for UN-mandated military action). However, the culture within the party itself also plays an important role. Olsen (2002a, p.207) observes, for example, that eastern members in particular had a strong sense of loyalty to the PDS, and likens the prospect of their leaving the PDS to that of leaving the Church. In addition, there are also sections of the membership (for instance in the Communist Platform) who despite their opposition to pragmatic reforms and participation in coalitions are convinced they still have a more realistic chance of achieving political goals from within the party. The threat of defection also assumes there is an alternative political *Heimat* (home) ready to welcome ex-members. Some PDS members, including office holders, have indeed defected to the SPD over what they perceived as ideological rigidity and lack of pragmatism<sup>42</sup>. However, for those fundamentally opposed to or critical of capitalism and policies such as Hartz IV, it is not clear to which party they might defect. The other parliamentary parties offer variations on the very policies opposed, while alternative leftist movements do not offer a parliamentary platform for opposition. As such, leaving the Left Party would lead to 'political irrelevance' (*ibid.*). Moreover, members can be reluctant to surrender 'their' party to an unpopular leadership, and therefore resolve to remain as a 'corrective' force, to steer the party back onto the right path<sup>43</sup>.

Cartel Theory points out that in spite of the tendency for decision-making to take place at leadership level, activists are not completely superfluous. After all, an active membership reinforces the party's democratic image and lends legitimacy to the claim of societal representation (Detterbeck, 2008, p.34). Secondly, it is likely that leaders begin their own political involvement as activists; consequently, the party on the ground continues to fulfil the important function of nurturing and developing talent (*ibid.*). Yet

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<sup>42</sup> Examples of PDS/Linke office holders at various levels who are now members of the SPD include Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (MEP), Angela Marquardt (former national executive and Bundestag member) and Sirvan Cakici (former Bremen Bürgerschaft member).

<sup>43</sup> For example, the Communist Platform has stated: 'We shouldn't leave the party to those who would misrepresent history for the sake of government participation today, or vote for military deployment of the Bundeswehr tomorrow (...) Let's not do anyone the favour of allowing ourselves to be forced out of the party.' (Kommunistische Plattform der Partei DIE LINKE, 2014)

activists, who actually constitute a minority of the overall membership, can still find themselves sidelined. Open party lists, for example, can mean that the most promising list positions are allocated to candidates who are likely to appeal to the public, but who are not even necessarily members of the party and maybe have little experience of grassroots campaigning or knowledge of local issues. Another practice is that of ‘parachuting’ a central office-approved and often high profile candidate in need of a safe seat into the regional branch at the expense of the constituency’s own candidate.

Despite a degree of autonomy among sub-national organisations, central office is able to exert influence on the focus of regional election campaigns. The political work of the regional association includes activism regarding certain issues that specifically affect the area, such as local industry, environmental impact or housing. Political work is also likely to involve collaboration with related local interest groups. In the absence of an existing cultural and electoral base in the western states, the PDS strategy for western expansion was a long term one that focused on cultivating ties to various social movements. Only then could the party hope to establish a significant and sustainable voter base in the West. However, the sudden emergence of the WASG and the subsequent cooperation between the two parties drastically transformed the political environment for the left in the western states. Although the results for both parties in the 2005 North Rhine-Westphalia election were disappointing, they also indicated that, as a combined force, the PDS and WASG had a strong chance of attracting a sufficient voter share to enter parliament — not just in the Bundestag (where the PDS was already represented), but also in the western regional legislatures, beginning with Bremen in 2007.

If entry into the regional parliamentary becomes a realistic goal, then central office — which provides material resources as well as support in the form of public appearances by well-known politicians — can insist that the focus of the election campaign conform more closely to the party’s national strategy and programme. As a result, emphasis on ongoing local political issues could become secondary, thereby interrupting cooperation with other social movements the party has established around this theme. Furthermore, an activist who might have emerged as a prospective candidate on the strength of their engagement on local issues could find that the party in central office favours another, perhaps more ‘reliable’ candidate, better versed in the policies and strategy prioritised by the leadership.

Active grassroots members are a valuable and inexpensive campaigning and recruitment resource. In the run-up to elections, they regularly donate their time and energy to carry out door-to-door leafleting and canvassing. However, their mobilisation is required chiefly in the context of election campaigns, whether at local, regional or national level; in other words, for the promotion of the parliamentary party. With a real prospect of gaining parliamentary representation, the work of activists would need to reflect this priority. Therefore, whereas activists had been closely involved in extra-parliamentary work and cooperation, their efforts would now be geared towards the goal of entering parliament and, following electoral success, supporting the work of the parliamentary party.

A further characteristic identified by Cartel Theory is the collegial relationship that develops among office holders of different parties. Political adversaries, once in a position of responsibility such as a member of a parliamentary group or a parliamentary committee, become regarded as professional colleagues. This characteristic was also evident in the PDS/Left Party in the eastern states. PDS politicians in regional parliaments and coalitions could generally be considered trustworthy partners; as a result, SPD politicians came to respect their PDS 'colleagues', with whom they shared similar office-seeking goals. Conversely, this collegial element was of course far less identifiable in the West, where the PDS/Left Party had no seats in regional parliaments, and where sharing office was a decidedly remote prospect. However, an important practice identified in Cartel Theory is that of 'signalling' intent to other parties. When the PDS cooperated and later merged with the WASG it became increasingly apparent that the Left Party was on the point of an electoral breakthrough. Even before the regional elections, the prospect of future toleration models and even 'Red-Green-Red' coalitions in western states was already being discussed in the media and among political parties. Particularly in target *Länder* such as Bremen, it can therefore be anticipated that the professional working relationship between SPD and PDS office holders in the eastern states — as well as the selection of the regional candidate — could play an important role in indicating the party's readiness to become a responsible parliamentary *Fraktion* and future coalition partner, also in the western states.

## 2.5. Electoral Competition

The final section of this chapter now takes a closer look at Cartel Theory and its impact on electoral competition in order to establish the characteristics of electoral competition to be investigated in the Case Study. Once again, the starting point is Cartel Theory's model of party evolution.

The cadre/elite parties had been able to compete within a restricted and therefore controllable environment. Political goals closely reflect the nature of the prevailing organisation of society; consequently, the party was concerned with the distribution of privileges during a time of limited suffrage. This controlled environment was subverted by the social reform and mobilisation which typified the mass model, characterised by an ideologically based appeal to clearly defined constituencies (Katz and Mair, 1995, p. 19). The mass party model was born out of a period marked by social reform and organised opposition, both of which featured strongly in this party type's political goals. By the time the model had once again shifted, this time towards that of the catch-all party, much of the welfare provision had become established in society, so the emphasis was less on reform and more about social amelioration. Ideology therefore gave way to broad appeal and policy effectiveness as the basis of competition between catch-all parties. Within the cartel party model, the emphasis is once again on efficacy and management, but this party type is concerned with participation in politics and holding office as goal in its own right (*ibid.*). Therefore, parties, aware they are able to share the rewards of state resources by cooperating with their political rivals, collude with rather than challenge their competitors. In other words, the cartel model sees a return to controlled competition between parties.

The cartel party model is similar to previous model types in that it is associated with certain conception of democracy. But there is a vital difference between the cartel and previous stages in party type development. Even though the parties' relationship with the state and civil society transformed and underwent increasing professionalisation, earlier models would still produce some degree of alternation of ideas and policy. The prospect of languishing in opposition, excluded from access to important state resources, provided a powerful incentive for parties to aggregate and articulate the interests of the electorate. The cartel, on the other hand, demands not only the participation of the major parties, but also safeguards against their exit. Indeed, a cornerstone of Cartel Theory is that parties within the cartel can effectively 'close down' electoral competition. In short, the cartel is supposed to be able to bridle outside

challengers, either by blocking access to state resources or assimilating them into the cartel.

In the first approach, parties join together in order to consciously restrain voter choice. An indication of this practice would be the 'convergence of all significant parties in their programmatic concerns, as measured by the distance of the parties in the left-right space' (Kitschelt, 2000, p.166). However, an alternative explanation of the closer proximity of policies in post-industrial countries claims that, following the decline and collapse of the socialist economies, political leaders and the electorate no longer countenance radical socialist solutions to the challenges confronting mature welfare states, such as worsening conditions for poorly skilled workers, an ageing population and the resulting pressure on welfare systems (*ibid.*, p.161). As a result, a series of policy trade-offs is required. However, according to this explanation, the factors constricting policy choice are external to the parties themselves and therefore demonstrate that the parties reflect and are consequently responsive to electorate preferences; to put it simply, radical policies fail to attract support and therefore are not represented in the policy package. Political and economic developments might affect people's preferences and restrict the policy scope available to parties, but this does not provide evidence of the idea of parties' *conscious decision* to disregard voters (*ibid.*).

Following this line of argument within the context of German parties specifically, Detterbeck (2008, p.37) also finds there is no compelling evidence of collusion with regard to policy and instead identifies programmatic differentiation between parties. Despite broad acceptance of basic principles such as liberal democracy and a mixture of the welfare state and market economy, discernible policy differences exist between, for instance, the CDU and SPD. Also cited are examples of significant reform, namely the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms, as evidence that policymaking has not simply stood still (*ibid.*). In fact, Agenda supporters within the Red-Green coalition have highlighted the labour supply measures such as investment in training and childcare as evidence of a distinction between the SPD on the one hand, and the conservative CDU and FDP on the other. Camerra-Rowe (2004, p.22) argues that maintaining the policy distinction between the Social and Christian Democrats was a contributory factor in the inclusion of more 'social' measures in Agenda 2010.

A further method of protecting a cartel is co-opting new potential challengers into the cartel itself. Co-option can be understood as a process in which these new challengers are able to participate in the *procedure* of decision making, but do not leave their mark

on the *content* of the decision (Kitschelt, 2000, p.173). In other words, although the newly recruited political actor participates in the cartel, it fails to leave any imprint whatsoever in the cartel's policy output. Criticism of the co-option notion claims that too little consideration is given to the impact of left-libertarian and right-authoritarian parties on mainstream parties, for example concerning environmental/family issues and immigration respectively. Even though such parties cannot expect their policy programmes to be fully implemented, it is usually possible to reach a compromise, particularly if the parties play a role in a coalition (*ibid.*)<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the parties who remain 'frozen out' are those who tend to have an extremist orientation, attract little support among the electorate, and are unwilling to adopt policy compromises. According to this critique, in the case of German parties, not only have the established parties maintained their distinct policy profiles, it is also possible to observe the impact of the newer parties on these policies (Detterbeck, 2008, p.37; also Kitschelt, 2000, p. 173). Examples include the commitment to the gradual decommissioning of Germany's nuclear power programme or the introduction of the '*Ökosteuer*' ('eco-tax'), both of which occurred while the Greens governed alongside the SPD. In other words, the newer, smaller parties have not merely been 'swallowed' by a party cartel, but have made their impact felt (Detterbeck, 2008, p.37) Meanwhile, the emergence and continued popularity of smaller left-libertarian and right-authoritarian parties<sup>45</sup> able to attract voters from the more established parties is also said to cast further doubt on the idea that parties in a cartel are able to block the entry of new challengers (Kitschelt, 2000, p.171).

Conversely, it can be argued that exclusion applies not only to entry to parliamentary representation, but also access to public executive office. It was only after a period of nearly a decade after their entry into the Bundestag that the Greens were deemed a feasible coalition partner for the SPD at national level. Moreover, before this potential eventually became a reality, the Greens had undergone a significant transformation both in terms of programme and organisation. It is difficult to imagine that the Greens of the 1980s, even as a new parliamentary group, would countenance either military intervention or the fundamental welfare and employment reforms the party was jointly

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<sup>44</sup> Kitschelt (2000, p.173) argues that if voters do give their support to more extremist parties, particularly those on the right-authoritarian periphery of the political spectrum, this is not necessarily indicative of an anti-cartel protest. The right-authoritarian parties tend to find the greatest approval among specific, narrow groups in society. Yet if the backing for such parties were genuinely indicative of a broad, anti-cartel backlash, it would be reasonable to expect much wider appeal.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Three for a more detailed description of social cleavage and parties.

responsible for implementing in government. Also, in the case of the German Greens there was no attempt to exclude the party or challenge its right to exist — the established parties instead sought to ‘socialise’ them into the political mainstream (Katz and Mair, 1996, p.531), and this socialisation was a prerequisite to being granted entry into the ranks of national office. By contrast, PDS faced challenges to its legitimacy as the former state party of the GDR, while sections of the Left Party even today remain under the observation of the domestic intelligence service. The party has yet to become a credible potential associate for the SPD at national level, despite instances of cooperation in some eastern federal states; even though, during those periods of office, the PDS/Left Party has generally proved to be a compliant junior partner (Detterbeck, 2008, pp.36ff).

An internal explanation for programme convergence (restricted supply of policy) is that parties collude with each other in order to share the various rewards of the state. Because of the extent to which parties are embedded in the state, it is possible for a situation to arise where the major parties are never categorically out of power. Even if a party is voted out of power and spends a legislative period in opposition, it is still likely to be represented on various cross-party committees and therefore has some influence over policy. In addition, due to policy convergence and a weakened ideological distinction between parties, the party can rest assured that at least some of its key policies are retained by the (opposing) governing party or coalition (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.22). For example, the SPD-Green Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms were generally supported by the opposition CDU and FDP. When these two parties formed the federal coalition in 2009, there was no abandonment or even major reform of the policy. Therefore, even though the SPD and Greens found themselves in opposition, their access to state resources continued, their deputies continued to influence decision-making on Bundestag committees and, above all, their most far-reaching welfare and employment policies remained intact, if not strengthened.

Furthermore, as a result of the diminished policy differentiation and recognition of resource sharing based on cooperation, the sense of rivalry also further abates. This in turn strengthens the growing regard for politicians from other parties as fellow professionals who can be seen as future colleagues, peers and partners in government, and who share similar concerns over job security, in other words remaining in power, whether directly in government or not.

The result of this continuity does not only concern parties' anchoring in the state, as there are also implications for the democratic process. Elections are no longer the means by which the population holds its political leaders accountable; rather, they become a tool permitting ruling parties to retain their hold on power. In this respect, the cartel is far removed from the mass party, which originated as a force for social change. The cartel's priority is stability, not least in terms of its own endurance. Therefore, the role of elections is to peacefully legitimise the parties' control, and to provide feedback concerning approval of specific policies and performance. Since elections by nature also demand the participation of parties, the democratic process itself safeguards their future indispensability (Katz and Mair, 1995, p.22).

Koole (1996, p.516) finds Cartel Theory's 'toning down of competition' to be merely speculative. There is no doubt that most major parties, including smaller newcomers, can now be considered *regierungsfähig*, (i.e., capable of participating in government); furthermore, coalitions consisting of opposing parties (such as a Grand Coalition) have become increasingly common. But Koole has argued that this has been an ongoing tendency, especially in consensual democracies such as Germany, since 1945, and is therefore not a new phenomenon linked to global economic developments. Moreover, the greater number of parties increasing in elections once again raises the ever-present threat of exit, meaning that the stakes are surely greater than before.

Cartel Theory answers this criticism by maintaining exactly the opposite to be the case. While there is indeed nothing particularly new about these characteristics, what does demand attention is that they are no longer anomalies but instead have become commonplace throughout the western democracies — and not just those with a consensual political tradition. Furthermore, recent years have witnessed a convergence of parties on the traditional left-right spectrum, giving rise to increased 'promiscuity of coalition formation' (Katz and Mair, 1996, p.530), in which combinations of nearly all political colours are now conceivable. For example, 'Black-Green' coalitions have been formed of conservative Christian Democrats and Greens in the regional parliaments in Hamburg and most recently Hessen. As a result, increasingly intense electoral competition in which more parties compete in a narrower policy space goes hand in hand with a decline in the 'relative importance of the outcome', which Katz and Mair, (1996, p.530) refer to as an 'inverse relationship' between competition and policy supply.



Past and existing policy commitments and restraints, international pressures such as globalisation and the demands of foreign direct investment have resulted in little room for manoeuvre in terms of fiscal policy, or at least the perception of such. Therefore, the outcome of the election depends less on policy choice, but simply how the 'game' is played. Here, too, the rhetoric of 'no alternative' plays an important role. The PDS was a coalition partner in eastern regional governments and, as Chapter One has explained, consequently shared the responsibility for implementing the Hartz measures, as well as cost-cutting and privatisation policies. Undoubtedly, budget constraints were tight, particularly in Berlin, and many of the problems were inherited from the previous government. But the party's justification for cuts and privatisation continued in the same vein as the demands made by office-seeking PDS politicians in the East, who had called for 'practical' and 'pragmatic' politics unfettered by ideology.

Although critics called for the PDS to reject participation in favour of principled opposition (resigning from coalitions if necessary), defenders of the coalitions argued that, having won substantial support among the electorate, the PDS in fact had a duty to ensure that tough and unpopular measures were implemented in the most socially just way possible. But the adherence of parties across the political spectrum to the Hartz reforms exemplifies Cartel Theory's description of a narrowed supply of policy. Moreover, in the absence of unequivocal opposition and the offer of alternative to Hartz IV and privatisation, the main differentiation among the parties — even by the admission of PDS/Left Party politicians — was the 'management' of the existing policy. The 'rhetoric of no alternative' thus applied twofold: both to the unwelcome and controversial political decisions, and to the involvement of the PDS itself, to alleviate the worst outcomes of those decisions.

Naturally, the PDS regional associations in the western states, while often critical of Red-Red government coalitions in the East, had not been required to confront this situation, as they had yet to gain even parliamentary representation in western legislatures. Furthermore, the WASG, whose origins were directly in the anti-Hartz protest, was far more prolific in the West; indeed the Left Party's main source of support was to be found among the anti-Hartz movement. Therefore, while the Left's response to the Hartz measures was characterised by parliamentarianism and 'management' in the East, opposition to the measures was clearly based in the extra-parliamentary movement in the West. Nevertheless, as discussed in Section Four, prospects of entry into target western parliaments grew substantially as the PDS and

WASG merged. Naturally, the national leadership, committed to its strategy of the party's western establishment (see Chapter One), would be keen to ensure electoral success. Mindful of future parliamentary work and potential office-seeking goals, it is therefore possible that in its election campaign in target states, the Left Party adopted quite moderate criticism of Hartz and other austerity policies, or at least offset its critical rhetoric with a modest set of promises, which, while appealing to its main source of support, could be interpreted as signalling reasonableness and openness to other parliamentary parties.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter set out to identify certain features of Cartel Theory that are of particular relevance in relation to the Left Party. First, however, it is important to bear in mind that the party combines different histories and political cultures not only as a result of the PDS-WASG merger, but also within the PDS itself. The PDS, as the successor to the state party in the GDR, was organisationally and electorally rooted in the eastern states. Despite a dwindling membership in the aftermath of unification, the party remained closely integrated in society at grassroots level and retained considerable support among sections of the eastern population (see Chapter One). At the same time, though, the PDS had a very strong identification with the state, through its heritage as East Germany's ruling state party (SED). Although in united Germany the PDS was initially a party of opposition, the party was sustained by its solidly-established network, also a legacy of its state role. Furthermore, from the outset, the party was represented on local councils and in regional parliaments, and by 1998 the PDS was once again an office-holding party at regional level. As such, the PDS-East continued to be integrated in the state and had an established parliamentary party as well as the party on the ground. Moreover, as a socialist party, the PDS had a distinct ideological basis. Despite calls from some eastern politicians to abandon the strategy of western development and instead broaden its appeal among voters based in the eastern states, with the aim of becoming a catch-all regional party, the PDS resolved to continue with its strategic commitment to becoming a nationwide party and its programmatic commitment to socialism. In this respect, it is possible to view the PDS as a mass party in the eastern states.

The same cannot be said of the party in the western states, either in terms of organisation or electoral outcomes. Seemingly destined to remain a perennial '*Null-*

*Komma* ('zero point x') party, the PDS struggled to maintain visibility in the West and often lacked the personnel and resources to establish an effective grassroots party and also lacked a parliamentary party. The support it did muster was mainly found among the already divided western left, such as former members of the communist DKP, and the cooperation between the PDS and these groups was far from straightforward. Consequently, in addition to the structural contrasts, there were tensions between the western and eastern branches of the party concerning policy as well as strategy.

Given this disparity, it is therefore not possible to categorise the PDS in its entirety as a mass party. Yet neither was it strictly a fringe party, even in the West. Despite its weakness, the PDS-West was supported by a strong party in central office that included several prominent politicians; moreover, the PDS was represented in the parliament continuously, which is also uncharacteristic of a fringe party. The national executive's long-term strategy for the western states was to build and develop a grassroots network among various social movements, with the aim of establishing an electoral base; ultimately, the goal was to eventually gain parliamentary representation, alongside the eastern organisations. Therefore, although the research question is concerned with the Left Party in the western states, it is inevitable that the eastern party organisation is also influential.

While the Left Party has not followed the evolutionary path set out in Cartel Theory or conformed to the cartel party type, Cartel Theory does identify characteristics and behaviours that could have been relevant to the electoral success of the party in the western states. Drawn from the discussion of leadership and representation as well as electoral competition in Sections Four and Five, the themes can be grouped into two broad categories:

*Policy:* Cartel Theory foresees a narrowing of policy supply. The scope and language of election campaigning are 'toned down' to reflect a readiness to become a parliamentary party. Furthermore, campaigning conforms more closely to national policy and focuses less on specifically local issues and cooperation.

*Organisation:* Cartel Theory predicts an ascendant party in central office. At a regional level, this can be evident in, for example, the selection of election candidates and the focus of election strategy; it can also influence decision-making within the party itself as well as in communication. All in all, there is an increasingly top-down approach within the party. Cartel Theory anticipates that activists continue to play a role, but one that is

subservient to the needs of the parliamentary party. This may lead to discontent among activists on the grounds that ongoing political work on local issues and cooperation with local organisations are being neglected.

These themes will be explored in the case study of the Left Party in Bremen, but it is first necessary to consider the second explanatory framework, Social Cleavage Theory.

# Chapter Three: Explanatory Framework II - Social Cleavage Theory

## Introduction

This chapter presents the second of the two theoretical frameworks explored in the research. Following a similar pattern to Chapter Two, the aim here is to establish how Social Cleavage Theory can be applied to explain the electoral success of the Left Party in western Germany. As Chapter One has shown, one of the Left Party's key policy themes is social justice (*soziale Gerechtigkeit*). The party campaigns strongly on the issues of welfare, employment rights and poverty and advocates social ownership of key industries and services. The focus of the discussion in this chapter is therefore the class cleavage concerning the tension between capital and labour.

Section One defines social cleavages according to the model developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and describes the conditions affecting their formation and articulation. Germany has been characterised by two prominent cleavages: the religious cleavage and above all the class cleavage. Both of these cleavages were broadly represented by the two largest political parties in the Federal Republic, the CDU and SPD, and are explained in this section in the context of Germany's post-war economic and social development. By the 1980s, however, a new cleavage emerged, focusing on the tension between materialism and post-materialism, and was expressed by a successful newcomer to party politics, the Greens. Section Two looks at the rise of this new dimension and outlines further arguments which call into question not only the continuing importance of the capital-labour cleavage but also the relevance of class for party support over recent decades. These arguments centre on the changing nature of economic activity and the shift from the industrial to post-industrial society.

Section Three takes up the theme of class to confront the criticism that definitions such as 'traditional working class' no longer accurately portray types of work or social mobility brought about by economic development. Drawing on a reclassification of class according to modern types of employment, this section argues that the distinct sets of characteristics and challenges associated with each of the occupational groups clearly demonstrate that socio-economic class continues to be relevant today. Furthermore, the flexible labour market and trend towards part-time employment has

given rise to an increasingly common mode of precarious work, which, in light of its own distinct set of characteristics, can even be considered a class in its own right — the precariat.

Section Four returns to the employment market and welfare reforms introduced by the SPD-led federal coalition. While Chapter One has already set out the content and impact of the reforms, the emphasis here is the explanation of Agenda 2010/Hartz in terms of the class cleavage. The measures set out to achieve a 'flexible' labour market characterised by low wages and, importantly, shifted risk to the individual. The second part of the section considers attitudes towards the scope and activity of the welfare state and finds that although job insecurity might be expected to generate wariness of redistributive policies perceived as hostile to business interests, support for welfare actually remains remarkably resilient, particularly among workers and the unemployed, thus indicating the influence of socio-economic class in shaping these attitudes.

Section Five turns to the relationship between class and party political voting for the SPD and the PDS/Left Party. Based on the categories of class described earlier, the aim is to identify the trends in support for both parties among each of the occupational groups over time. The evidence of class-based voting is further strengthened by data showing workers' propensity to vote for the SPD and PDS/Left Party compared to that of the electorate as a whole. Furthermore, socio-economic class is even more likely to influence voting in the western states, suggesting that class plays an even greater role in the Left Party vote in the West than it does in the East. Finally, the chapter considers how the findings can be applied to the case study of the Left Party in Bremen.

### 3.1. Social Tensions and the Formation of Social Cleavages

A social cleavage can be understood as 'a socio-political fault line between social groups' (Webb, 2002, p.16). There are many lines of conflicts in society and their development is far from uniform, with cleavages emerging over time, some enduring and others diminishing, some uniting adversaries and others entrenching existing tensions (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.1). Furthermore, not all social conflicts necessarily become fully-fledged social cleavages. In fact, a fault line (for example a social disparity or clash of interests) might exist for a period of time before mobilisation actually occurs around this potential source of conflict. In order for a political tension to develop into a social cleavage, a clearly defined social group first needs to emerge around the respective fault line, based on common attributes such as class, location, ethnicity or religion. Secondly, this social group requires some notion of collective identity, which in turn must be expressed through political organisations. Typically, but not always, the organisation which lends itself to the expression of these tensions is the political party (Bartolini and Mair, 1990, p.116).

Although many social tensions can exist at a given time, only a few have the strength to actually polarise society (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.6). According to Lipset and Rokkan's model, these social divisions are mainly rooted in the nation building and industrial revolutions. The former saw the developing nation state build 'a wide range of agencies of unification and standardization' (*ibid.*, p.13). This ultimately generated two enduring social conflicts: the centre-periphery cleavage and the religious cleavage, whether in the form of the confessional cleavage between religious denominations such as Catholicism and Protestantism or, more recently, between organised faith and secularism.

The industrial revolution also provoked two perennial social fault lines. The first of these can be described as the urban-rural cleavage — 'the conflict between the landed interests and the rising class of industrial entrepreneurs', while the second is the capital-labour cleavage — 'the conflict between owners and employers on the one side and tenants, laborers and workers on the other' (*ibid.*, p.14). Together with the centre-periphery cleavage and religious cleavage, these constitute the 'four critical lines of cleavage' (*ibid.*). In the Federal Republic of Germany, the religious cleavage and the

labour-capital cleavage became prominent throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Since this thesis is concerned with explaining the electoral success of the Left Party, it is the labour-capital cleavage that forms the main focus of the chapter.

The channel of tension articulation and the impact on the political party system is contingent on a number of related factors, known as thresholds (*ibid.*, p.27). The first threshold concerns the political culture of the society in which the tension exists. For example, protest and criticism might be regarded as legitimate expressions of opposition (indicating a low threshold); they may, however, be perceived as attempted subversion (characteristic of a high threshold). A high threshold of legitimacy is therefore not favourable to the mobilisation of public protest and expression of the social cleavage. Related to this is the incorporation threshold, which concerns the ability of people mobilising around a cleavage to participate in the processes of representation. The threshold is high if the franchise is limited to the few, whereas a low threshold indicates broad access to democratic participation. In general, both the legitimisation and incorporation thresholds have been lowered (although not in a uniform manner) as political parties, petitions and protests have become accepted means of expression in society, and as universal suffrage has been introduced (*ibid.*).

The representation threshold concerns the degree of assimilation of a particular tension into the political system. The key issue here is the extent to which existing political parties and other organisations of representation, such as trade unions and interest groups, identify with the cleavage in question, as well as their willingness to represent and articulate this conflict. If the representation threshold is low, a movement arising from a social tension may be able combine forces with an existing organisation or party; conversely, opportunities for assimilating the cleavage could be minimal (in other words, the threshold is set high), which could leave the movement with little choice but to seek its own channels of representation. The entrenchment of other cleavages can also prove decisive in this respect. For instance, even if parties represented in parliament are united along one side of the class cleavage (e.g., that of capital), the extent of rivalry between them concerning the religious cleavage or the rural-urban cleavage could prevent cooperation on the class issue, thus easing the emergence of a new working class party (*ibid.*). Once again, depending on the nature of the legitimacy threshold, the movement may engage in strikes, demonstrations and direct action or exert external pressure on established political parties in order to persuade them to represent its demands. Alternatively, in the absence of a sympathetic partner among the existing parties, it may opt for the formation of a new political force. This leads us to



the fourth threshold of majority power, which describes the institutional framework and the extent to which it places limits on the majority rule within the system. For instance, a high threshold would mean a majority party is constrained by checks and balances, whereas a low threshold enables the party to initiate radical change once in power (*ibid.*). In addition, the previous chapter on Cartel Theory has explained how institutional factors such as the electoral system, state subsidiaries and electoral thresholds can hinder or ease the path of a newcomer to the political marketplace.

Over time, the salience of a particular cleavage fluctuates, reflecting the current relationships within the respective society. While some circumstances facilitate accommodation and consensus, others sharpen the profile of conflict. These approaches are identified by Lipset and Rokkan (*ibid.*, p.10) as the functional dimension. At one end of this dimension is the instrumental pole, where the social tension is articulated and addressed through negotiation in order to secure benefits and concessions. At the other pole, the cleavage is expressed in terms of ideology, with an emphasis on principles rather than individual and tangible gains. Nevertheless, most political expression of social tension occurs somewhere between the two poles (*ibid.*, p. 11). Certainly the labour-capital cleavage has displayed features of both instrumental and ideological approaches; small opposition (including extra-parliamentary) parties often lean towards a more ideologically polarised character, while larger, parliamentary social democratic parties tend to adopt a more conciliatory approach. As we have seen in Chapter Two, this characteristic is particularly associated with office-holding and becoming embedded in the state.

Lipset and Rokkan suggest that social cleavages and therefore voter alignment to parties became 'frozen'. In other words, despite the upheavals of fascism, National Socialism and World War II, 'the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s' (*ibid.*, p.50). Ware (1996, p.225) also points out that the significant party families — such as communism, socialism, Christian democracy and liberalism — largely resembled the political families that had participated in elections over decades, with no new, significant party type emerging for many years. But in Germany this frozen party system would be broken. The 1950s saw the establishment of a powerful catch-all party, while the New Social Movements' focus on issues such as the environment, peace and feminism gave rise to a completely new type of party, the Greens. The following section considers the development and expression of the capital-labour cleavage in Germany, alongside its representation in the party system.

### 3.1.1. Political Parties and the Class Cleavage in Germany

Europe's industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries gave rise to mass political parties which articulated the dominant cleavage, namely that of capital and labour. Dalton (1996, p.322) elaborates on the focus of this cleavage as the provision 'for the economic security of all citizens and ensuring a just distribution of economic rewards', while Graf (1977, p.189) describes the class cleavage as the conflict between those who possess and control productive capital and those who are excluded from its ownership. Mass parties articulating this tension formed throughout Europe; Webb (2002, p.118) emphasises that while expression of the capital-labour cleavage has not been uniform in its intensity, no European society or political system has remained unaffected by this conflict. Furthermore, the class cleavage has proved to be one of the most divisive (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.21).

The nineteenth century saw an increase in wage labour. In the hope of finding better conditions offered by large companies and as a result of technological developments, workers left rural areas and headed to the major towns and cities (Mochmann, 2002, p. 50). Growing industrialisation gave rise to an increase in waged labour working in large-scale farming and in the industrial sector. Working conditions, the insecurity of employment contracts and labour's sense of isolation from employers and factory or large farm owners all contributed to growing resentment among especially factory-based workers who were 'most strongly exposed to the industrial socialisation and the tensions between employers and workers' (*ibid.*).

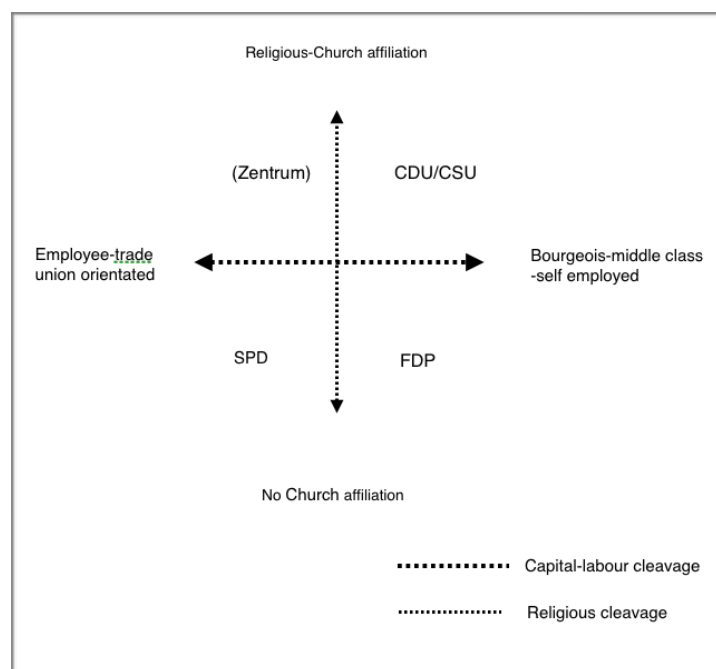
The expression of these resentments was dependent not only on the factors described above, but also circumstances relating specifically to the class cleavage. The relative openness of the respective society played an important role in that it determined whether wage labour stood any realistic opportunity of social or economic advancement, such as through education or establishment of an independent business (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.21). In the Europe of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this status threshold was set quite high, since education was not universally available, thus preventing younger generations from acquiring the knowledge and skills that could improve their standard of living (*ibid.*) through self-improvement and entrepreneurship. It was possible for some conflict between rural and urban interests to be addressed through specific interest organisations and bargaining; these conflicts therefore remained non-party forming (*ibid.*). But the capital-labour cleavage resulted

not only in a number of trade unions but also in the founding of socialist parties, with Germany's Social Democratic party, established in 1875, the first mass party that set out to represent specifically the interests of workers. Articulating the demand by rural and industrial workers for improved conditions, the SPD was able to absorb the growing ranks of wage labour that resulted from greater industrialisation, thus creating a solid left voter base in Germany's industrial cities (Mochmann, 2002, p.51).

But the fragmentation of Germany's pre-war party system was echoed among the left of centre parties at the time. Representing the left were, in addition to the Social Democrats (SPD), the Communists (KPD) and, until 1931, the Independent Social Democrats (USPD). Voters often switched between these parties, all of whom had their roots in the manual working class and addressed the tensions between capital and labour (Jeffery, 1999, p.97). Furthermore, even though the manual working class could be described as a clearly identifiable social group that supported the parties of the left (*ibid.*, p.105), the same could not be said of those opposed to the left: the centre ground consisted of an array of parties representing agriculture, civil servants and salaried workers as well as religious and regional tensions (*ibid.*, p.98). Apart from their general opposition to the left, these parties shared little common ground. In terms of the religious cleavage too, although Catholics constituted a distinct social group, a similar degree of coherence and party alignment was not evident among non-Catholics. Jeffery (*ibid.*, p.105) therefore describes the middle class in the pre-war era as rather 'fluid'. What is more, parties' failure to overcome their differences contributed to a period of government that was frequently interrupted by broken coalitions. For this reason, the Weimar Republic was identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967, p.29) as being characterised by low thresholds in all four aspects.

The social cleavages of class and religion, which had dominated the prewar era, were also evident in the postwar Federal Republic. Manual workers, particularly in industrial cities and as a result of organised labour, continued to form the core constituency of the Social Democrats, while the communist KPD represented the far left. However, it was a new party, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), that attracted the support of what had been the rather disparate middle class, including landowners, farmers and owners of financial and industrial capital, as well as a new generation of self-employed workers (Jeffrey, 1999, p.105). The CDU/CSU succeeded in becoming a *Volkspartei* or catch-all party (see Chapter Two) offering a package of moderate policies that were simultaneously committed to the social market economy and strongly opposed to communism. In terms of the religious cleavage, too, the CDU/CSU won the support of

Catholic voters as well as church-going Protestants, while the SPD tended to attract more secular voters. The formation of the CDU catch-all party precluded the establishment of Christian trade unions and a new specifically Christian party, therefore 'shattering' ties between the party and narrowly defined social groups (Mochmann, 2002, p.53). With the addition of the FDP, which represented both the social and economic aspects of liberalism (Jeffery, 1999, p.102), the comprehensive appeal of the SPD and CDU/CSU made it difficult for additional and smaller parties to compete electorally (the Catholic centrist party Zentrum, for example, would fail to gain representation in the Bundestag after 1957). Meanwhile, parties positioned towards the more ideological pole of the functional dimension of social tensions fared no better: the Constitutional Court banned the KPD in 1956, thereby removing a potential challenge to the SPD from the more ideological left, albeit a small one in terms of voter share. Whereas eleven parties had gained parliamentary representation in the first national election of 1949, by 1961 only three parties were present in the Bundestag, namely the CDU/CSU, the SPD and the FDP (Dalton, 1992, p.53). As both major cleavages overlapped to an extent in that tensions reached across both religious values and economic interests, the major social tensions were therefore largely accommodated within Germany's moderate catch-all political parties. What is more, in contrast to the Weimar era, 'non-left' interests were broadly incorporated by one party, the CDU (Mochmann, 2002, p.53). Figure 3.1 below places the main political parties within a simple left-right and religious cleavage framework.



**Figure 3.1: Cleavages in the West German party system in the 1950s and 1960s**  
 (Based on Mochmann, 2003, p.55).

It is important to understand the development of the capital-labour tension within the context of Germany's post-war economic recovery. The German Social Market Economy was based on the principle of ordoliberalism, in which state intervention rather than the 'invisible hand' of the free market provides the framework in which competition is able to thrive. It therefore constituted an alternative to full free market liberalism on the one hand and the full command economy on the other (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.112). The SPD was committed to the concept of social integration and sought to combine both economic efficiency and social justice by maximising competition in the commodity, services and capital markets and simultaneously strengthening the position of workers in the labour market. This approach, which can be described as Keynesian productivism<sup>46</sup>, regarded increased wages, social spending and public services as a 'productive side-effect' of redistribution (Nachtwey, 2013, p.237) in that they created wealth and therefore stimulated economic demand.

Yet the SPD was unable to muster sufficient electoral support beyond its working class core and therefore remained in opposition at national level. The turning point came in 1959, when the party adopted its Bad Godesberg programme. This programme was the culmination of 'pragmatic' inner-party reforms and marked the party's break from its remaining formal allegiance to Marxist principles. Previously, the SPD had considered nationalisation a key instrument of controlling productive power (Graf, 1977, p.188) but the new programme, which fully committed the SPD to the market-based approach of ordoliberalism, renounced large-scale nationalisation as a hindrance to optimum competition (Nachtwey, 2013, p.236). Instead, it was envisaged that small and medium-sized businesses, together with cooperative and public enterprises, would provide the counterbalance to big business (Graf, 1977, p.188). As such, the SPD embarked on a programmatic transformation. Previously, as a mass party, it had clearly articulated workers' interests, but was now broadening its appeal in the manner of a left-of-centre catch-all party (Jeffrey, 1999, p.103). According to Graf, the SPD was 'orientated primarily towards the acquisition of power within the context of the advanced capitalist system and the CDU state' (Graf, 1977, p.189).

The Federal Republic was based on the decentralisation of political authority and on corporatism, the control of the state by large interest groups. The federal structure meant that policy-making responsibility lay with the competent level of government plus

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<sup>46</sup> Productivism refers to the objective of economic productivity that in turn leads to economic growth.

the relevant social partners. State organisations such as the Federal Labour Office (*Bundesanstalt* - later *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* - BA) were charged with the administration of employment market programmes, while employers' associations and trade unions were partners in the process of collective wage bargaining. This system of free collective bargaining (*Tarifautonomie*), which was enshrined in law, brought together employers and trade unions to set wages and foresaw only minimal government involvement (Bowyer and Vail, 2011, p.684). Consequently, the federal government adopted a 'hands off' approach to wage and employment relations, and intervention was limited to mediation in the event of entrenched disputes between the social partners (*ibid.*). However, one of the outcomes of government inability to 'interfere' in negotiations has been the lack of a national minimum wage in Germany (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.115). A further important point is that because of the expectation that the Social Market Economy would continue to ensure economic security, the issue of inequality and poverty was not placed at forefront of central government policy (Bowyer and Vail, 2011, p.683). For example, the 1962 *Bundessozialhilfegesetz* (Federal Social Assistance Law) was constructed on the assumption that poverty would be an issue that affected only the smallest minority of the population. Once again, implementation of the Assistance Law was devolved to the *Länder* rather than a competence of central government. The benefit consisted of a modest payment intended only as a stopgap measure, rather than as a longer-term source of financial support for the poor; its value was even reduced in the 1990s (Bowyer and Vail, 2011, p.686).

The weakness of a model dependent on corporatism and lacking robust redistributive measures would become apparent during subsequent decades that revealed Germany's lack of both readiness and federal government tools for tackling declining economic growth and growing poverty (*ibid.*, p.687). In the meantime, though, workers enjoyed relatively high wages at a time of low unemployment, while employers benefited from low non-wage costs thanks to the volume of social contributions made by the large workforce. Therefore, the high rate of employment and the growing incomes gave both labour and capital a stake in wealth creation and, at the same time, supported a comparatively generous welfare state, at least for the majority.

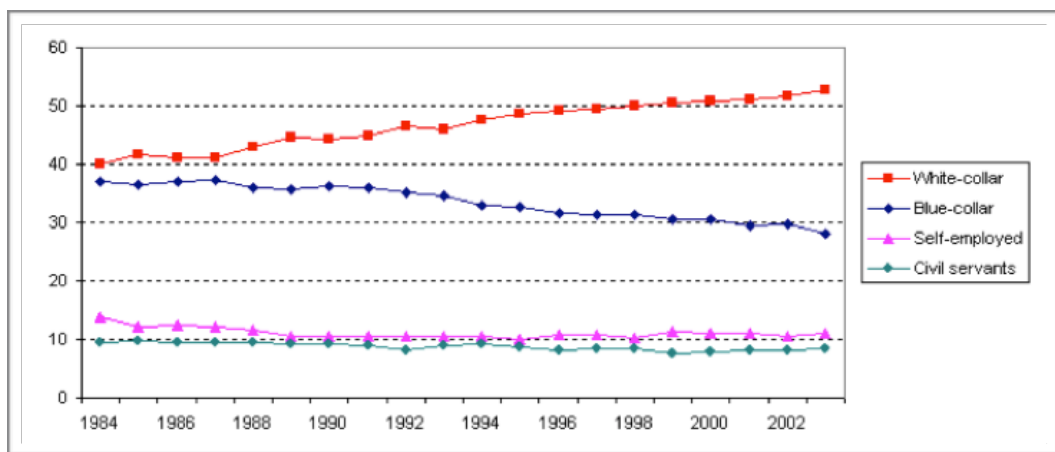
## **3.2. Challenging the Capital-Labour Cleavage**

Following its experience of dictatorship, war, defeat, occupation and national partition, post-war Germany did not easily conform to Lipset and Rokkan's concept of 'frozen' party systems and cleavages (Jeffery, 1999, p.105). First, whereas the centre ground before the war had lacked cohesion, both in terms of a shared identity (beyond an anti-left stance) and party alignment, the centre in the post-war Federal Republic was now broadly united in support for the catch-all CDU; meanwhile, the liberal FDP, also a party of the centre, had become a reliable coalition partner for the Christian Democrats. Secondly, the array of political parties in the 1920s bore little resemblance to what Jeffery (*ibid.*, p.97) terms the 'hyperstability' of the two-and-a-half party system that had become established by the 1960s. What is more, of the profusion of political parties that existed in the Weimar era, only one party would go on to thrive in the Federal Republic, namely the SPD. Even though the Social Democrats' policy orientation had broadened following the Bad Godesberg programme, the party nevertheless continued to attract the support of its working class core. The SPD's endurance as a party, as well as the support of its traditional voter base, therefore actually indicated the continued relevance of the class cleavage in post-war Germany. Nevertheless, social and economic developments have been cited as reason to doubt the durability of the class cleavage. The key developments and arguments are set out in this section.

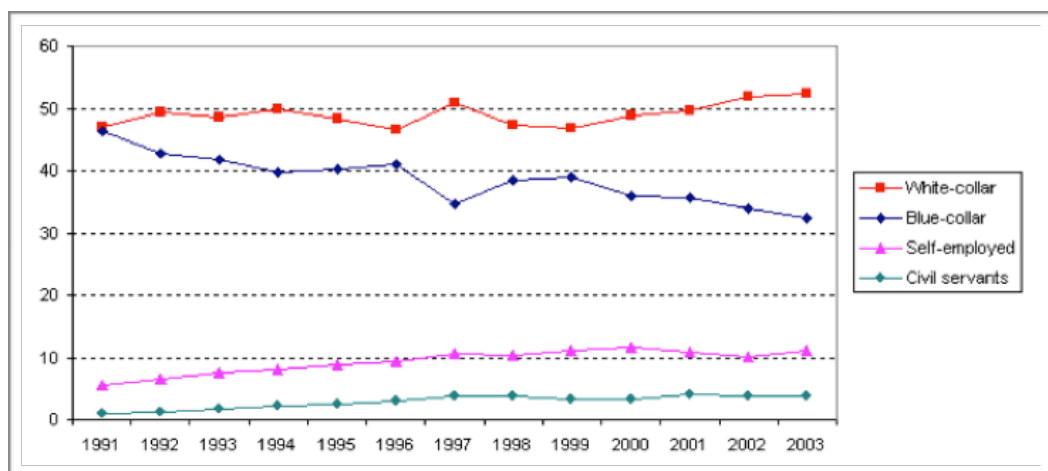
### **3.2.1. The Decline of the Manual Working Class?**

Over the years in western Germany, employee rights as well as a comprehensive social state became popular demands among the SPD's traditional constituency of blue-collar and unionised workers. But from the late 1960s, deindustrialisation and technological developments led to a decline in the number of manual workers that continued into the twenty-first century. Figure 3.2a shows the occupational status of people in employment in West Germany from 1984 to 2002, the beginning of the SPD-Green government's second term in office. Immediately obvious is that of the four occupational groups, blue-collar employment alone decreased steadily over the eighteen-year period, falling from just under 40% in 1984 (having already experienced decline in preceding decades) to below 30% in 2002. Conversely, the share of white-collar group increased, accounting for over 50% of employment by 2002.

The trend was similar in East Germany (Figure 3.2b), for which data is shown from 1990 (unification) until 2003. Once again, the proportion of blue-collar employment experienced a marked decline that contrasted with the steady increase in other types of work: whereas around 45% of the workforce were in blue-collar employment in 1990, this was true of less than 30% of the workforce within a twelve-year period. Even though unification increased the net number of workers, the pace of deindustrialisation of the new *Länder* within the unification process, meant that the additional workers from the former GDR did not manage to reverse the overall downward trend.



**Figure 3.2a: Occupational status of people in employment, West Germany (%)**



**Figure 3.2b: Occupational status of people in employment, East Germany (%)**  
(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005, p.3)



Deindustrialisation and the declining proportion of the blue-collar workforce resulted in a smaller core constituency of traditional working class support for centre-left parties such as the SPD. However, this raises two important points. First, it is reasonable to expect that a party faced with a sustained numerical contraction of its core voter base might choose to find ways to broaden its appeal and seek voters from alternative occupational groups. But this strategic reorientation need not inevitably involve the *abandonment* of the remaining traditional core voters. The choice lies with the party as to whether or not such a strategy is to be based on a policy shift that is likely to alienate the working class and abandon the articulation of what might still be acute divisions centred on the class cleavage (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011, p.109). In other words, broadening electoral appeal is not necessarily a case of 'either-or' for the party's policy supply. In addition, this kind of reorientation is not without potential pitfalls for the parties concerned; indeed, Kitschelt (2004, p.9) acknowledges that in the process of casting their nets ever wider, social democratic parties pursuing such a strategic course that risks completely undermining support from the traditional voter base.

Related to this, the second fundamental point to consider is that the numerical downturn in the working class does not equate with an inevitable decline in the significance of class tensions. This is because the *size* of the respective social group does not necessarily correspond with the depth or *acuteness* of the divisions between these groups (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011, p.109). As such, the cleavage — the tension between capital and labour — continues to exist, even if there is a decline in the overall number of people mobilising around it at a given time.

The social mobility and rising incomes of the postwar era were accompanied by enhanced educational attainment and improved access to information. Arising from this development is the argument that 'cognitive mobilisation' in turn facilitated further social and economic mobility. As a result, voters were better equipped to make electoral choices based on independently acquired information and political awareness (Evans, 1999, p.7). As such, divisions between the working class and middle class became less distinct in terms of income and lifestyle, a process also known as the levelling-off of the middle class (Graf, 1977, p.192). According to this notion of the 'embourgeoisement of the working class' (Evans, 1999, p.6), social mobility facilitated greater interaction between social circles; consequently, individuals would identify increasingly with their own particular situations, rather than consciously associate themselves with their social or occupational group. Consequently, the so-called 'affluent worker' became less and less attached to status or class (*'jenseits von Stand und Klasse'*) (Müller, 1999, p.1). In

other words, the relationship to the respective social class was to have become increasingly ambivalent, thus further blurring Germany's already weakly defined labour-class cleavage (*ibid.*). Yet Graf (1977, p.192) points out that although improved standards of education were accompanied by higher wages and longer leisure time, an increasing proportion of this income and time was actually taken up by the cost of everyday living, as well as the cost and acquisition of consumer goods. Furthermore, the greater share in the consumption of goods was not matched by a greater share in power over the means of their production (*ibid.*).

Even though the relative size of the SPD's core constituency declined, parties on the centre-right, including Germany's CDU, had been unable to garner mass support for openly free market policies, since the basic and universal elements of the welfare state had found broad acceptance across society (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.78). But unification, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the wave of economic deregulation associated with globalisation all served to undermine the perceived validity of economic planning as a tool available to governments — there appeared to be no credible alternative to capitalism. Eager to provide the optimum market conditions to attract international finance, governments curtailed their utilisation of fiscal tools to stimulate demand and employment. The capacity for wealth redistribution and, consequently, welfare provision, was therefore narrowed. With voter expectations of welfare and redistribution 'ratcheted down' (Blyth and Katz, 2005, p.43), parties were able to maximise their appeal despite offering policy packages that promised less.

Deindustrialisation, the subsequent shift towards a post-industrial society as well as the sell-off of public goods and services, meant that a diminishing number of employee groups were shielded from the pressure and demands of international markets. Instead, employees were increasingly involved in 'private, market-exposed and even internationally traded sectors of financial and managerial business services, information technologies, and personal services' (Kitschelt, 2004, p.6). With the decline in the manufacturing sector and loss of many manual jobs, workers found themselves driven into increasingly precarious employment which often failed to pay a living wage or offer basic social security. The demand for redistribution via welfare benefits such as income support would presumably remain consistent among this group<sup>47</sup>. Yet it is also argued (*ibid.*) that the workers who did manage to retain their jobs in the manufacturing sector were likely to have a better set of qualifications and skills and, most importantly,

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<sup>47</sup> This claim is supported by data presented by Kitschelt (2004, p.3) which found that of seven social groups, low-intermediate skill public service sector and domestic private sector low skilled wage earners displayed the greatest propensity to support redistributive policies.

believed that their continued employment depended on company profitability in a market which was exposed to international economic factors. Kitschelt therefore suggests it is feasible that these employees, anxious to protect their jobs, prioritised the economic wellbeing of the company over any sense of identification with a particular class, and consequently favoured less redistribution and public sector activity<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, times of particularly severe economic pressure can lead to the perception that the future profitability of the employer takes precedence not only over any class identity, but also over one's tangible needs. For instance, the individual might make the conscious decision to avoid 'burdening' the employer with the responsibility and cost of providing more comprehensive parental leave schemes; in a difficult employment market, he or she might 'self-exploit' in the hope of retaining a job or progressing within an occupation (Standing, 2011, p.18). The key aspect about these choices is that they are based on the values and perceived interests of the individual, rather than in accordance with class identity.

Yet Anderson (2009) offers a historical explanation to argue that support for egalitarian policies continued in both the western and eastern regions of Germany. After the fall of the Third Reich, the Federal Republic underwent a transformation in its industrial structure, that shifted the emphasis from huge corporations to the growth of the privately owned, medium-sized companies that still characterise the German economy today. According to Anderson, although this restructuring created the sense of classlessness at the top, there remained at the bottom a collective awareness of history and political potential (Anderson, 2009, p.23). As Lipset and Rokkan have described, this consciousness is essential for the expression of a social cleavage. Moreover, even despite deindustrialisation, the Federal Republic did manage to maintain a manufacturing base. As a result, a labour force continued to exist, albeit smaller in size and not especially militant (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, in the socialist GDR, redistribution and the welfare state had become the norm, and it could therefore be anticipated that such attitudes continued to exist among the eastern population, especially in the years immediately following unification. However, this leads Anderson to make an important distinction between the roots of attitudes favouring redistribution and welfare. While in the East this ongoing support was largely attributable to the socialist heritage, in the West it was the result of the 'residual strength of labour' (*ibid.*). In other words, it was in the western states that class actually played a significant role,

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<sup>48</sup> The same data shows that 'trade-exposed sector intermediate skilled wage earners' were among the social groups least likely to support redistributive policies (Kitschelt, 2004, p.3).

especially when the labour force was confronted with rising inequality and the concentration of wealth at the top (*ibid.*).

### 3.2.2. The Post-Materialism and the Socio-Cultural Dimensions

In 1966 the SPD formed a Grand Coalition with the CDU, and entered government at federal level for the first time. This period saw the coordinated action (*Konzertierte Aktion*) of state, the Bundesbank, employer organisations and organised labour to implement a programme of deficit-funded public spending. To counter the effects of the tight control of wages, social policy concentrated on easing differences in the employment status between manual and skilled workers and bolstered welfare payments (Nachtwey, 2013, p.237). However, the Grand Coalition — a coalition of the two largest (and usually opposing) parliamentary parties — is naturally characterised by weak opposition in parliament. During the CDU-SPD coalition, the only other party represented in the Bundestag, and therefore the sole opposition to the coalition, was the liberal FDP, with just forty-nine seats. It was this period that also saw the emergence of political disillusionment (*Verdrossenheit*) amidst a growing sense among voters of bureaucratisation and self-interest regarding the parliamentary parties (Jeffery, 1999, p.109)<sup>49</sup>. What is more, the Social Democrats' ascension to power at federal level relied on their cooperation with parties on the centre-right: first with the CDU and then later with the FDP, thus continuing the SPD's own convergence towards the centre (*ibid.*, p.105).

The SPD was also experiencing internal conflict. Its youth/college arm, the Socialist German Student Union (SDS), became one of the leading organisations in the extra-parliamentary opposition. Founded in Hamburg in 1946, this had also served as a school for future party functionaries and leaders, including Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (Graf, 1976, p.225). It went on to adopt a distinctly left-wing character and its anti-nuclear stance brought the group into conflict with the SPD leadership over the party's support for German rearmament. Yet the SDS also focused its attention on issues beyond the scope of economic redistribution, such as pacifism and oppression in the developing world. It also campaigned for the right to abortion and liberation from sexual taboos and demanded a normalisation of relations between the two Germanys. Eventually, in the face of dwindling membership and support, the SDS dissolved in 1970. Many of its former members returned to the mainstream SPD, while a minority rejected the conventional SDS tactics of sit-ins and demonstrations and turned instead

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Two for an explanation of Germany's '*Parteienstaat*'.

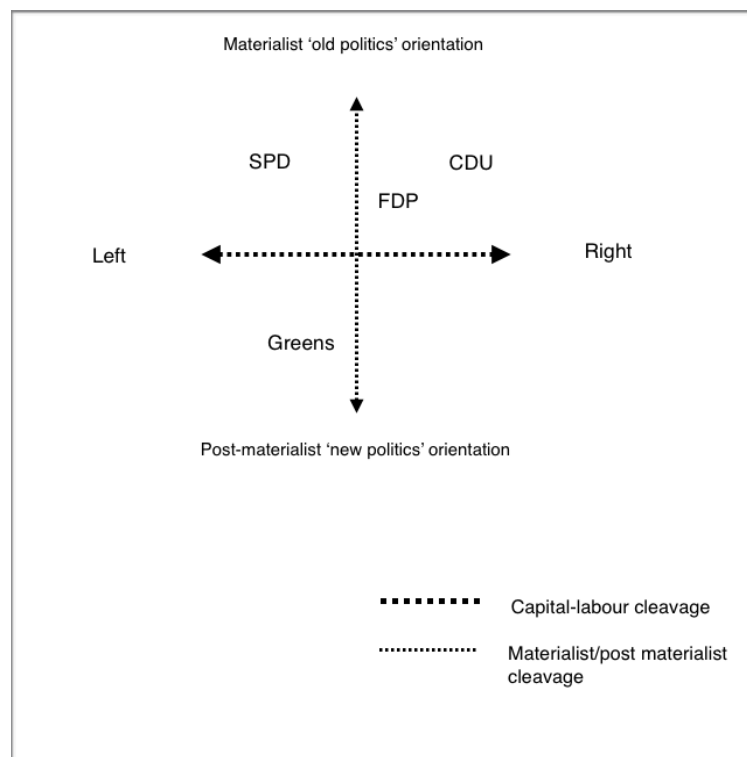
to armed struggle. However, other former SDS supporters became increasingly involved in single issue politics and set up various grassroots initiatives which would go on to form the new social movements (NSMs) in the 1970s (Pulzer, 1992, p.312).

The rise of the NSMs has been attributed to the growing disenchantment with mainstream politics and parties on the one hand and, on the other, increased awareness of post-materialist issues which, according to Inglehart, moved beyond the traditional (or materialist) politics of redistribution or consumption, and prioritised “post-materialist” values, emphasising autonomy and self-expression’ (Inglehart, 2008, p.130). These issues resonated especially among younger people who became politically relevant in a period characterised by relative prosperity and peace but also the decline of the manufacturing base (and less emphasis on the capital-labour conflict). This ‘new politics’ approach emphasised non-material or post-materialist goals relating to quality of life, such as the environment, the abolition of nuclear weapons and power, democracy and participation, personal liberty, racial and gender equality and a shift towards sustainability and little or zero economic growth (Dalton, 1992, p.66).

As this chapter has explained, political culture shapes the expression of emerging (and revived) cleavages. The expression of the post-materialist dimension was therefore contingent on several factors: first, the mobilising actors had to decide on a strategy, in other words, whether they preferred to take an extra-parliamentary route (e.g., remain a single issue pressure group) or to organise themselves as a political party (perhaps later on becoming office-seekers). The parliamentary route is in turn dependent on the threshold of representation and the willingness and ability of existing parties to successfully respond to and accommodate post-materialist concerns. If the established parties do not accommodate these demands, a new party may emerge around the specific cleavage. Whether the new party can realistically expect to break into the competitive party system is determined by institutional factors such as the electoral system, for example, Germany’s five per cent electoral threshold. In the Federal Republic, the party that embodied the dimension of post-materialism and successfully entered into electoral politics was the Greens.

Having already experienced a degree of dealignment among its core constituency, the SPD went on to concede support among young and educated voters, as well as those identifying with the post-materialist left (Jeffery, 1999, p.105). Here, a degree of realignment occurred along the emerging post-materialist tension, in favour of the emerging Greens. However, while the core group of voters for the SPD declined

numerically, the importance of labour-capital cleavage for the party did not recede altogether. Sections of the SPD sought to reposition the party further from the middle ground in order to win back some of the left vote. In addition, the emergence of the Greens (a left-of-centre potential partner for the Social Democrats) and the SPD's response also reduced the likelihood of a future coalition with the FDP, which had by then aligned itself more closely to the CDU. As a result, it is possible to identify a 'rudimentary two-bloc party system' (Jeffery, 1999, p.109) along the continuing left-right divide. In Figure 3.3 the determinant cleavage structure of the 1980s is therefore depicted to include, in place of the less prominent religious-secular divide, a new 'materialism/post-materialism' dimension, placing the Greens on the left, within the field of 'new politics'. The class cleavage, represented by the left-right dimension, nevertheless remains a defining social tension.



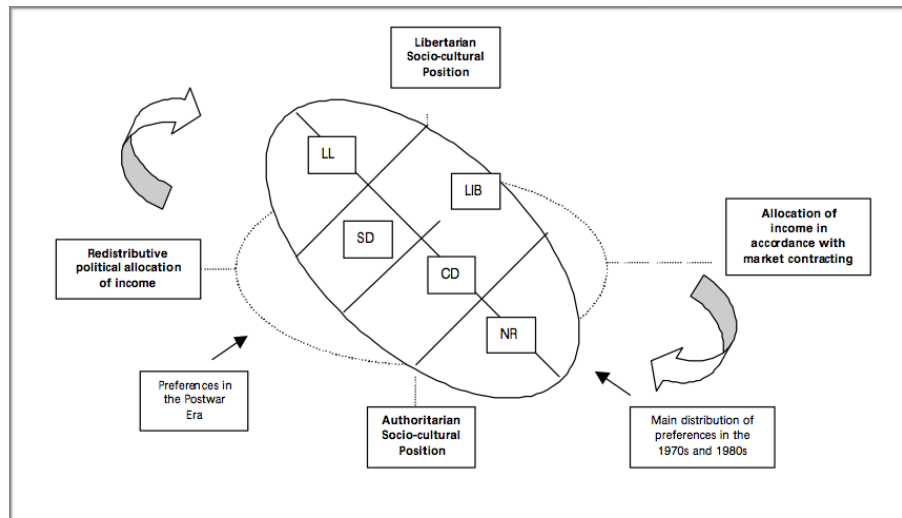
**Figure 3.3: Cleavage structure of the Federal Republic in the 1980s**  
(Based on Busch, 2007, 6)

However, according to Kitschelt (2004), in addition to the emergence of the materialist/post-materialist cleavage, the 1980s also saw a further shift of emphasis; this time from the primarily distributive economic policy preferences associated with the class cleavage and towards the values of socio-cultural (left) libertarianism and (right) authoritarianism. Both approaches are concerned with attitudes to society, the family

and individual rights and responsibilities. Libertarianism is based on the autonomy of the individual to determine lifestyle, as well as ‘respect for socio-cultural difference’. Authoritarianism, on the other hand, emphasises compliance with ‘cultural homogeneity’ and its moral standards and regulations (Kitschelt, 2004, p.2). This argument, which is represented in Figure 3.4 below, acknowledges that policy preference distribution during the post-war era was essentially concentrated along one dimension between redistribution of income on the left and allocation of income in line with market constraints on the right. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, it is claimed that the axis shifted away from the distributive (materialist) concepts of left and right and policy preference began to take into account socio-cultural libertarian and authoritarian positions, with the Greens occupying the left-libertarian (LL) position on the framework (*ibid.*, p.8).

The diagram also illustrates how, according to this reasoning, the various party ‘families’ have accommodated these positions in their policy offerings. For example, it can be assumed that the political programme of the left-libertarian party (LL) will include a range redistributive taxation and welfare policies — more so than that of the social democratic party (SD) — as well as a raft of libertarian socio-cultural policies (*ibid.*, p.9). Conversely, the diagram shows that the party furthest to the right (NR) can be expected to present a programme that emphasises more market-orientated economic policies combined with an authoritarian approach to socio-cultural issues (*ibid.*, p.10). Thus, it is possible to discern an association between the economic left and socio-cultural libertarianism on the one hand and between the economic right and socio-cultural authoritarianism on the other.

What is more, the catch-all parties, which by now also included ‘modernised’ social democrats, succeeded in absorbing social issues beyond the traditional left-right dimension of economic (re)distribution to encompass religious and centre-periphery cleavages (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.78). The argument follows that this process in turn led to further dilution of the class cleavage; in its place, growing importance was attached to individual liberty and to socially managed ‘responsible’ capitalism.



**Figure 3.4: Distribution of political preferences from the post-war decades to the 1970s and 1980s**  
(Kitschelt, 2004, p.7)

The post-materialism dimension is also associated with the changing orientation of values. Underpinning this concept is a hierarchy of motivational needs<sup>50</sup>. The first set of needs centres on basic physiological survival (necessities such as food, water and shelter); their fulfilment allows the individual to prioritise the activities and resources (e.g., employment and health) that ensure security and stability. Then, having secured these basic needs, the individual can focus on more social needs that include a sense of belonging (e.g., family and relationships) as well as esteem (acknowledgement, status, respect). Only when these needs have been met is it possible to turn attention to fulfilling what are known as self-realisation needs, such as creative expression (Mochmann, 2002, p.40). As each level of the hierarchy is fulfilled, a change in the individual's value orientation occurs.

Applying this hierarchy of needs and the associated value change to the context of social cleavage, it can therefore be argued that increasing economic prosperity

<sup>50</sup> The hierarchy of motivational needs was conceptualised by the psychologist Maslow (1943, p.375), who was concerned with the question: 'It is quite true that man lives by bread alone — when there is no bread. But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled?' Maslow claimed that other and 'higher' needs become progressively dominant and, once satisfied, are superseded by still 'higher' needs, thus resulting in a 'hierarchy of relative prepotency'.



unburdened the expanded or 'levelled-off' middle class of the challenge of securing basic needs. It would follow that the ability to take for granted resources for physiological wellbeing and economic security through wage labour and the welfare state brought about a change in values that prioritised the fulfilment of 'higher' goals. Many of these priorities coincided with the post-materialist issues articulated by the new social movements and the Greens; the attainment of these needs and the changing values they represent are therefore central to the post-materialism dimension. At one end of this dimension, materialists are concerned with obtaining resources and security, whereas post-materialists at the other pole strive to achieve self-realisation (*ibid.*).

It is acknowledged that a person can strive for both 'basic' needs and 'higher' goals simultaneously. For example, an individual might be concerned with achieving greater economic security and at the same time seek creative self-expression. In addition, values and therefore the prioritisation of these goals can easily change at various stages of life (*ibid.*, p.41). But above all, the key to this concept is that the motivation and ability to achieve higher goals remain contingent on the continued and reliable fulfilment of the more basic needs. As a result, if individuals, groups and even regions are unable to achieve material and economic security, it can be expected that there will be a weaker emphasis on post-materialist goals and values (*ibid.*) and, conversely, a stronger prioritisation of securing basic necessities. In other words, although the hierarchy of needs is a concept closely associated with the materialist/post-materialist dimension, the importance of continued job security and reliable employment conditions and wages means that it inevitably touches on aspects of the labour-capital cleavage, too.

In addition, although the emerging post-materialist dimension was concerned with attitudes beyond economic redistribution and consumption, there is often no clear-cut distinction between material and post-material values. For example, the issue of the environment — frequently identified with 'new politics' and post-materialism — is in fact heavily concerned with physical security and material questions, such as the allocation and use of finite natural resources. Moreover, neither is it possible to strictly separate post-materialist concerns surrounding the environment from the issue of social and economic class, for it is frequently the poorest in society who suffer the most immediate and severe effects of environmental degradation, for instance as a result of pollution and resource depletion (Woodin and Lucas, 2004, p.34). Similarly, while gender politics is also a central theme of post-materialism, this too concerns economic rights and

physical security (Ware, 1996, p.229); in addition, socio-economic factors and class clearly influence choices relating to fertility, childcare and life opportunities (*ibid.*), once again highlighting the intersection with the labour-capital tension.

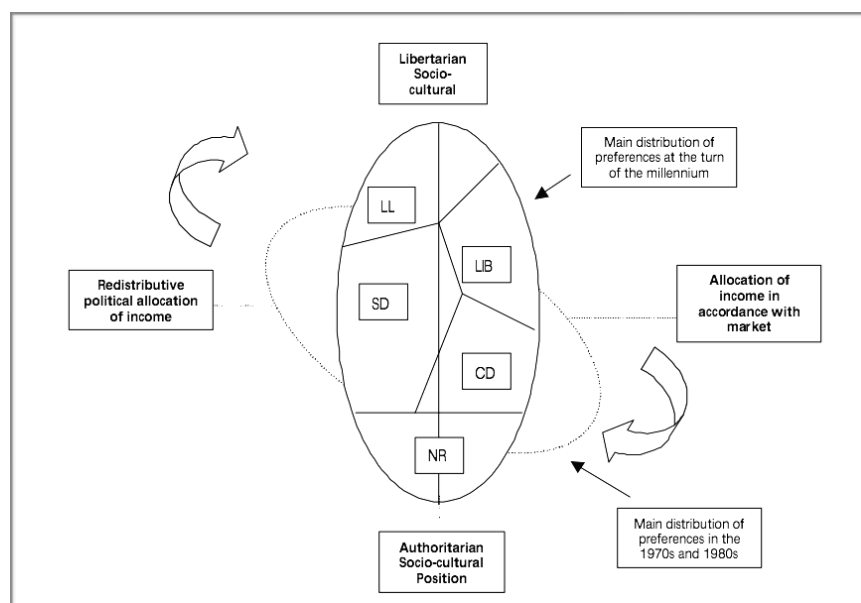
Education and training are also linked to greater acceptance of a modern (libertarian) socio-cultural outlook, while those with low or intermediate level skills are associated with a more authoritarian approach<sup>51</sup>. Kitschelt (2004, p.2) therefore anticipates a shift away from the preference for redistributive and authoritarian policies often linked to the working class in favour of market-orientated and socially liberal policies. If highly educated professionals and the self-employed are also more closely associated with the market-exposed sector, then Kitschelt considers that left-libertarian parties such as the Greens, who traditionally enjoy support amongst the most educated voters, will focus on offering more market-orientated policies to attract voters, whilst at the same time retaining the appeal of their libertarian identity on the socio-cultural dimension (*ibid.*, p.6). In addition, to secure the support of young professionals and entrepreneurs, social policy would also endeavour to emphasise issues of concern to younger people, such as education and improved childcare provision. Thus, it is argued that left-libertarian parties increasingly count young professionals and entrepreneurs amongst their core voters (*ibid.*, p.9). The extent of this shift in preferences, as well as the response by political parties, is portrayed in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 shows that in a period characterised by restricted redistribution and policy preferences, the positions of parties once again shifted. Although there is still a two-dimensional dispersal, the diagram also portrays the greater emphasis on libertarianism and authoritarianism, and their respective solutions to socio-cultural issues. Focusing on the parties of the broad left, the diagram reveals a perceptible move away from redistributive political allocation of income by the social democratic (SD) parties (*ibid.*, p.9) and in particular the left-libertarian (LL) parties (who sought to attract the votes of young, educated professionals), with these two party families occupying a similar centrist space in terms of redistributive policy. All in all, the diagram conveys a general narrowing of policy space. On the one hand, there is greater emphasis on the socio-cultural dimension and libertarian or authoritarian remedies as the chief means of differentiating parties and policy preference distribution (*ibid.*, p.11). Consequently, the model portrays a significantly less pronounced left-right economic

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<sup>51</sup> 'Low-intermediate skill public service sector' and 'domestic private sector low skilled wage earners' were among the least likely to favour libertarian socio-cultural approach (Kitschelt, 2004, p.5).

dimension that in turn suggests a decline in the importance of the capital-labour cleavage for political parties.



**Figure 3.5: Distribution of political preferences from the 1980s to the turn of the millennium**

(Source: Kitschelt, 2004, p.7)

Yet even though the political parties promised less in terms of redistribution and welfare and offered policies that were less defined in terms of class-related difference, it is important to bear in mind that social and political divisions endured. Poverty and social problems such as homelessness and crime did not simply go away (Dalton, 1996, p. 330). Furthermore, although arguing that the scope of ‘distributive disagreements has narrowed, Kitschelt (2004, p.8) nevertheless acknowledges that the conflict over redistribution nonetheless ‘remains salient’ (*ibid.*, p.8) and has the potential to intensify, during periods of sharpened economic constraint.

### **Social Cleavages and the German Democratic Republic**

Finally, the former GDR and unification pose some interesting questions concerning social cleavages and political parties. German unification ‘confronted two different electorates with a party system which, the PDS excepted, had developed in the context of only one of those electorates’ (Jeffery, 1999, p.117). In 1990 the German electorate swelled by around one-fifth. Four decades of state socialism had naturally impacted the GDR's party system (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011, p.109ff.). There had not been a tradition of competitive elections; while parties other than the SED were represented in

the parliament, they were subservient to the ruling party (see Chapter One). In addition, voters had little or no experience of the Federal Republic's party system beyond the information and images they received via the media. At the time of the first all-German election in 1990 the East German electorate was therefore largely politically non-aligned (while dealignment had been occurring in the West), and consequently was highly responsive to short-term influences, such as key campaign issues as well as focused campaigns and individual candidates (Jeffery, 1999, p.112).

Historically, the territory of what would become the GDR had been the location of the greatest support for the SPD and KPD. In 1928 the Weimar era left-wing parties, including the KPD, achieved 49% of the eastern vote compared to 35% in the West; by 1933 combined voter share of the SPD and KPD was ca. 38% (East) compared to ca. 25% (West) (Mochmann, 2003, p.58). However, the SPD was not able to revive this support in the 1990 election. In fact, the SPD and PDS performed weakly in industrial areas where one might expect a strong left vote, while the CDU and the bloc of eastern conservative parties attracted the greatest support in these regions. The CDU's strong commitment to unification, which stood in contrast to the more ambivalent approach adopted by the SPD, was the greatest defining factor in these electoral outcomes. However, to fully understand the attitudes towards the capital-labour cleavage in the post-unification era, it is nonetheless useful to consider the distinct social base that had developed in the GDR, as well as its effect on social cleavages and their expression.

First, in terms of the religious cleavage, the East had become far more secularised than the West. A clear majority of eastern voters (67%) identified themselves as having no religious affiliation, compared to just 19% in the West (Jeffery, 1999, p.113). Both the Protestant and Catholic denominations had markedly declined in the East: whereas approximately 80% of the population were Protestant in 1950, the proportion in 1989 had fallen to around 30%. Catholics accounted for 11% of the population in the 1950s and just 6% by 1989. There had also been a strict separation of Church and state and the Church was not authorised to teach religion in the GDR's schools. However, the Protestant Church played a prominent role in the protests that sprang up in 1989, and some of the citizens' groups and organisations that shaped the demonstrations became associated with or absorbed by the CDU. Therefore, even though the Christian vote was numerically less significant than its counterpart in the western state, there was clearly strong alignment to the CDU. Nevertheless, eastern voters were largely secular and therefore unlikely to make electoral decisions along religious lines (*ibid.*).

The class cleavage in the former GDR has been described as 'disrupted' (Mochmann, 2002, p.59), while Arzheimer and Schoen (2007, p.4) observe that the bond between workers and left-wing parties was destroyed during the four decades of the GDR's existence. The class cleavage did persist but was less visible; far-reaching nationalisation and other socialist policies arguably minimised the tension, but the lack of competitive elections also prevented party-political expression of the cleavage (Nachtwey and Spier, 2005, p.129).

A further explanation for the weaker profile of the capital-labour cleavage was that the size of the working class was maximised, meaning that workers did not identify themselves as a distinct social group that distinguished and articulated its needs in relation to others (Mochmann, 2002, p.59). In fact, in the period around unification, the primary tension was not between capital and labour, but between labour and social hierarchy surrounding the SED itself (Nachtwey and Spier, 2005, p.129). The PDS would later exemplify this: despite its socialist manifesto, the party could hardly be described as the representative of the (eastern German) working class, since much of its support originated among the ranks of former functionaries and civil servants as well as — at least initially — those wishing to preserve separate statehood. On the other hand, by 1998 eastern workers tended to vote more in line with their western counterparts: 39% supported the SPD, while just 27% continued to support the CDU which, in terms of the class cleavage, suggests not only a degree of convergence with the West, but also signs of party alignment concerning this tension.

Although there was no GDR equivalent to a Green Party, it is still possible to consider the role of the (post-)materialist dimension in eastern Germany following unification. Mochmann (2002, p.74) cites a series of studies<sup>52</sup> which applied the 'Inglehart Index'<sup>53</sup> of political attitudes. In this index, issues such as maintaining law and order and combating rising prices are classified as materialist, while the focus on greater political influence and protecting freedom of speech are identified as non-materialist<sup>54</sup>. The surveys revealed that eastern German citizens prioritised a combination of both

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<sup>52</sup> European Commission Eurobarometer surveys 1990-1999 (Eurobarometer numbers 34.0, 35.0, 36, 37.0, 38.0, 39.0, 40, 42, 47.1 and 52.1), cited in Mochmann, 2002, p.77.

<sup>53</sup> The Inglehart Index, constructed in 1977, is used in Eurobarometer surveys on Value Orientation. Respondents are asked to identify two priorities from the following: (1) Maintaining order in the nation; (2) giving the people more to say in important political decisions; (3) fighting rising prices; (4) protecting freedom of speech (Gesis Eurobarometer Data Service, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> These also reflect the policies associated with Bündnis '90 (Alliance '90), the umbrella group that incorporated some of the citizens' movements in the GDR — Bündnis '90 eventually joined forces with the western Greens.

aspects, although there was an increase in the number of eastern Germans who gave precedence to the post-materialist values during and shortly after unification. Given the unique context of unification, Mochmann (2002, p.76) considers it is hardly surprising that greater political influence and freedom of expression resonated with the eastern population. Yet the emphasis on these priorities declined as swathes of eastern industry declined while unemployment and prices rose (*ibid.*). In addition, the process of unification had weakened labour in the former GDR. Industry had been dismantled and the population, confronted with climbing unemployment, were reluctant to jeopardise increasingly scarce and insecure work. Despite the efforts of western trade unions to secure nationwide tariffs, wages remained lower in the East. In addition, these lower wages were in competition with an even cheaper labour market in the neighbouring eastern European states. As a result, the labour market in the eastern states was 'prised loose' (Anderson, 2009, p.11). Therefore, experiencing 'unmet materialist demand' such as economic security (for example regarding employment and the cost of living), citizens in the East increasingly prioritised materialist concerns (Mochmann, 2002, p.76).

In addition to the transformation of the German party political system as a result of the enlarged and as yet unpredictable electorate, two party systems also took shape in the aftermath of unification. In the West, the failure of the PDS to establish a credible electoral base ensured the persistence of the four-party system (CDU, SPD, FDP and Green). Conversely, in the East, neither the post-materialist Greens nor the FDP, which went on to adopt a more market-liberal approach, would really thrive in the eastern states. Competitive politics was therefore dominated by three parties, namely the CDU, SPD and PDS. As such, the main parties in the East were orientated to the traditional left-right dimension of the labour-capital cleavage.

The consequence of deindustrialisation has not only been a numerical decrease in the number of blue-collar workers. The critiques outlined in this section have questioned the enduring salience of the class cleavage. The very definitions of socio-economic class are deemed problematic, as they no longer reflect the type of work, social mobility, educational attainment or individual interests that have resulted from economic development. Therefore, the next section re-examines these concepts of class and argues that while definitions of class need to account for modern patterns of employment, divisions along the lines of socio-economic class are clearly identifiable and, consequently, that class remains just as relevant today.

### 3.3. Definitions of Social Class

One of the challenges to social cleavage theory in relation to the class cleavage is that, in the modern post-industrial society, traditional classifications of class are outdated. Certain types of work have declined, while others have become widespread, for example as a result of an expanding service sector or advances in technology. A further criticism is that the terms are too broad. The term 'white collar worker', for example, has been used to refer to clerical workers, many of whom are part-time or temporary and have little in common with other white-collar workers such as academically trained employees (e.g., engineers and lawyers) in terms of pay, prospects or job security. The term has also been used to describe managers (including lower management), who, unlike some other professions within the white-collar category, tend to identify closely with company owners (Graf, 1977, p.191).

In addition, there are also problems of misinterpretation. Both 'middle class' and 'working class' can even be understood to mean 'typical': 'middle class' might suggest 'average', while 'working class' could refer to the 'normal' activity of engaging in paid employment (Savage *et al.*, 2010, p.120). Furthermore, there is a degree of ambivalence towards terms such as middle or working class, whether due to a reluctance to associate with a particular class or because of perceived irrelevance in a 'classless' society (*ibid.*, p.137).

Therefore, it is helpful to refer to Evans (1999) and the further development of the definitions and classification first constructed by Goldthorpe and Erikson<sup>55</sup>. The concept underpinning this reclassification is not social status, but rather the character of working relationships within the modern employment market. The emphasis is therefore on terms of employment as well as the nature of the employment itself (Evans, 1999, p.10) and takes into consideration aspects of job autonomy, authority and security (Dalton, 1996, p.330). In light of the employment reforms in Germany, the emergence of the 'precariat' also demands particular attention.

The classification includes familiar terms such as petty bourgeoisie to denote those who are either owners of small enterprises or who are self-employed. However, a clear

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<sup>55</sup> See Robert Erikson and John H. Goldthorpe: 'The Constant Flux' (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

distinction must be drawn here between the genuine self-employment of small-scale entrepreneurs and the pseudo-self-employment<sup>56</sup> of what can be described as the precariat, which is addressed later in this chapter. The next group in the schema is the service class — also known as the 'salariat' — consisting of professionals and managers in organisations (Evans, 1999, p.9), often in large corporations and public administration (Standing, 2011, p.7). These are followed by the routine non-manual working class, identified as clerical and white-collar workers (for example, the retail sector), and, finally, the manual working class, which incorporates skilled workers such as technicians, as well as semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers (Evans, 1999, p.9).

Closer examination of the service and working classes highlight the contrasts in conditions of employment. For instance, an employee in the service class has a degree of authority (for instance regarding their workload or perhaps supervision of a small team) and provides the employer with their specialist knowledge or skill in exchange for a salary. Their terms of employment also include agreed elements of occupational security, such as contractual rights, company pension and other benefits, as well as career progression prospects that include training and incremental salary increases (*ibid.*, p.10). By contrast, contracts in the working class occupations tend to offer less in the way of long-term benefits and involve wages paid in exchange for manual or non-manual effort, rather than for knowledge or expertise. Payment may also be determined on the basis of time work or piecework, rather than a fixed salary for contractual hours (*ibid.*). In terms of regulation and discipline, too, a distinction is drawn between service class employment and working class employment. Whereas the former is characterised by a 'carrot' approach of bonuses, promotion and other incentives, the latter relies on the 'stick' of strict regulation and short-term or fixed contracts (*ibid.*).

Regarding the impact of these contrasting conditions of employment on political preferences, the comparatively favourable employment conditions of the service class provide an incentive to preserve privilege and certainty. Therefore, Evans describes members of the service class as quite a conservative group, keen to maintain a

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<sup>56</sup> On its website, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) cites a definition of pseudo or bogus self-employment (*Scheinselbstständigkeit*) as 'business activities that do not include any managerial or proprietary tasks and which possess the attributes of an employment relationship but without entitlement to the corresponding labour law protections' European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2012).



business-friendly environment (*ibid.*, p.11). It can therefore be expected that there is a less significant role for trade union activity and instead greater emphasis on specific issues and interests. In other words, a member of this group vote could consider the business interests of the employing organisation to be a prerequisite for his or her own security, and therefore votes in accordance with this individualistic (rather than class-based) motivation (see Section 2.2 above). Conversely, the employment conditions imposed on the working class may be linked to a preference for redistributive policies that serve as a safety net, especially in light of the lack of job security, prospects or enterprise benefits (*ibid.*). To summarise, the important point of this classification is that political preference within both the service class and working class is based on the specific nature of the employment relationship, rather than on actual income or social status.

Since the original construction of this schema, further differentiation has been made, notably concerning the service class and the impact on values within that group. First, the service class is divided into two sub-groups: the administrative-managerial group and the expert-professional group (Müller, 1999, p.6), or 'proficians' (Standing, 2011, p. 7). The role of administrator or manager implies an additional element of responsibility, meaning that employees in these positions play a role in upholding and implementing the structure of authority within the company or organisation. As a result, administrators and managers within the service class are likely to identify strongly with their employer (Müller, 1999, p.6).

On the other hand, even though the expert-professional group may also implement some degree of delegated authority, it also identifies with the standards and practices of the respective profession (*ibid.*, p.7). Furthermore, membership of a professional body and subsequent obligation to its regulations and codes of conduct gives prominence to professional competence and autonomy. Consequently, the loyalty of an expert-professional lies not only with the company or organisation, but also with the profession itself (*ibid.*). Yet another division among the expert-professional group has thus been made, which distinguishes between technical experts on one hand and those delivering social-cultural services on the other. This latter group includes employees in the social and caring professions, medical services and education, as well as culture and the arts (*ibid.*). Employees in this group not only have obligations towards the employing organisation and to their professional body and standards; they also have close contact with their respective clients, such as patients or learners, and are concerned with meeting their health or educational needs. As a result, this group's

identification with the company or organisation becomes still further diluted (*ibid.*). Despite the relatively advantageous terms of the employment contract, the nature of the role could lead expert-professionals providing social or cultural services to hold values and political preferences that take into account the interests of their client group and therefore contrast with the more conservative elements within the service class. In fact, Müller (2011, p.8) expects that the egalitarianism arising from empathy for the client group would strengthen social or cultural service class employees' identification with the SPD, albeit for different reasons to those of non-manual or manual workers.

One of the consequences of the employment market and welfare reforms introduced in Germany has been a growing number of people in non-standard — or precarious — employment conditions (Dörre, 2014, p.19). Precarious work has many faces. It can include, for example, part-time employment, which is commonly defined as thirty or fewer hours per week (Standing, 2011, p.15). The reforms saw an increase in part-time employment, especially in the form of mini-jobs (also known as '€400 jobs'), which fell below the threshold for tax or social security contributions, either on the part of the employee or employer. While working part time can provide a useful route to a return to work, it is also common among employees (especially women) who have stepped away from their previous career path, and can therefore result in reduced earnings over a longer period. Furthermore, part-time workers often find themselves doing extra hours, sometimes for no pay (Dörre, 2014, p.15). Part-time employment therefore carries a greater risk of (self-)exploitation; moreover, workers may find they do not qualify for full enterprise benefits, and have the added pressure of organising different aspects of their lives around hours that might include shifts (Standing, 2011, p.15). Also, some part-time patterns involve a shorter working day but are still spread across a five-day week, meaning less pay, but still the same costs (e.g., travel) as those for full-time employees. A final important point is that workers re-entering employment through, for example, mini-jobs are no longer included in unemployment figures, even though they may be heavily underemployed in their part-time job and still rely on Hartz IV benefits to survive.

Temporary work, including work found through an agency, can also be considered precarious. Even though some people undoubtedly thrive on the challenge of short-term project-based work, temporary workers are easily exploited (Standing, 2011, p. 15). First, it is often the case that workers are paid at a lower rate than their counterparts with permanent contracts, despite doing similar or identical work and despite the insecurity inherent in temporary work. Also, employers can avoid paying

higher wages based on experience and an incremental pay scale (see above for a description of service class employment). Furthermore, career opportunities are reduced, since there is barely any opportunity to follow a career path within a single company. Once again, although temporary work can offer the chance of taking the first steps onto a career ladder — for example a newly qualified worker might take temporary employment to gain practical experience and improve their chance of finding permanent work — this type of work is often associated with a downward or at least sideways career move, particularly following a period of unemployment (*ibid.*). While policy makers and job centre staff exert pressure on unemployed people to accept temporary work, this pattern of employment, like part-time work, often results in reduced income over the longer term and offers few real prospects for social mobility (*ibid.*), as it is all but impossible to plan for long-term commitments, such as starting a family (Dörre, 2014, p.25) . Furthermore, there are implications for the hiring company's regular staff, too, as greater flexibility in employment terms for temporary workers heightens the fear that permanent jobs may be cut. As a result, staff may offer less resistance to wage freezes and reduced benefits (*ibid.*, p.22). When replicated across whole industries and sectors of the economy, this in turn clears the way for downward pressure on wages and the withdrawal of employment rights.

People working on a self-employed or freelance basis are also at risk of a precarious existence. An important criterion in this respect is whether the person is an independent contractor or a dependent contractor. The former has established a client base, determines terms and conditions and has autonomy over their work. The latter depends on an intermediary (an agency or coordinator within a company, for example) who also determines price and working methods (Standing, 2011, p.16). In other words, the worker is a 'concealed employee' and (depending on definitions within the employment law of the respective country) is engaged in pseudo self-employment. This type of work is made even more precarious in view of the limited eligibility for unemployment and other benefits. Other features of precarious work include internships, 'zero-hours' contracts and unpaid leave/lay-offs, for example during quiet periods for the business or sector. However, well-paid, well-qualified positions have also been subjected to 'rationalisation', since white-collar employees too are meanwhile forced to take jobs that offer no social security and low pay (Seppmann, 2006).

Given the diversity and growing reach of precarious work, it is necessary to consider this type of employment in the context of class. The actual work carried out in

precarious circumstances is extremely broad, with roles that could be included within the service class professions (such as hourly paid teachers) as well as among the routine non-manual or manual working class (for instance care workers) (*ibid.*). Yet, once again looking deeper than status or income, it quickly becomes apparent that precarious employment does not fit comfortably into either the service or working class categories in some of the key areas described above, including professional identity, the relationship with the employing organisation and occupational prospects.

First, people in precarious employment are unlikely to have a relationship of trust and loyalty with the employing organisation. The often transient nature of the work precludes opportunities to exercise the delegated authority associated with the service class, and does not provide even the modest employment security given to the routine non-manual and manual working class in exchange for their subordination. In fact, due to outsourcing and intermediaries such as temping and placement agencies, it is even possible that the worker is unaware for whom he or she is really working (Standing, 2011, p.6). Meanwhile, those who do go on to develop longer-term relationships with an employing organisation are in jeopardy of becoming stuck in pseudo self-employment and therefore missing out on the enterprise and statutory benefits granted to their service or working class colleagues. Furthermore, employees in the service and working class have clearly defined contracts and job titles. In contrast, occupational identity within precarious employment is far less specific, since this type of activity depends on flexibility and adaptation of skills (*ibid.*, p.9). While this might suit some workers who value independence and variety (*ibid.*, p.15), it does carry negative implications for long-term career progression and the support provided by belonging to an occupational community. Indeed, there is also the danger that workers in precarious employment face resentment (for example on the part of employees in more stable employment) for their perceived complicity in the downward pressure on wages and rights in the drive to increase employment market flexibility (Dörre, 2014, p.31). In turn, this can hinder the formation of a sense of solidarity among workers who are essentially performing similar tasks.

The three main occupational groups outlined in this section — service class, routine non-manual working class and manual working class — highlight the often stark contrasts surrounding the autonomy, authority and security of employment that characterise each category. Subsequent refinements also take into account values and professional identification. In addition, the risks that characterise precarious employment extend much further than income or occupational status. Therefore, since

the schema is constructed to reflect employment conditions, there is a strong argument that rather than constitute a sub-section within these classes, 'the precariat' can arguably be understood as a further differentiation within this model of class structure (Standing, 2011, p.8). Based on the classifications presented here, the next section goes on to examine the importance of class voting in relation to the SPD and the PDS/Left Party.

### 3.4 Attitudes to Redistribution and Welfare

As far back as the late 1950s, the Social Democrats took the step of distancing themselves from their (at least nominal) socialist reference points and orientation. As a result, principles and core issues such as nationalisation and the property question (*Eigentumsfrage*), perceived as a hindrance to economic competition and maximum electoral appeal, were removed from centre stage. Focus was instead placed on provision of a safety net within the social market economy (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.78). Thus, the SPD was able to extend its appeal beyond its traditional working class basis and potentially attract votes from different sections of the electorate. In a nutshell, 'electoral goals were overcoming ideological ones' (*ibid.*). Now, the focus turns to explore the qualitative change in the Social Democrats' approach to social welfare and social justice in the context of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms.

The economic recessions of the 1970s and 1980s and the resulting stagnation in growth and wages were accompanied by increasing unemployment, which by the 1990s reached a post-war high. In the case of Germany, federal structure (with the *Länder* responsible for social assistance) the 'hands off' approach of *Tarifautonomie* and the minimal provision for the very poorest (see Section One) meant that the state was poorly equipped structurally to tackle its 'discovery of poverty' (Bowyer & Vail, 2011, p.685). Furthermore, Germany's unification in 1990 sharply intensified already growing problems of inequality and unemployment. Despite significant transfer payments to the eastern *Länder*, there was a pronounced disparity in terms of the economy, living standards and unemployment when compared to the western states. In addition, as a result of the funding allocated to the restructuring of the eastern region, the poorest western *Länder* such as Bremen and Saarland found that they had to manage with a reduced share of federal state subsidies. Furthermore, the imbalance highlighted the inability of the existing employment institutions and instruments to offer realistic hope of recovery. By the time the SPD-Green coalition entered government in 1998, it was faced with long-term unemployment at record levels, with an average of 11% nationwide, with the figure far higher in the eastern states (17.8%) (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2012).

The new finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, took a distinctly expansionist and redistributionist approach to the economy. To reverse the deflationary path caused by

the Stability Pact and to stimulate domestic consumption (Anderson, 2009, p.5), fiscal policy centred on tax reduction for lower income groups, while maintaining the existing rate for middle and higher incomes. The objective of boosting consumer demand, particularly among these low-income groups, was to create economic growth and increase greater social justice (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.138). In terms of the labour market, measures were taken to begin the re-regulation of employment, especially with regard to part-time work and pseudo self-employment, while amendments to the Works Councils (*Betriebsräte*) aimed to enhance employee rights within the workplace (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.139). However, following Lafontaine's resignation (see Chapter One), the SPD-Green federal government embarked upon an approach that although certainly interventionist, was based on the premise that transformation of the employment market and welfare held the key to reducing the stubbornly high jobless rate.

The essence of the Hartz reforms was the flexibility of the employment market. The bleak message presented by the government was that Germany's 'inflexible' job market would push up the cost of labour, leaving corporations no choice but to move their production and investment to more business-friendly locations with lower costs. Furthermore, this flight of investment would soon be followed by the departure of valuable and already scarce jobs (Butterwegge, 2005a, p.2).

In flexible employment markets, employee rights and job protection are seen as 'barriers' to greater employment. Indeed, when setting out his government's reforms, Chancellor Schröder (2003) identified non-wage labour costs as an 'impediment to creating new jobs'. It was not only employment in the private sector that was under pressure to become more flexible; jobs in the public sector, too, were affected, especially as outsourcing became increasingly common.

First and foremost, 'flexibility' refers to contracts and the terms of employment. It is argued that these should involve minimum financial cost and effort on the part of the company if it needs to change (and especially reduce) the size of its workforce to reflect demand at any given time. As such, workers' employment, security and rights are more restricted (Standing, 2011, p.6). The second aspect is job flexibility, which includes the ability of companies and organisations to alter the structure and even location of jobs, for example by deploying workers in targeted areas of the firm at short notice, again with little in the way of restrictions or cost. Linked to this is skills flexibility, which enables employers to hire the specific skills needed for a defined period. Finally,

wage flexibility allows companies and organisations to quickly adjust (and, once again, especially to reduce) the price of labour in response to demand and the economic situation (*ibid.*).

The dismantling of these 'obstacles' effectively places the resulting precariousness on the shoulders of employees and, therefore, their dependents. However, insecurity is portrayed as a necessary risk, based on the rationale that businesses are more likely to create jobs in the peace of mind that adapting the size of workforce according to demand will require minimal fuss or expense (Standing, 2011, p.1). Logically, therefore, the same line of reasoning implies that disappointing economic performance or failure to bring down unemployment rates can be then attributed to insufficient flexibility within the employment market or to a sluggish pace of reform.

A key objective of the *Ich-AG* self-employment scheme was to steer jobless people away from the shadow economy — it also removed them from the status of unemployment. However, the stumbling block was a lack of sustainability, as the scheme produced a number of bankruptcies once the full monthly subsidies had expired, and, moreover, contributed to the problem of pseudo self-employment (*Scheinselbstständigkeit*) associated with the precariat (Butterwegge, 2005b, p.9). What is more, although the growth of low-paid, part-time work, mini-jobs and (sometimes bogus) self-employment eased unemployment figures, these modes of employment were usually liable for substantially reduced social security contributions or were even exempt altogether, both of which of course resulted in a drop in the amount of contributions-based revenue flowing into the social state (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.120).

The *Grundsicherung* (basic security benefit) introduced in the Hartz reform package was not only aimed at people who were unemployed; it also applied to individuals who were in work, but unable to get by on their low wages. Indeed, driving down the cost of labour was another objective of the reforms, and among the '*Aufstocker*' — the working poor in receipt of this top-up benefit — were many people who were in fact in regular full-time employment (Dörre, 2014, p.31). In addition, as the 'mini-jobs' were too low paid to attract tax or social contributions from the employee or employer, the *Aufstocker* payments essentially amounted to a state subsidy for low wages (*ibid.*). In 2005, Chancellor Schröder even went so far as to proudly declare to the World Economic Forum in Davos that Germany had 'built up one of the best low-wage sectors in



Europe' and praised the system in which job seekers would accept any type of reasonable work or else face sanctions (Bury *et.al.*, 2006, p.19).

In the past, to achieve the goal of economic efficiency and social justice, the Social Democrats had attempted to maximise competition in the commodity, services and capital markets while strengthening the rights of workers in the labour market. The emphasis had therefore been on the de-commodification of labour (Nachtwey, 2013, p. 237); in other words, that exit from the labour market (for example through unemployment) should incur minimal loss of income for an individual. But the pursuit of a flexible employment market — the priority of the SPD-Green coalition — is also concerned with the supply of labour. As a result, criticism is focused on the established system of welfare benefits on the grounds that it is too generous and that it therefore represents a disincentive to work, since 'work doesn't pay' (Butterwegge, 2005a, p.2). Consequently, the coalition's stance was that the labour market 'had to be treated more thoroughly as a market like all others'. For the SPD, this constituted a significant departure from the de-commodified labour market of traditional social democracy (Nachtwey, 2013, p.242).

Schröder announced that the government would 'be cutting state benefits, promoting individual responsibility, and demanding that every individual make greater efforts'. In other words, another characteristic of the 'activating' approach to welfare and the employment market was, in addition to the reduction in unemployment benefits and the far more stringent eligibility criteria, that the 'rights previously taken for granted' by the individual claimant would be contingent on fulfilling a range of responsibilities (Bowyer and Vail, 2011, p.688). For example, claimants were obliged to participate in training courses and other employability measures, or else be subject to benefits sanctions. This even led to discussion centring on whether aspects of the Hartz measures were even unconstitutional, particularly in light of Article 1 of the German Basic Law (human dignity) as well as Article 12 (occupational freedom)<sup>57</sup>.

The Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms therefore indicate that the SPD underwent a transformation in its concept of social justice. Nachtwey (2013, p.244) refers to a shift from prioritising the 'redistribution of market-generated primary wealth' and instead

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<sup>57</sup> Article 1 [Human dignity – Human rights – Legally binding force of basic rights] (1) 'Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.' Article 12 [Occupational freedom] (1) 'All Germans shall have the right freely to choose their occupation or profession, their place of work and their place of training. The practice of an occupation or profession may be regulated by or pursuant to a law.' (Deutscher Bundestag, 2012).

towards levelling entry to the market. As explained in Section 3.2, the productivist approach had focused on redistribution in the form of higher wages, social spending and expanded public services, which would in turn generate the 'productive side-effect' of stimulating economic demand. In this sense, the SPD's traditional redistributive model of welfare can be depicted as the 'vertical' tension between capital and labour. Conversely, the 'supply-side egalitarianism' that characterised SPD welfare policy from the late 1990s strove for fair access to a 'horizontal' market. Thus, the goal of equality of outcome was superseded by that of equality of participation (*ibid.*).

Although the SPD-Green coalition anticipated that the outcome of its institutional reforms combined with the 'activating' effect of job market re-commodification would be a significant decline in the unemployment rate, the reality was that unemployment rose to its highest post-war level by 2005 (5.29 million people). Economic growth stalled as austerity bit, while wages stagnated. Between 2003 and 2007, corporate profits rose by 37%, compared to a 4% increase in wages. By 2007, wages for the lowest paid quarter had actually dropped by 14% since 1995 (Anderson, 2009, p.21). Related to this was a further enduring outcome of the employment market reforms, namely the problem of poverty despite work, also fuelled by the growing number of people in precarious employment conditions.

All in all, the German workforce were confronted with the insecurity of the 'flexible' employment market and the ever-present threat of unemployment. Furthermore, the government had wasted no opportunity to emphasise the necessity of its labour and welfare reforms if *Standort* Germany were to remain competitive in the global economy. Therefore, following the reasoning set out by Kitschelt in Section Two, it could be anticipated that employees, motivated by anxiety to protect their increasingly vulnerable jobs, would prioritise the economic wellbeing of the employer over the interests of their socio-economic class, and specifically favour policies offering less redistribution and less public sector provision. But was this really the case?

### **3.4.1. Perceptions of the Welfare State**

Research into perceptions of the welfare state has revealed strikingly similar attitudes in the eastern and western regions of Germany (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007). In 1994, Germans were asked whether or not they concurred with the following statement on the scope of the state:

*'The state must ensure that people still have a decent living even if they are sick, destitute, unemployed or old'. (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.134)*

A considerable 89% of westerners and over 91% of easterners agreed that the state should act upon these responsibilities. Ten years later, following the implementation of the Hartz reforms and rising unemployment, overall support for the statement remained quite resilient (ca. 87%) in both regions. In the western states, a solid 89% of workers and 87% of unemployed people continued to hold this view, while support was even stronger among eastern workers (91%) and the unemployed (96%). The results therefore show that although there has been a slight decline, the overwhelming majority of the German population endorsed state provision of a decent livelihood for the sick, destitute, jobless and elderly (*ibid.*). A second statement concerned the extent of state intervention:

*'The state must ensure that everybody has work and that prices remain stable, even if that means restricting the freedom of employers'. (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.134)*

This concept of state activity also met with solid support: In 1994, 69.8% of the general population in the West and 84.9% in the East agreed with this position, and ten years later, despite an overall decrease, the clear majority continued to identify with an interventionist approach (over 64% and 73% respectively). Once again, particularly strong support was found among workers in both the West and East (74% and 74.5%) and among the unemployed (71.7% and 92%) (*ibid.*).

**Table 3.1 Attitudes towards the welfare state 1994-2004**  
(Based on Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.134)

Scope and activity of the welfare state	West		East		
	1994	2004	1994	2004	
'The state must ensure that people still have a decent living even if they are sick, destitute, unemployed or old.'	Overall population	89.0	87.7	91.3	87.0
	Workers	91.1	89.3	99.1	91.0
	Unemployed	93.0	87.0	98.6	96.1
'The state must ensure that everybody has work and that prices remain stable, even if that means restricting the freedom of employers.'	Overall population	69.8	64.3	84.9	77.3
	Workers	79.1	74.0	87.3	74.5
	Unemployed	82.4	71.7	92.9	92.0

The strength of support for both the scope and activity of the welfare state demonstrates the existence of ongoing concerns about social security and therefore the fulfilment of basic needs. In addition, the particularly strong endorsement of state welfare provision among workers and among the unemployed across both regions of Germany highlight the influence of socio-economic class on attitudes towards redistribution.

These findings are particularly relevant because despite the economic challenges of deindustrialisation and unemployment, the attitudes towards the welfare state confirm continuing and robust support for redistributive policies. This is especially the case among workers, who, it has been suggested, would be the group most anxious to create the right business-friendly conditions for the protection of their job. Moreover, even though the Hartz reforms resulted in an increase in the number of working poor forced to top up their low income with benefits, Agenda 2010 had been driven by strident rhetoric that stressed the need to make work 'pay'. The rhetoric also emphasised the need to end the 'German sickness' of relying on other people to 'pick up the tab' for the welfare state and the cost of regulated employment conditions<sup>58</sup>. Dörre argues that recipients of Hartz IV, subjected to bureaucratic scrutiny of their private sphere and extreme economic hardship, effectively became separated from the rest of society, thus earning 'collective disapproval' (Dörre, 2014, p.44)<sup>59</sup>.

The employment market reforms and their consequences fuelled concerns about the systematic dismantling of Germany's social welfare system, as well as fears regarding the prospect of individual social decline (*sozialer Abstieg*): 'Not only has social inequality increased, social uncertainty has also become widespread' (Seppmann, 2006). Given the enduring demand for welfare and the expectations of the state to provide this security, Wiesendahl (2004, p.4) attributes public disquiet about Agenda 2010 not only to scepticism regarding its effectiveness, but also to concerns that the reforms would in fact worsen social injustice. The continued solidarity with the sick, elderly, destitute and unemployed, together with the endorsement of prioritising work for all and general price stability showed that these anxieties concerned society as a whole, and were therefore not only based on individual needs and interests. Wiesendahl (*ibid.*) therefore regards such attitudes towards the welfare state as

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<sup>58</sup> Economist Thomas Straubhaar in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 August 2012, cited in Dörre, 2014, p.7.

<sup>59</sup> Dörre (2014, p.44) also argues that the status of 'Hartz IV recipient' fuels discrimination, since joblessness and precarious employment have become deemed 'discreditable'.

evidence that citizens 'want to live in a country that values social security and not in a country that rewards personal risk provision'. As such, the reforms placed the issue of poverty at centre stage in political debate (Bowyer and Vail, 2011, p.689). The implications for the relationship between socio-economic class and party political voting are now explored in the next section, which concentrates on class-based electoral support for the SPD and the PDS/Left Party.

### 3.5. Class Voting: The SPD and the PDS in Eastern and Western Germany

This chapter begins to consider the significance of class voting and public attitudes towards the welfare state in relation to electoral outcomes. The focus is concentrated on two parties: the SPD and the PDS/Left Party since the aim is to establish the extent of change in class-based electoral support. The Bundestag election results for both parties are broken down to reflect voting patterns by occupational group, including the unemployed, over time.

The results are shown separately for the eastern and western states. This is particularly important in the case of the Left Party, given the East-West disparity in electoral support for its predecessor, the PDS. The significance of class voting is also revealed by data depicting the tendency of workers in the eastern and western states to vote for either party. It is here that a striking relationship emerges between the demise of workers' support for the SPD and the corresponding growth in working class support for the Left Party.

**Table 3.2: Bundestag results (percentage share of second vote) for the SPD and PDS/Left Party**

<b>Bundestag Election</b>	<b>SPD East<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>SPD West<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>SPD Nationwide</b>	<b>PDS/Left Party East<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>PDS/Left Party West<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>PDS/Left Party, Nationwide</b>
<b>1994</b>	31.5	37.5	36.4	19.8	1.0	4.4
<b>1998</b>	35.1	42.3	40.9	21.8	1.2	5.1
<b>2002</b>	39.7	38.3	38.5	16.9	1.1	4.0
<b>2005</b>	30.4	35.1	34.3	25.3	4.9	8.7
<b>2009</b>	17.9	24.1	23.0	28.5	8.3	11.9

<sup>1</sup> Western federal states including West Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> Eastern federal states including East Berlin (election.de)

The Bundestag election results shown above in Table 3.2 provide a general impression of support for the SPD and the PDS/Left Party, broken down into the western and

eastern regions and for Germany as a whole. Focusing on the eastern states first, it is clear that the SPD's highest level of support in the region steadily climbed to reach a peak (39.7%) in 2002. However, the 2002 election took place against a set of circumstances that bolstered the popularity of the SPD in the eastern *Länder*<sup>60</sup>. Following 2002, though, there was a clear downward trajectory in the SPD vote, with support collapsing to below 20% in 2009. The PDS/Left Party on the other hand saw a steady increase in its share of the vote, marred only by the significant drop to 16.9% in 2002 (again, the contributory factors are discussed in Chapter One). By 2005, in the first general election following the introduction of the Hartz reforms, the PDS/Left Party vote not only recovered from this slump but also exceeded all previous results; in 2009 the Left Party became the second largest party in the eastern states by a comfortable measure.

Electoral support for the SPD in the western states echoes the pattern nationwide. The results show that support for the SPD peaked in 1998 (when the SPD ended the sixteen-year run of CDU-led government and entered into coalition with the Greens). Yet again, it was in 2005 that voter share declined. Up until that year, voter share for the PDS had been negligible in the western states and across the entire country, which was a significant weakness for the party, given that western voters accounted for the majority of the electorate nationwide. But in 2005 the share of the vote increased to just under 5% in the western states and nationally to 8.7%.

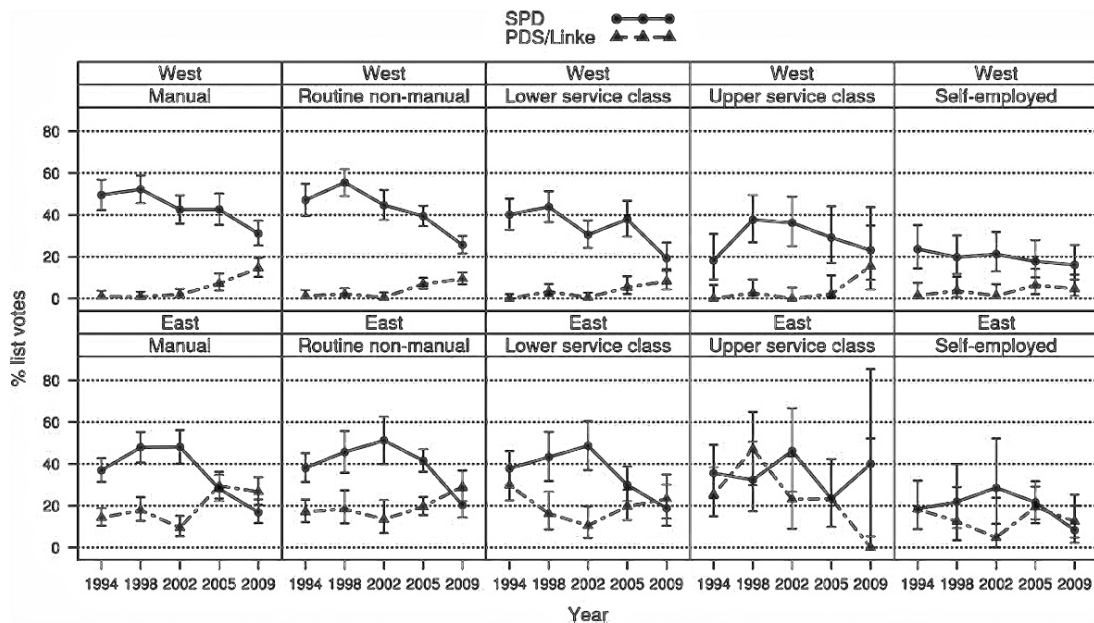
Looking at the overall Bundestag election results, the relationship between the voter share of these two parties begins to emerge. In 2005 the SPD suffered a substantial decline in support in both regions, while the PDS/Left Party share significantly increased. Furthermore, PDS success (measured in terms of clearing the five per cent electoral threshold) had until that point been limited to the East. But by 2005, in partnership with the newly emerged WASG, it had become a force in the western states, too, subsequently gaining seats in western regional parliaments (e.g., Bremen 2007 and others in 2008) and further strengthening the nationwide vote in 2009.

However, these very general results do not yet establish any causal relationship to class voting specifically. To do this, the results need to be broken down further to reflect voting patterns by occupational group. Eiff and Rossteutscher (2011) analyse Bundestag election support for the SPD and PDS/Left Party in eastern and western

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<sup>60</sup> These included the huge emergency and clean-up operation as a result of the flooding of extensive areas in the East.

Germany. Figure 3.6 below presents the voting patterns for five occupational classes according to the schema outlined above in Section 3.4: manual workers, non-manual workers, lower service class, upper service class and the self-employed.



**Figure 3.6: The development of support for SPD and for PDS/Linke broken down by class in Bundestag elections 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005 and 2009** (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011, p.122)

*The service class*

The service class constituted an important source of votes for the SPD. In the eastern states, support among the lower service class grew steadily up to 2002, but then fell away sharply, even dropping below the level of support for the Left Party by 2009. The picture for the upper service class was more erratic, but it is notable that only among this occupational group did the SPD manage to buck the downward trend and even recover its support; just over 20% of the upper service class voted for the SPD in 2005 but this figure rose to approximately 40% in 2009. In the western states, the pattern was similar for both lower and upper service classes; since 1998 SPD support ebbed away among these groups.

For the PDS/Left Party, a rather differentiated picture emerges of support from the service classes. In 1994, both lower and upper groups constituted the greatest source of votes for the PDS. Although support had fallen among the lower service class by the next election, it increased sharply among the upper service class. So far then, support



from these occupational groups conforms to the classification of the PDS as a party of eastern interests, and in particular those of (former) administrators and officials employed in the GDR. Following a drop in support in 2002, which, as noted above, was a particularly disastrous year for the party across the board, voter share among the lower service class did make up some ground and continued to grow. However, the party did not fare as well among the upper service class; indeed, this occupational group represented the most substantial loss of support suffered by the PDS/Left Party in 2009. Overall, service class voter share failed to recover to the levels recorded in the early to mid-1990s. In the western states, the trend was similar across the two service class groups. After receiving only minimal support throughout the 1990s and in 2002, the party saw its share increase in both 2005 and 2009, particularly among the upper service class.

#### *The self-employed*

Throughout the 1990s, SPD support among the self-employed was particularly weak in the eastern states and represented by far the smallest source of votes for the Social Democrats. Even in the 2002 election, when the SPD recorded its best performance among all occupational groups in the region, voter share remained decidedly modest. Furthermore, it slipped away again in 2005, and in 2009 SPD support among self-employed voters (replicating the pattern of the lower service class) was weaker than that of the Left Party. In the western states, although the self-employed accounted for a greater share of the SPD vote overall, support remained quite flat and tailed off, albeit only slightly from 2005 onwards.

From the 1990s through to 2002, the PDS fared steadily worse among the self-employed in the eastern states. Even the overall recovery in 2005 was unable to boost the party's voter share among this occupational group to above 20% and the support received in the early 1990s. Furthermore, this modest level of support then declined even more in 2009. Together with the upper service class, the self-employed therefore represent the Left Party's weakest source of electoral support. In the western states, while the minimal support during the PDS era is barely surprising, the Left Party too failed to attract a substantially greater share of votes from the self-employed and its modest increase in 2005 had even dropped away by 2009.

#### *The routine non-manual working class*

In the eastern states, after its postwar merger with the KPD and after forty years of the GDR, the SPD had to work hard to re-establish itself as a workers' party. It embarked

on this process of renewal as the extent of the social and economic realities of unification were materialising (Nachtwey and Spier, 2005, p.129). Despite the absence of a traditional alignment to the SPD, the routine manual working class became a key voter group (around 50%) for the Social Democrats. However, repeating the pattern that emerged across all occupational groups, support fell in 2005, returning to a level comparable to that of 1994. By 2009 the SPD's share of the non-manual working class vote had fallen by more than half. In the western states, support among this occupational group was far more established, and was even further strengthened during the 1990s. Support then rose to well over 50% (the largest share among all occupational groups) in the year that the SPD formed the federal government with the Greens, but then declined steadily, with a marked decrease to just over 20% by 2009. Thus in both regions of Germany, the SPD saw its support from this important group halve over a period of fifteen years.

PDS support from eastern routine non-manual workers in the 1990s was modest, especially when compared to that of the upper service class. This contrast can be regarded as a symptom of the 'disrupted' class cleavage in the GDR (see Section 3.2). Even by 2005, voter share among this group had barely risen above levels in the initial post-unification period. It was not until 2009 that Left Party votes from routine non-manual workers exceeded votes for the SPD. In the western states, the pattern closely resembles that of the lower service class, with a minimal share of the vote until 2005. From this point, the party's support among routine non-manual workers climbed steadily. However, even though the voter share does not approach that of the SPD in the western states, the key point is that in both regions, support noticeably falls away from the SPD as it increases for the PDS/Left Party.

#### *The manual working class*

In the eastern states, the SPD managed to strengthen voter share among the manual working class in the 1990s and retain its support at around 50% until 2002. The 2005 election produced a collapse in this group's vote for the Social Democrats, with the share (just under 30%) already at a comparable level to that of the PDS/Left Party. Subsequently, in 2009, the SPD managed to attract less than 20% of manual working class voters. The pattern in the western states is similar to that of the routine non-manual working class, although the overall decline over the fifteen-year period is less severe than for the latter occupational group.

PDS support among eastern manual workers was characterised by marked fluctuations. Voter share remained below 20% throughout the 1990s, reaching a low in 2002. However, the 2005 election was once again the turning point; PDS support soared among eastern manual workers, first matching and then exceeding the voter share of the SPD. In the western states, the trajectory is similar to that recorded for the routine non-manual working class, but with a stronger performance in the 2005 election and continued growth in 2009. Most significantly, there is once again evidence of an inverse relationship between manual worker support for the SPD and Left Party.

### *The unemployed*

In addition to these occupational groups, it is also naturally important to consider the voting patterns of unemployed electorate. In the prewar era, the SPD had not formed a particularly strong relationship to the unemployed; rather, it was the communist KPD that counted this group among its key support, along with the precariously employed of the time, such as casual labour and migrant workers (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p. 130). In the postwar Federal Republic, however, during a period of low unemployment (and no realistic political challenge from the socialist left), the SPD succeeded in attracting the support of jobless voters; the Social Democrats averaged just under 50% of voter share among this group up until 1998. For the eastern states, post-unification dismantling of industry and jobs, along with the substantial westward migration, resulted in massive job losses. Although the SPD did not have a firmly established voter base in the eastern states, it nevertheless began to win the votes of the unemployed. However, Table 3.3 below shows that during the period of SPD-Green government (1998-2005) the Social Democrats lost substantial electoral support among unemployed voters in both regions, particularly in the East, where voter share fell to just over a quarter.

Meanwhile, the PDS, with a voter share of only 2% (albeit higher than its average of just over 1%), clearly failed to make any significant inroads among the growing proportion of unemployed voters in the western states. Even in the eastern states, where support among the unemployed was stronger and the PDS far more established, the share was actually lower than average (for example, 21.6% of the total vote, compared to 17% of the unemployed vote). Yet as the SPD formed the federal government in 1998 and began rapidly losing popularity among jobless voters, the overall share of the vote for the PDS rose from 1.1% to 4.9% in the West and from 16.9% to 25.3% in the East in 2005. Unemployed voters accounted for a greater share of the labour force, too, increasing from 9.0% to 11.0% in the western states and from

15.7% to the very substantial figure of 20.6% in the eastern states in the eleven-year period to 2005. During this time, the Left's share of the vote among jobless voters had grown from 2% to 14% in the West and from 16% to 42% in the East. It is therefore clear beyond a doubt that unemployed voters became a key source of support for the PDS/Left Party in both regions.

**Table 3.3 Voting behaviour of the unemployed 1980–2005 (from 1990 West/East)**

	West								East				
	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
Unemployment as percentage of civilian labour force	3.8	9.1	8.9	7.2	9.0	10.3	8.5	11.0	n.a.	15.7	19.2	19.2	20.6
SPD share of vote among unemployed (%)	55	49	46	54	44	55	36	38	27	35	55	35	26
SPD share of total vote (%)	42.9	38.2	37.0	35.7	37.5	42.3	38.3	35.1	24.3	31.5	35.1	39.7	30.4
Left Party share of vote among unemployed (%)	–	–	–	n.a.	2	2	4	14	9	16	17	16	42
Left Party share of total vote (%)	–	–	–	0.3	1.0	1.2	1.1	4.9	11.1	19.8	21.6	16.9	25.3

(Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.132)

To sum up, the figures show that by 2009 SPD support from the manual working class had shrunk to around one-third of that group's total share of the vote. While it should not be overlooked that the working class (particularly manual workers) still remained the most significant voter base for the SPD, by 2005 onwards, workers in the West displayed only a marginally greater propensity to support the SPD than did any other class.

In the eastern states, between 2005 and 2009, the share of manual and routine non-manual working class votes for the PDS rose to exceed that of the votes for the SPD. As such, Elff and Rossteutscher identify evidence of class realignment of the PDS vote in the eastern states as the party, having lost the post-unification support of the upper service, increasingly become a party of working class people (i.e., within the routine manual and non-manual occupational groups), and the unemployed. In western Germany, the dwindling of these groups' support for the Social Democrats was countered by a significantly greater share of votes for the Left Party. Here it is also necessary not to underestimate the significance of the western vote, which is numerically far larger than that in the eastern states; indeed, as Chapter One has discussed, it is one of the reasons why the PDS prioritised and persisted with the strategy of establishing a voter base in the West.

The voting patterns illustrated above clearly point to the electoral significance of socio-economic class. What is more, the salience of class-based voting becomes even more pronounced when we consider the extent to which workers are more likely than the electorate as a whole to vote for the SPD and the PDS/Left Party. This question is addressed in Figure 3.7 below (Nachtwey and Spier, 2005, p.128), which maps working class voting patterns for the SPD in the western and eastern states (1977-2005 and 1990-2005 respectively) and for the PDS in the eastern states (1990-2005)<sup>61</sup>. This time, the results are not based on Bundestag election results, but on surveys of voting intentions carried out every two years. Although it is therefore more difficult to ascertain whether these intentions translated into actual votes, the benefit of biannual test of opinions is that it can minimise the potentially distorting influence of national election campaigns and the preoccupation with potential government coalitions.

The graph depicts the increased likelihood of the SPD and the PDS to gain the vote of blue-collar workers than of the population in general. If the figure is zero, this means that workers are no more or no less likely than the rest of the electorate to support the respective party. A value greater than zero indicates a greater propensity to vote for either the SPD or PDS, while a negative value means that the blue-collar voter is less likely than the general voting population to support either party (*ibid.*).

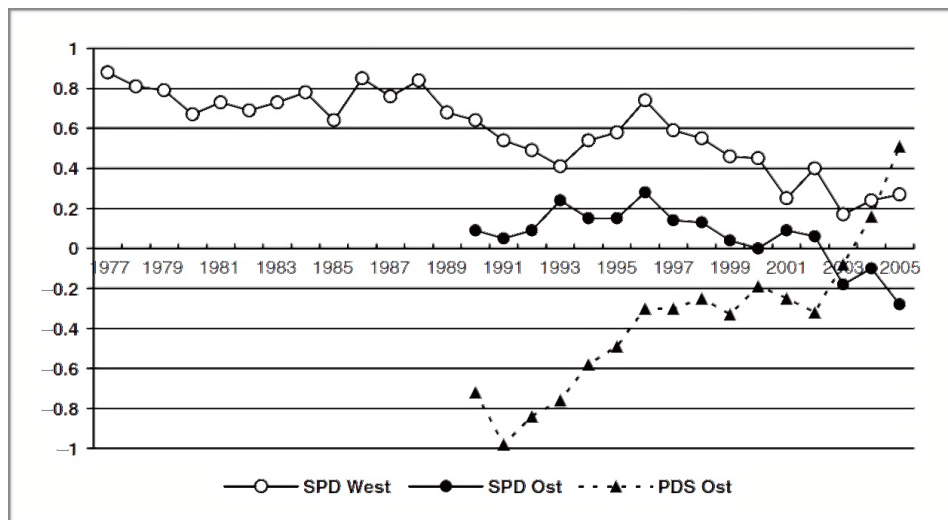
### The SPD

The graph depicts the very clear overall trend of diminishing working class support for the Social Democrats. In pre-unification West Germany the gradual decline had already begun towards the end of the SPD-FDP government (early 1980s). However, the inclination of working class voters to support the SPD reduced even further following unification and was not restored until the mid-late 1990s, during the waning popularity of the CDU-led government. Once in power, though, the SPD lost substantial working class support, so that by 2003 working class voters in the West became only slightly more inclined than the general population to support the party. In post-unification eastern Germany, historical factors (see Section 3.2) meant that the SPD had always struggled that bit harder to win working class votes, as shown in the values for the early 1990s. By 1991, the likelihood of greater electoral support from workers than from other voters was only minimal, most probably still a reflection of the SPD's ambivalent

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<sup>61</sup> Voting patterns are presented for blue-collar workers; there is no differentiation between routine non-manual workers and manual workers. Figures are not presented for the PDS in the western states, as the party's share of the vote in western Germany was so small until 2005. As the merger to form the Left Party took place in 2007, i.e., outside the range of this data, the party is still referred to as the PDS, its name at the time.

approach to unification. It was towards the end of the 1990s that eastern workers became increasingly inclined to vote for the SPD, only for this support, still lower in the eastern states than in the West, to fall away during the SPD-Green coalition. As such, the year 2003, which is when the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms were passed, marked something of a watershed for the SPD, in that blue-collar voters in the East actually became *less* likely than the overall electorate in that region to vote for the SPD.



**Figure 3.7: Workers' relative support for SPD and PDS, 1977-2005 (from 1990 West/East)**  
(Nachtwey and Spier, 2005, p.128)

### The PDS/Left Party

The contrast between PDS and SPD support is immediately striking. Initially, the party clearly lacked the support of blue-collar workers in the former GDR; indeed, the negative values shown for the 1990s and up to 2003 confirm that working class voters were less likely than the rest of the electorate to vote for the PDS. The historical factors explained in Section 3.2 as well as the growing inclination of workers to support the SPD account for this pattern, although the relationship between the PDS and the working class did improve around the turn of the century, with workers only marginally less likely than average to vote for the party. Once again, 2003 marks the turning point, as eastern blue-collar workers became more inclined to support the PDS than the SPD, with PDS support continuing to climb in 2005. An additional factor to consider at this point is age. Bowyer and Vail (2011, p.691ff.) observe that the PDS/Left Party attracted a disproportionately older voter base in this region and attribute this to the fact that much of the older eastern population was socialised in the former GDR. Conversely, it

is among the younger electorate that the PDS/Left Party finds its support in the western states. These voters are therefore of working age, even if they do not actively participate in the labour market. Figures 3.5 and 3.6 above illustrate that support for the PDS/Left grew among working class and unemployed voters in particular and therefore substantiate the conclusion of Bowyer and Vail (2011, p.699) that 'social class seems to be a stronger determinant of Left Party support in the West than in the East'.

## **Conclusion**

A degree of dealignment has taken place between the Social Democrats and the traditional working class. However, the cause of this dealignment is not the diminished relevance of the class cleavage; in fact, a new variant of the tension between capital and labour has materialised (Nachtwey & Spier, 2005, p.135), also fuelled by the emergence of new industries, increasingly deregulated patterns of employment and, as a result, the growth of the precariat. Growing numbers of people have found themselves facing social and financial insecurity, for example as a result of precarious work, pseudo self-employment and under-employment, as well as downward pressure on wages. Furthermore, redefining class according to modern types and patterns of employment demonstrates that although changes in its character have taken place, class itself nonetheless remains important.

The demand and support for state welfare measures such as healthcare provision, a social safety net and secure, liveable pensions, have remained robust across much of the population, and especially among workers and the unemployed. This contradicts the expectation that anxiety over job security generates preference for policies that favour business interests over redistribution and workers' rights. The '*Welfare Wende*' of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms encountered opposition from those eager to conserve the fundamentals of social democracy, such as a principled commitment to social ownership of industry and services, and a redistributive welfare system to promote social equality. The resulting opposition and protest to the reforms were expressions of the deep 'symbolic wounds' the reforms tore open.

In the absence of a party that unequivocally represents the preferences of a particular class, it is not the cleavage itself, but the *expression* of class-based divisions in society that becomes less pronounced. Consequently, a gap opened up on the demand side of

Germany's party system for a party with a clearly pro-welfare programme and that articulated concerns about social justice (Kitschelt 2004). As such, Bowyer and Vail (2011, p.686) consider that support for the Left Party is based not just on established ideological extremism, or a bleak view of the economy in general, but on convictions concerning economic equality and what the government should do to alleviate it.

The Case Study of the Left Party in Bremen will therefore concentrate on the following themes to determine the extent that the class cleavage explains the electoral breakthrough of the party:

*A clearly defined and articulated class cleavage:* As a result of deindustrialisation, there is a growing low-paid service sector accompanied by a rise in precarious work. Consequently, the problem of poverty despite work intensifies. Such developments support this chapter's argument that there are clear divisions in social-economic class, defined according to conditions of employment. Furthermore, opposition to the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms is mobilised around the capital-labour cleavage.

*Class-based electoral support for Left Party:* Traditionally there has been strong class-based support for the SPD. However, following the implementation of Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms, a degree of dealignment from the SPD has taken place along class lines. It is expected that this dealignment is particularly noticeable in working-class neighbourhoods where SPD is traditionally high. Conversely, it is anticipated that a partial realignment towards the Left Party has occurred, with particularly strong evidence of this trend found in working-class SPD strongholds.



# Chapter 4: Bremen Case Study

## Introduction

This research is concerned with identifying the relative strengths of two explanatory frameworks, Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory, in accounting for the success of the Left Party in Germany's western states. Chapter One's historical account of the PDS/Left Party in Germany's western states has outlined the strategy of establishing a voter base in the western states and also outlined the party's three key policy areas of social justice, eastern interests and peace. It has also explained the significance of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms that led to the creation of the Left Party. Chapters Two and Three have introduced the two theoretical approaches of Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory and placed both in the context of the German party political system. The task of the current chapter is to bring together these themes and put the explanatory frameworks to the test in a case study of the Left Party in the city-state of Bremen. Initial conclusions are drawn about the ability of these theories to explain the eventual success of the Left Party there.

To set the scene, Section 4.1 begins with a contextual portrayal of Bremen's structural, economic and political character. Long before the socio-economic and political consequences of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms took effect, budgetary crisis, poverty and unemployment had already become established problems in this staunchly Social-Democratic city-state. In fact, it is the combination of persistent socio-economic challenge and uninterrupted SPD governance that provides such an interesting context for the research: given the long-term nature of Bremen's financial and social problems and the Social-Democratic political tradition, what were the transformations that took place to facilitate the Left Party's breakthrough success in 2007?

Against this background, Section 4.2 then turns its attention to the performance of the Left Party itself. Throughout the legislative periods 1999 to 2007, the SPD governed in coalition with the CDU and oversaw the major restructuring of Bremen's economy and industry, as well as the Hartz reforms introduced by the SPD-Green federal government in 2004. The section is structured into two parts, starting with the PDS and the Bürgerschaft elections in 1999 and 2003, in other words before the party formed the alliance with the WASG. Despite Bremen's social and economic difficulties and the

hopes of the national leadership, the PDS remained unable to make any convincing impact in the state's regional elections. Local issues and political constellations specific to Bremen, as well as the general challenges facing the PDS in the western states, all contributed to this underwhelming performance. The second part turns to the 2007 election. By now, considerable change had taken place at a national level, not least in the implementation of the Hartz employment and welfare measures. The Left Party had also already gained seats in the Bundestag, although it had yet to enter a single western parliament. This section identifies the major election issues of 2007 and identifies the Left Party's main campaign focus and objectives. The final part sets out the election results for the three centre-left parties, ahead of further analysis in Section 4.3.

Section 4.3 analyses the theoretical frameworks in context, beginning with Cartel Theory (4.3.1). The key areas identified in Chapter Two — a narrowed policy supply and an internal organisation characterised by a parliamentary focus and ascendant party in central office — form the basis of the Cartel Theory analysis. Beginning with a closer examination of the policy scope offered at the time of the 2007 election, the chapter looks within the Left Party itself to discover whether evidence exists of efforts to consciously modify policy supply in order to gain power. Focusing on organisational traits, the study considers whether indicators such as efforts to influence candidate selection and campaign focus support Cartel Theory's prediction of a power shift from the party basis towards the party leadership.

Section 4.3.2 places Social Cleavage Theory in the context of Bremen. It explores evidence that could support the themes identified in Chapter Three: a clearly defined and expressed class cleavage and evidence of class-based electoral support for the Left Party. As a collective identity is required for the expression of a social cleavage, the section begins with an account of the protests that sprang up as a consequence of the Hartz measures. The series of demonstrations, which came to be held on a regular basis on the Market Square (and in fact still take place today), provided a space for public protest for participants who were members of political parties, supporters/members of social movements or simply individuals compelled to voice and share their dissent. The research examines the social and political character of these protests, in relation to the actors, the issues and the class-based language used to articulate the objections and demands. To determine the extent to which the Left Party's success in Bremen could be explained in terms of class voting, the study then analyses the voting patterns in the 2007 Bürgerschaft election according to factors such as political

tradition and socio-economic class, and looks for evidence of class-based dealignment and realignment, particularly in SPD-voting, working-class districts.

### **Methodology**

A variety of resources useful for the investigation of both frameworks was readily available. Data obtained from Bremen's State Statistics Office (Statistisches Landesamt) provided extensive information (tables and maps) on structural voting patterns, for example according to age, employment status and occupation, as well as statistics relating to income and employment, including at the most local level. The data was used to identify patterns in Left Party electoral support and subsequently to support the analysis of class-based voting patterns. Analysis of the election data pointed to a marked increase in Left Party support among the unemployed, workers and trade union members. Meanwhile, data relating to the political character of individual districts revealed that the support was concentrated in SPD strongholds, but also in certain Green strongholds.

Bremen also has an Archive of Social Movements, which proved a useful starting point from which to build a picture of the groups that organised the first Monday demonstrations against Hartz IV. For every year that the protests have been held, the *Initiative Bremer Montagsdemo* group has published an online 'annual' containing collected press cuttings, photographs and flyers and transcripts of speeches by demonstrators. This documentation proved an invaluable resource for understanding the changes and developments in the framing and mobilisation of protest. It emerged that the Hartz demonstrations were indeed framed in class terms, but also that it was not until later, and in particular the growing influence of the WASG and trade unions, that Bremen's Monday demonstrations were cast in clearly *leftist* class-based terms. Furthermore, this data also revealed several examples of the challenges confronting the PDS in the western states, including perceived 'easterness', weak ties to extra-parliamentary movements and the perennial tension between office-seeking and opposition.

A key aspect of Cartel Theory explored in the study related to leadership and organisation. Resources relating to these themes appeared more difficult to come by, as they would require an 'insider's view' of the Left Party. However, a search of social

movements' websites led to an online discussion forum, 'OFFO'<sup>62</sup>. Established by WASG members prior to the merger with the PDS, OFFO featured in-depth discussion topics relating not only to political issues in Bremen, but also the WASG-PDS cooperation and, later, the practices and policies of the Bremen Left Party. Non-members, including local activists critical of the Left Party's perceived parliamentarianism and reformist approach also contributed to the forum. Most interestingly for the research, discussions focused on transformations within the party, for example concerning leadership, democracy and party orientation; debates also addressed policy and the relationship to the SPD. Through the contributions, some supportive, others highly critical of the new alliance, it was possible to gain valuable insights into themes identified in Cartel Theory. Signs of an increasingly parliamentary focus emerged, as did indications of central party intervention in the election campaign and possible restriction of the policy offer.

Therefore, qualitative analysis of the election data and the wealth of locally-based resources enabled inferences to be made about both Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory. Consequently, the aim of the original, empirical aspect of the study was to obtain and qualitatively analyse supplementary evidence for its ability to support the key themes of each explanatory framework.

There were two main considerations that determined sample selection and the research design. First, a central aspect of the thesis concerns the electoral breakthrough of the Left Party, which in the case of Bremen was 2007. Secondly, while aspects of the Cartel Theory framework require evidence from party members (e.g. relating to leadership and organisation), other aspects of the investigation would benefit from evidence from ordinary voters, since members would not account for the party's breakthrough. Therefore, how would it be possible to obtain responses from both members *and* non-members who, in addition, were able to recall the reason for their voting decision in 2007?

To fulfil these very specific criteria, a snowball sample approach was used. Initial contact was made with the Left Party in Bremen, as well as with social movements and organisations known to share policy interests/positions with the party, such as the Bremen Peace Forum, local trade union branches and the Chamber of Labour. In each

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<sup>62</sup> '*Offene linke bremer Diskussionsforum*'. In December 2007, after a series of conflicts with the forum, the Left Party removed the OFFO link from its website. See '*Offener Brief an den Landesvorstand der Partei DIE LINKE*' (Antikapitalistische Linke, 2008). Sadly, the number of users gradually declined after the merger; today the OFFO forum has closed.

case, the contact person was made aware of the aims of the research and invited to distribute an online self-administered questionnaire ('Questionnaire 1'<sup>63</sup>). The contact person at the Left Party agreed to place a link to the questionnaire on the party's social media page. Contact persons from the social movements and groups were unable to publish a link on the website, as they were obliged to maintain party neutrality, even when the organisation had campaigned alongside the Left Party on specific issues. However, it was possible to distribute the link to associates in an 'unofficial' capacity.

Questionnaire 1 consisted of a series of closed questions, with the option of entering additional comments, and was designed to elicit responses relating to both Social Cleavage Theory, and aspects of Cartel Theory (principally policy competition, office-seeking and opposition). Questions were worded carefully to avoid reference to the theories, or use of contentious/ill-defined terms, such as 'working class' (see Appendix 1).

However, questions requiring the response of members only, for instance those relating to leadership and organisation aspects of Cartel Theory, had yet to be addressed. Therefore, a second set of questions was compiled with the goal of gathering more focused and in-depth evidence in a structured interview. The aims and scope were explained to the (different) contact person at the party office, with the request for three to five remote interviews<sup>64</sup>, ideally to include the grassroots party membership. A list of themes and anticipated questions was forwarded to the contact person. At this point there was a palpable reluctance to consent to the interviews; instead the contact person offered to distribute the interview questions as a written, self-administered questionnaire to be returned by email. This approach was not ideal, as the questions were designed to elicit detailed information, and it was unrealistic to expect a respondent to spend time writing lengthy, in-depth answers to each question; furthermore, this method precluded clarification and follow-up questions. Nevertheless, it was agreed to gather the evidence in this manner and to distribute Questionnaire 2<sup>65</sup>. This time, the questionnaire consisted of a series of open questions relating to Cartel Theory. The questions were designed to be answered by any type of member and as before avoided use of theoretical terminology (see Appendix 2).

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<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 1 for the English-language version of Questionnaire 1. The language of the distributed questionnaire and the responses was German.

<sup>64</sup> Both telephone and Skype were offered.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix 2 for the English-language version of Questionnaire 2. The language of the distributed questionnaire and the responses was German.

The number of responses received for Questionnaire 1 was twenty-three. Although clearly not statistically significant, the data yielded some very useful evidence, particularly as respondents made frequent use of the comments fields to give more detailed answers and explanations. Questionnaire 2 received only one response with sufficiently elaborated answers. An inherent disadvantage of self-administered questionnaires is the potential for misunderstandings and dwindling interest/patience. Indeed, this may have contributed to Questionnaire 2's weak response rate. Nevertheless, the respondent to the second questionnaire actually provided several insights into key aspects of the study, including the relationship to social democracy, core policy themes and parliamentary focus.

Therefore, despite the low volume of responses, the qualitative data obtained through the questionnaire and accompanying anecdotal evidence provided some important insights to supplement the findings from the existing data and the conclusions of the study.

## 4.1. Bremen: Structural, Economic and Political Background

Bremen is a city-state (*Stadtstaat*) consisting of two municipalities, Bremen (City) and Bremerhaven<sup>66</sup>. Its status as a city-state carries both benefits and drawbacks. On the positive side, as a state in its own right, its autonomy over spending and decision-making is far greater than that of a city within a larger federal state (*Flächenland* or 'area state'). Also, without the additional layer of administration between itself and the federal government, the city-state is able to more rapidly access and implement federal programmes and funding (Plöger, 2008, p.9). However, even though the states are responsible for competences such as education, law enforcement, they do not possess their own tax-raising powers<sup>67</sup>, which means that although the federal states, including the three city-states, 'bear full responsibility for their expenditure, they are unable to raise taxes to cover any shortfalls in expenditure (or excess expenditure), which in times of slow economic growth therefore tend to be covered by borrowing' (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.61). As we will see, precisely this problem has had particularly severe consequences for Bremen. Moreover, the city-state is also responsible for fulfilling functions and services whose scope extends beyond the geographical limits and interests of the city itself (Plöger, 2008, p.4). For instance, Bremen's infrastructure, public services, higher education (all of which are competences devolved to the *Länder*) and its port are significant not only for the city-state, but also to the surrounding region, further afield across the country and even internationally.

On top of these significant financial responsibilities, the city-state faces a further yet related challenge in the form of suburbanisation (*ibid.*, p.2). The relocation of wealthier households to greener, quieter, more desirable outskirts of the city and even beyond has led also to the relocation of financial resources away from the central city, since income tax is based on the municipality of residence — the '*Steuerzerlegung nach dem Wohnortsprinzip*' (Spehr, 2007, p.132). For Bremen, higher earners moving away from the centre into the surrounding area, chiefly to the state of Lower Saxony, therefore represents a direct loss of income (*ibid.*, p.4). Even so, Bremen is still obliged to finance and carry out its functions both as a city and as a state. This is a challenge that

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<sup>66</sup> To avoid confusion, the city-state of Bremen is referred to as Bremen; the city of Bremen is referred to as Bremen City.

<sup>67</sup> Taxes are raised at federal level then distributed in varying proportions across the federation, the states and municipalities (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.61).

has to some degree also affected Germany's two other city-states but Bremen, the smallest of the three, has neither Berlin's capital city status, nor Hamburg's reputation as a 'global' city (Spehr, 2007, p.131). Ever since the tax ruling came into effect in the 1970s (*ibid.*, p.132), there has been a continuous and stark disparity in the relationship between Bremen's revenue and its expenditure obligations. Consequently, the city-state has experienced a serious and enduring budget problem, which was then exacerbated by a further restructuring of federal finances following unification (*ibid.*). The *Länderfinanzausgleich* (fiscal equalisation programme) has meant that while the eastern federal states (plus Berlin) receive a greater share of payments to assist with infrastructure development, the poorest western states, including Bremen, actually receive less funding (Green *et al.*, 2008, p.72).

#### **4.1.1. Democratic Institutions and Political Parties**

Bremen's *Landtag*, or federal state parliament, is known as the Bürgerschaft. Electoral law treats the state as two distinct electoral areas, Bremen City and Bremerhaven. Thus, while a party has to achieve at least five per cent of voter share in order to enter the Bürgerschaft as a parliamentary group, it is only necessary to do so in *either* municipal area<sup>68</sup>. In other words, a party could gain five per cent of the vote in Bremerhaven but only three per cent in Bremen City and still be represented in parliament. This clause has proven highly significant in Bremerhaven, where electoral participation is generally lower than that of Bremen City, and has contributed to fringe parties gaining representation in this area of the state (Probst, 1999, p.6). The lower voting turnout has been attributed to a sense of being treated as Bremen's 'poor relation', as well as scepticism regarding the main parties' interest in or commitment to tackling Bremerhaven's particularly acute social and economic problems (*ibid.*, p.7).

Politically, Bremen is dominated by the SPD. It is the only western state in which the Social Democrats have remained in power without interruption since 1946; during that time the party has managed to gain an absolute majority five times (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.18), which is quite an achievement in an electoral system based on proportional representation. Bremen is sometimes referred to in terms of its 'mini-electorate' (Probst, 2007, p.4). This characterisation alludes not only to Bremen's status as Germany's smallest federal state, but also to the fact that it is a type of 'laboratory for new developments in the party system' (*ibid.*). One reason for this is the favourable environment for small parties. It was in Bremen that the Greens first gained

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<sup>68</sup> See Bremen Verwaltung online: Wahlen im Land Bremen: 'Sperrklausel'.



representation in a regional parliament — a trajectory the PDS hoped to emulate in the West (Broughton, 2000, p.57). In addition, small right-wing parties such as the DVU and locally focused parties/alliances including Arbeit für Bremen (Jobs for Bremen) and Bürger in Wut (Enraged Citizens) have also managed to send deputies to the regional parliament. Secondly, Bremen's governing SPD has experimented with various coalition configurations, including the Grand Coalition with the CDU, the 'traffic light' coalition (SPD/FDP/Green) and the Red-Green coalition (Spehr, 2007, p.131).

Throughout the legislative periods 1999 to 2007, the SPD governed in coalition with the CDU and presided over the major restructuring of Bremen's economy and industry described below. The coalition also oversaw the implementation of the Hartz reforms introduced by the SPD-Green federal government in 2004. In the aftermath of the 2007 regional election and the Left Party's entry to Bremen's parliament, the SPD once again switched its coalition partner and entered into government with the Greens.

#### **4.1.2. Bremen's 'Restructuring'**

Bremen's port has traditionally dominated the state's industry and plays a vital role in the Germany's export-orientated economy (Plöger, 2008, p.1). However, from the mid 1970s, shipbuilding in general experienced a decline that would eventually result in the loss of two major shipbuilding companies in Bremen (AG Weser in 1984 and later Bremer Vulkan AG). As a result, Bremen became one of the regions with the highest levels of unemployment in western Germany (Probst, 2007, p.22).

As a consequence, Bremen's harbour industry underwent significant structural change. The orientation shifted to modern logistics and transport, which were more attractive in terms of added value than the old labour-intensive shipbuilding industry. Yet the outcome of this shift was an increase in unemployment and impoverishment, as well as a resulting shortfall in income: 'This successful economic function has not been reflected locally, either in terms of increased tax revenue or in more jobs (...); it is a case of "jobless growth"' (Spehr, 2007, p.132). As jobs in Bremen's traditional economy vanished forever, a large number of low-skilled workers, many of them with a migrant background, found themselves 'being threatened with permanent exclusion from the formal labour market' (Plöger, 2008, p.11).

By the late 1980s, Bremen was suffering a growing budget crisis, prompting the SPD-led government to make a claim at the Constitutional Court for compensation to take into account the city-state's fulfilment of the higher (in other words federal state) functions outlined above (*ibid.*, p.5). In 1991, the state won compensation of €8.5 billion, which included financial assistance from other states, spread across two five-year periods, in instalments of between €500 and €900 million (Spehr, 2007, p.129). However, the federal government linked financial assistance to stringent budgetary measures. The primary objective of the package was debt reduction, although it was agreed that savings on servicing debt could be used for investment (Plöger, 2008, p.5). Bremen's President Henning Scherf (SPD) accepted the terms and described the SPD-CDU government as 'the restructuring coalition' (Thomsen, 1999). However, the reverse side of the coin was that Bremen's per capita debt soared, becoming the highest in any of Germany's states (*ibid.*). The coalition used the funds for ongoing expenditure commitments and interest payments, but part of the agreement was to freeze public spending in areas such as social services, jobs and education; by 2004, the level of public expenditure was nominally comparable to that of the previous decade. Not only did this amount to a significant reduction in public spending, it also resulted in a cut in the number of public sector employees (*ibid.*).

Following on from earlier measures introduced in the late 1980s to enhance the city's status as a centre for science and technology, Bremen's government embarked on a series of projects (Plöger, 2008, p.3). These were designed to develop new industry and business parks, to improve transport to the harbour and airport, to promote tourism both in the city centre and with the construction of new projects, as well as to prioritise research and development, focusing on existing industries and new research institutes (*ibid.*, p.5). Even Bremen University's academic focus was restructured, moving away from the social sciences and towards technology and the natural sciences (*ibid.*, p.4). While public spending froze, expenditure for 'restructuring investments' doubled (Spehr, 2007, p.129). However, the results were mixed, and some of the high-profile investments turned out to be financial flops, such as the Space Park, the Musical Theatre and the private International University (*ibid.*). Although the restructuring programme prioritised growth in the high-tech, high-skill sectors, it also envisaged job creation in the low-pay sector, for example retail and catering jobs at the Space Park, an ultimately ruinous venture that was supposed to rejuvenate the socially deprived neighbourhood of Gröpelingen (Plöger, 2008, p.9).

The government promised that the finance package would stimulate job creation and, very importantly, jobs paying enough to become liable for social security contributions. But by the 1999 state election, the number of jobs qualifying for social security contributions had actually fallen by approximately 8,000 (Thomsen 1999). In the meantime, unemployment stood at 15.6%, a rate comparable with that in some eastern states (Probst, 1999, p.2). As a consequence, the proportion of Bremen's residents receiving social welfare payments also increased and was among the highest nationally in relation to the population. A further knock-on effect was that as unemployment rose, so did the problem of people chasing jobs for which they were over-qualified, thus creating even greater barriers to employment for those with few or no qualifications or skills (Plöger, 2008, p.9). Debt and a shortfall in income went hand in hand with a series of privatisation measures. Substantial sections of Bremen's housing and infrastructure, including the *Stadtwerke* public utilities company, waste disposal and water, had been sold off, often at bargain prices (Thomsen 1999). All in all, the coalition 'practised redistribution from bottom to top in enormous proportions' (Spehr, 2007, p.129).

Even more ambitious measures were proposed under the SPD. One such concept was a reform of 'task fulfilment'. The plans were submitted on behalf of a state steering group and envisaged the functions of the state being reduced to the very barest legal minimum, namely law enforcement, justice and financial administration (Eisermann and Spehr, 2007). This so-called 'night watchman' state would act as a manager/coordinator of the public services 'market' and contract out all other services to private enterprises or to the non-profit sector (*Disput*, 2003)<sup>69</sup>. A further proposal envisaged the creation of a special economic zone (Eisermann and Spehr, 2007). Under this scheme, Bremen would have once again become a 'test laboratory' (Rupp, 2003); this time for a programme of deregulation and tax incentives designed to attract businesses with low costs and to stimulate the creation of (cheap) jobs. Had it been approved, the plan would have swept aside employment rights and the nationally established *Tarifautonomie* (collective bargaining) in a bid to dismantle legal protection, which was now renamed 'bureaucracy' (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2010).

In 2002, the Bremen Chamber of Labour (Arbeitnehmerkammer Bremen - ANK) published its first 'Poverty Report'. The ANK took as its point of reference a report published by the federal government a year earlier, which examined poverty and wealth

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<sup>69</sup> This '*Neuordnung der Aufgabenwahrnehmung*' would be based on a similar model to that of the 'no-frills' council or so-called 'Easy Council'.

across the whole of Germany. The ANK was disappointed that Bremen's government had refused to publish a similar report of its own (Jakubowski and Arbeitnehmerkammer Bremen, 2002, p.9), so in the absence of an official report, the task fell to the ANK. The report identified unemployment as a key cause of poverty. Not only was joblessness stubbornly high, but the number of long-term unemployed was also increasing. What is more, the responsibility for implementing social welfare support (*Sozialhilfe*), was placing the local municipality mounting financial pressure (*ibid.*, p.16). The report's key finding was that any realistic chance of solving poverty was its recognition as a social problem within society — not a purely economic one (*ibid.*, p.13). The following year, the ANK published another report, this time with the spotlight on the growing problem of in-work poverty<sup>70</sup>. This time, the report identified a growing awareness of poverty in Bremen.

*(B)eyond the 'official politics' there is another level of politics that is concerned about and with the poverty situation in our city, and which wants to know more and do more about it (and) to tackle it not just as an individual problem but as a social problem. (Jakubowski and Arbeitnehmerkammer Bremen, 2003, p.7)*

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<sup>70</sup> In subsequent years leading up to the 2007 election, the ANK's reports examined (inter alia) poverty and health (2004), poverty and education (2005), the working poor (2006) and the social division of the city (2007).

## 4.2 The 2007 Bürgerschaft Election in Bremen

The 2007 Bürgerschaft election marked the turning point for the Left Party. But prior to this breakthrough, despite Bremen's economic and social challenges, the PDS had repeatedly demonstrated its inability to mobilise opposition to the policies and programmes of the SPD-led government. This section traces the PDS/Left Party's arduous path to the Bürgerschaft, beginning with the 1999 and 2003 elections. These earlier elections highlight the challenges facing the PDS in the western states (see Chapter One); furthermore, it is possible to discern early patterns in campaigning and voter share that would later become significant for the Left Party.

### 4.2.1. The PDS and the Bürgerschaft Elections 1999-2003

**Table 4.1. Election results for the PDS in Bremen Bürgerschaft elections 1995, 1999, 2003**

	PDS election results in Bremen 1995 – 2003 (%)		
	1995	1999	2003
Bremen City	2.37	3.13	1.78
Bremerhaven	1.43	1.61	1.08
Bremen (state)	2.37	2.90	1.67

Source: Probst et al. 2008, page 3.

#### The 1999 Election

The 1999 Bürgerschaft election was the first major test of the Grand Coalition government and its restructuring programme. At federal level, the first ever SPD-Green government had come to power just the previous year,<sup>71</sup> which might have raised expectations for a similar coalition in Bremen. However, Bremen's ruling SPD instead signalled its preference for continuing the partnership with the Christian Democrats for a second term (Broughton, 2000, p.56). One effect of this strategy and the subsequent dominance of the two largest parties was that smaller parties, including the PDS, were squeezed out and struggled to make a strong impression during the campaign.

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<sup>71</sup> Broughton (2000, p.51) also observes that the 1999 regional elections in several federal states were the first opportunity to assess the 'fallout' from the Third Way/*Neue Mitte*.

Nonetheless, undeterred by the disappointing outcome of the previous election in 1995<sup>72</sup>, the PDS entered the *Bürgerschaft* election campaign with a degree of optimism. According to the Secretary of the Bremen *Landesverband* (regional association), writing in an article for party members' magazine *Disput*, the PDS had been bolstered by an increase in its modest membership (from 30 to 150), some of whom enjoyed valuable connections to Bremen's social movements (Thomsen, 1999). On the other hand, he also acknowledged that it had been difficult to develop a strong profile on local themes during the past legislative period, despite Bremen's economic and social plight (*ibid.*). The article explained that in light of SPD and CDU public statements in favour of extending their coalition it was unlikely there would be a great tactical push among voters to bring about an alternative Red-Green coalition. The article also took the Greens to task on the grounds that during the traffic-light coalition they had supported privatisation, had not provided effective opposition from the left, and now appeared to be focused on 'seeking the favour of an increasingly right-wing SPD' (*ibid.*).

With no new Red-Green coalition on the cards, the PDS targeted Green strongholds, and especially voters disillusioned with the Greens' performance in national government (Probst, 1999, p.6). Despite its short time in office, the Red-Green federal government had disappointed particularly Green voters, who were dismayed at the (seemingly indefinite) postponement of the nuclear energy phase-out, the failed introduction of dual citizenship rights and, in particular, the stance on German military involvement in Kosovo. The PDS therefore planned to present itself as the genuine party of opposition and peace, and had already initiated anti-war protests through Bremen City and posted anti-war placards in traditionally Green-voting districts such as Östliche Vorstadt and Walle. In addition, the campaign hoped to appeal to political activists in the inner city, socially marginalised people in the suburbs, migrants (the party produced special materials on education and migrants' rights), as well as young and first-time voters. The party's weak organisation and resources, however, meant it relied on outside help from PDS groups in other states to produce and distribute the campaign materials (*ibid.*).

Despite the cautious optimism that the PDS may finally live up to expectations in the 'stronghold' of Bremen, the election results were again disappointing and the party still failed by some stretch to achieve five per cent in either Bremen City (3.1%) or Bremerhaven (1.6%) and was unable to gain a single seat the *Bürgerschaft*. However,

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<sup>72</sup> The PDS achieved just 2.37% of the vote in 1995.

while the party was unable to enter the state parliament, it did manage to gain some additional seats on local councils (*Beiräte*). The party had in fact won representation at this most local level of democracy in a number of neighbourhoods as early as 1995, with eight seats by 1999.

The PDS gained its local council seats in areas that were by no means characterised by socio-economic difficulties. *Östliche Vorstadt*, the district which consistently produced the strongest PDS vote, both in Beirat and parliamentary elections (and later for the Left Party, too) was a traditionally left-leaning Green stronghold, a middle class inner-city area popular with academics and artists. In fact, both *Östliche Vorstadt* and *Mitte*, also a key location of PDS/Left Party support, were ranked among the top fifty per cent of Bremen's high-income districts<sup>73</sup>. Of the districts with PDS Beirat seats in 1995, only *Walle* and *Vahr* were ranked in the lowest quarter of the income table (Muscheid and Strüßmann, 2011, p.7).

### **The 2003 Election**

In the run-up to the 2003 *Bürgerschaft* election, Bremen's SPD and CDU once again stated their intention to continue the Grand Coalition. Despite the increasing unpopularity of the SPD-led national government, it appeared that for Bremen's voters it was regional rather than national issues that prevailed, since approximately two-thirds of voters considered Bremen's politics more important than what was happening at federal level (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2003, p.1).

In spite of the persistent unemployment and social problems, PDS hopes for the election were decidedly cautious. The PDS feared that, unlike the SPD, its *Bürgerschaft* campaign would be hampered by the challenges facing the party at national level (*Disput*, 2003). In the previous year's General Election, the PDS had failed to achieve the five per cent required to form a parliamentary group; the PDS was therefore excluded from certain privileges and struggled to maintain its profile as a national party (see Chapter One).

Furthermore, the party had recently experienced a particularly bruising congress at Gera, where factional feuds had cast doubt over the future of the party's ability to be anything but an eastern regional party. Conflict over the new party programme prompted the exit of several members from the Bremen party. This not only further weakened the party organisation (Spehr, 2007, p.134), but also resulted in the loss of

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<sup>73</sup> Based on the number of residents liable for tax on incomes of over €125,000 per annum.

invaluable contacts with local social groups, including self-help organisations for the unemployed, especially in the poor districts in the west of the city. Precisely these types of neighbourhood later became strongholds for the WASG. As such, by 2003 it was evident that the PDS actually had a variety of promising sources of support in Bremen, but also failed to mobilise this potential (*ibid.*).

In the 2003 election, the SPD was able to strengthen its position as the largest party (see Table 4.1 above). However, given the lack of confidence in the governing parties' competence to effectively tackle the most pressing problems, especially unemployment, the success of the SPD was widely attributed primarily to more personal factors, namely the continued popularity of its incumbent lead candidate (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2003, p.2). The continued electoral success of the existing coalition left little room for the smaller parties, although both the right-wing law-and-order Schill Party and right-wing nationalist DVU outperformed the PDS, with the DVU once again securing a seat in Bremerhaven (Infratest dimap, 2003, p.18). The DVU lost votes in Bremen City but increased its share in Bremerhaven, a result that highlighted not only the cleft between the two municipalities, but also the persistent weakness of the PDS, despite campaigning on these very issues, to attract voters in an area particularly severely affected by unemployment and social problems.

To sum up, from the mid 1990s, the city-state of Bremen had been suffering the consequences of industrial decline. The transition to a high-tech, service-based sector was a traumatic one not only for the state's economy in general, but also for the many workers now facing long-term unemployment. The 'restructuring' programme was based on cuts and privatisation on the one hand, and expensive 'prestige' projects on the other, while politically, the SPD's commitment to continued cooperation with the CDU meant that there was little prospect of bringing about a substantial shift in policy or political direction. What is more, the SPD and Greens managed to increase their voter share, meaning that the 2003 election produced an *arithmetical* shift to the left on the political spectrum. According to Spehr (2007, p.127), this overall leftward trend would normally produce a move to the left in voter preferences among the centre-left parties themselves; in other words, the expectation would be for the PDS (i.e., a party to the left of the SPD) to profit from the electorate's inclination towards a more left-wing balance. The fact that the PDS actually *lost* ground compared to its 1999 result highlighted the problems within the party itself (*ibid.*, p.128). With centre-left voters broadly united behind the SPD, the PDS again failed to successfully challenge the Social Democrats from the left and mobilise voters dissatisfied with the austerity



programme. The Bürgerschaft election results 'showed once again that (the PDS) was unable to attract new voter groups' (Probst *et al.*, 2008, p.3).

#### **4.2.2. The 2007 Bürgerschaft election**

The mood in Bremen ahead of the 2007 Bürgerschaft election was generally a pessimistic one, and yet again it was the economic and jobs situation that were cause for concern. The *Tageszeitung* ('*Taz*') newspaper reported that while jobs were certainly scarce in the eastern states, Bremen too was especially hard-hit by unemployment: the official jobless rate at that time stood at over 13%, and over 19% in Bremerhaven. Furthermore, those still holding onto their jobs were under increasing pressure, either facing redundancy or the expectation they should work longer hours for the same pay. Protests against the Hartz reforms had also taken place in Bremen (*Tageszeitung*, 2004). The city-state still relied on subsidies from the federal government, despite the coalition's target of balancing Bremen's books by 2004, by the expiry of the subsidies fought for and won in the Constitutional Court. But the coalition failed to achieve this objective, even though it had implemented various cuts designed to save money. In fact, in 2006, it became necessary for Bremen to submit another claim to Karlsruhe in order to obtain further subsidies, while the deficit had risen to nearly 14 billion euro (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.58) Although some investments in tourism, the port and aerospace were broadly deemed a success, 76% of the Bremen electorate believed that the *Senat* (cabinet) had spent public money in an irresponsible manner (*ibid.*, p. 78). Most commonly criticised were the prestige projects, including the Space Park development, an undertaking which had met with objections not only from the opposition Greens, but also from businesses fearing that the already limited consumer spending power would be diverted away from the struggling centre (Probst, 2007, p. 24).

#### **Key Themes and Voter Priorities**

Voter confidence in the SPD and Greens to improve the situation in socially and economically deprived areas stood at 40% and 10% respectively (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.81). The Left Party (4%) criticised the track record of existing policy, claiming that it had failed to address the growing polarisation of Bremen's districts (DIE LINKE Bremen, 2007, p.8). While the wealth of some already well-appointed neighbourhoods had doubtless benefited from the growth within high-tech industries (such as aerospace), other areas, especially traditionally workers' districts, had instead become

workless neighbourhoods. On the one hand, Bremen had the highest proportion of millionaires in Germany in relation to its size; on the other hand it also had the highest proportion of welfare recipients (Probst, 2007, p.23). As one participant in this research observed: 'Bremen is [Germany's] most poverty-rich federal state'.

Ahead of the election<sup>74</sup>, Bremen's voters identified two important themes in the election, namely social justice (31%) and economic policy (30%). Employment policy was ranked third in the list of priorities, with 22% (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.47). However, Left Party, SPD and Green voters attached differing degrees of importance to these and other issues<sup>75</sup>. Although voters of all three parties prioritised social justice, the issue proved by far the most significant for Left Party voters (69%), followed by Green (39%) and then SPD voters (36%). Left Party voters also placed employment policy above economic policy (33% and 16% respectively) (*ibid.*).

As seen in the 2003 election, the SPD appeared to benefit from the tradition of social-democratic support in Bremen, as well as from the popularity of its lead candidate. These trends looked set to continue in 2007; SPD supporters cited party loyalty as their primary reason for voting (34%), slightly ahead of party competence (32%) and appeal of the leading candidate (31%). Conversely, Green and especially Left Party voters attached far greater importance to competence (72% and 80% respectively) and were less likely to be persuaded by the merits of the leading candidate. Indeed, for Left Party voters, this was the least important motivating factor (just 7%) (*ibid.*, p.45) which perhaps reflected the fact that the lead candidate, Peter Erlanson, had a recognition rate of only 16% among the Bremen electorate (*ibid.*, p.86). Only a minority of Left Party voters (9%) cited party loyalty as a key influence on their choice, but it is important to bear in mind that, at the point of the election, the Left Party had yet to be formally created through the merger of the small, extra-parliamentary PDS and the still relatively new WASG<sup>76</sup>. As such, there had been little opportunity to build party loyalty, either among members or voters. Despite the state of transition within the party, around a third of voters (34%) believed it would bring a 'breath of fresh air' to Bremen's politics, while 37% thought it was simply about time that the Left Party entered parliament (*ibid.*,

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<sup>74</sup> Pre-election surveys published in 'Wahlreport: Bürgerschaft Bremen 13. Mai 2007' (Infratest dimap, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Of the Green voters, 62% saw themselves as 'winners' rather than 'losers' in light of socio-economic developments in Bremen (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.75).

<sup>76</sup> The merger had been agreed just two months earlier on 27 March, and the formal creation of the Left Party took place on 16 June, shortly after the Bremen election. However, all official election results already referred to the party as 'DIE LINKE' (Left Party).

p.85). Finally, a third of voters felt that social problems had become noticeably worse in recent years (*ibid.*, p.78). Furthermore, in light of the recent exposure of systemic and tragic failures in social care and yet another rock-bottom ranking for education in Germany's states, these too were also prominent themes in the election (Spehr, 2007, p.131).

### **The Left Party Campaign**

The Left Party's stated electoral goal was to gain at least 7% of the vote (Hanau, 2007) and to enter the Bürgerschaft as a parliamentary group for the first time (DIE LINKE Bremen, 2007, p.16). At last, it seemed that after the disappointments of the past, there was real potential for the Left in Bremen. The campaign built on the successes of the 2005 General Election and reiterated the promise to provide a counterbalance to the neo-liberalism of the established parties and to cuts in public services (*ibid.*, p.7). Clearly orientated to social issues, the party claimed to articulate Bremen's demand for social solidarity, highlighting what it saw as the SPD-CDU coalition's 'politically-motivated' and 'ruinous' package of public spending cuts (*ibid.*, p.9). In particular, the party aimed to attract disillusioned SPD voters and trade unionists (especially given that the WASG emerged from precisely these groups), former Green voters, as well as the growing ranks of non-voters (Probst, 2007, p.46). Although the PDS had had rather weak connections to the trade union movement, the alliance with the WASG meant that the Left's electorate now potentially included a sizeable share of organised labour. The leading Left Party candidate Peter Erlanson had been an activist in the anti-nuclear movement and the peace movement before becoming involved in trade union politics. However, despite his activism, he had little formal party political experience and did not initially enjoy the backing of the national leadership (Henning, 2007)<sup>77</sup>. Nevertheless, the candidates received significant support from leading Left Party figures, including Gysi and Lafontaine, both of whom travelled to Bremen to speak at rallies. Their public endorsement also underlined the strategic importance of Bremen's state election: it was the Left Party's most promising opportunity to enter its first western regional parliament and was also intended to function as a springboard for the Left in other western parliaments (*ibid.*).

The Left Party's eleven-point 'action plan' campaign included inter alia the demand to halt privatisation of Bremen's public services (DIE LINKE Bremen, 2007, p.14), an end to compulsory one-euro jobs, the abolition of the three-tier school system (*ibid.*, p.12) and the call for the introduction of a subsidised monthly travel ticket (*ibid.*, p.13). What

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<sup>77</sup> The leadership's position regarding Erlanson is discussed later on in this chapter (4.3.1).

is more, although Bremen's state elections historically tended to focus on regional rather than national, issues, the programme pointedly criticised the Red-Green federal government, particularly over the employment market reforms and their impact in Bremen. Calling for the abolition of Hartz IV, the programme set out a range of interim measures, for example, demanding an end to the eviction of Hartz recipients and their enforced relocation to cheaper accommodation (*ibid.*, p.19). The election manifesto also proposed a minimum wage for Bremen's public sector jobs, in addition to a statutory national minimum wage (*ibid.*). Acknowledging its structural weakness in Bremerhaven, the party also addressed the municipality's specific economic and social problems in a dedicated section of the programme (*ibid.*, p.61).

### **The Results of the 2007 Election**

The results of the 2007 election are set out in Table 4.2. Official figures for Bremen show the overall electoral outcome, as well as those for Bremen City and Bremerhaven, and compare the results with those of 2003.

The tables show that although the SPD achieved its aim of remaining the largest party in Bremen, it lost a sizeable amount of support (-5.6) in relation to its outcome in the previous Bürgerschaft election in 2003, with the most noticeable decline in Bremen City (-6.2%). The Greens managed to increase their share of the vote by over 3% in both municipalities but support remained markedly stronger in Bremen City (17.4% compared to 12% in Bremerhaven). Finally, the Left Party made substantial gains in Bremen City, where it received over four times as many votes as it had in 2003, and in Bremerhaven, where the party achieved a six-fold increase in its vote. This was a welcome development for the Left Party, as the organisationally weak PDS had always struggled in the municipality<sup>78</sup>. Overall, the Left Party accounted for 8.7% (an increase of 6.9%) of the vote in Bremen and 6.9% (an increase of 5.8%) in Bremerhaven. The party thus exceeded its stated electoral goal of gaining at least 7% and, most importantly, was able to enter the Bürgerschaft with seven seats as a full *Fraktion*, the first time it had done so in a western federal state.

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<sup>78</sup> Because of its weak resources the PDS had in the past even declined to field candidates in some local council elections in Bremerhaven.

**Table 4.2. Official results for the 2007 Bürgerschaft election:  
(a) Bremen, (b) Bremen City and (c) Bremerhaven**

Bremen Bürgerschaft election 2007						
(a) Bremen	Number of votes			Share of vote %		
	2007	2003	2007 - 2003	2007	2003	2007 - 2003
SPD	101,417	123,480	-22,063	36.7	42.3	-5.6
Green	45,524	37,350	8,174	16.5	12.8	3.7
Left	23,296	4,885	18,411	8.4	1.7	6.8

(b) Bremen City	Number of votes			Share of vote %		
	2007	2003	2007 - 2003	2007	2003	2007 - 2003
SPD	85,927	106,484	-20,557	37.1	43.3	-6.2
Green	40,218	33,264	6,954	17.4	13.5	3.8
Left	20,226	4,386	15,840	8.7	1.8	6.9

(c) Bremerhaven	Number of votes			Share of vote %		
	2007	2003	2007 - 2003	2007	2003	2007 - 2003
SPD	15,490	16,996	-1,506	34.9	36.9	-2.0
Green	5,306	4,086	1,220	12.0	8.9	3.1
Left	3,070	499	2,571	6.9	1.1	5.8

Note: Percentage point differences were calculated with unrounded values and may therefore differ slightly to the results published by the Bremen Returning Officer.

(Infratest dimap 2007, p.7)

The 2007 result was also important in terms of the overall political balance. Since the emergence of the Greens and especially until the end of the 1980s, Bremen's politics had been weighted to the centre-left. In 1987, the SPD and Greens had a combined lead of more than 27% over the centre-right CDU and FDP (Infratest dimap, 2007, p. 21). The SPD suffered substantial losses in the 1990s for which the Greens were unable to compensate, despite a consistently strong performance. Now, in the 2007 Bürgerschaft election, despite a poor result for the centre-right (less than 32% — the worst combined share since the 1960s), the SPD-Green bloc was yet again eroded as a result of the fall in support for the SPD and, for the first time, the strong performance of the Left Party. On the other hand, the arrival of the Left Party parliamentary group in the Bürgerschaft in fact marked a further shift in favour of the centre-left in Bremen (*ibid.*, p.22).

### **4.3. The Theoretical Frameworks in Context: Analysing the Left Party's Electoral Performance in Bremen**

So far, the chapter has set out Bremen's economic, social and political context as well as a general account of the main issues and outcomes of three regional elections, from the perspective of the PDS and Left Party. Having also recalled the key concepts of Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory set out in Chapters Two and Three, the next task of this case study is to begin to draw together these various strands and discuss the Left Party's success in Bremen in terms of the theoretical frameworks.

#### **4.3.1. Cartel Theory**

Chapter Two has identified policy competition and party organisation as the main themes for further investigation in the Case Study. This section now explores both themes and considers their relevance for the Left Party in Bremen.

##### **The Restricted Policy Space in Bremen**

The Agenda 2010 reform of the German employment market and welfare provision, seen from the perspective of Cartel Theory, can be regarded as willingness on the part of the SPD in particular to break with its core constituency, the working class. These measures, which cut public spending, privatised public goods and adopted market-led policies and narrative, effectively narrowed the ideological scope within the party system. Given the broad consensus among Bremen's established parliamentary parties, difference was limited to mere degrees of austerity, rather than opposition.

Furthermore, the policy of privatisation also highlighted a disposition to place public services and future decision-making outside democratic control. The sale of services would necessitate binding commercial contracts (a costly process in itself), which cannot simply be reversed by an incoming government with an election manifesto commitment to public sector services. Even if at all feasible, the early termination of such contracts to return the service to public ownership would involve costly legal procedures and payments to compensate the commercial damage suffered by the company or organisation; given the context of fiscal restraint and austerity, this would

not be regarded as the best use of public money. Similarly, the mooted 'commissioning authority' model and special economic zone would have involved exempting private companies and organisations from regulations and/or legislation based on agreements reached between governments and social partners. Once established, tax incentives, like commercial contracts, would be difficult to remove, again incurring massive legal costs. What is more, the tax incentives designed to promote business in Bremen would have actually reduced state income, thereby forcing future governments to provide even fewer public goods. In short, Bremen's SPD-led programme of privatisation effectively restricted the scope for government to fulfil a commitment to maintaining public services, social housing and utilities and as such represented a restriction of the policy supply curve.

Furthermore, Bremen's SPD Bürgermeister (Mayor) Henning Scherf clearly utilised what Blyth and Katz described as the rhetoric of no alternative in his defence of Agenda 2010 and the dismantling of employment protection. Stating that what mattered above all else was getting people back into work, Scherf referred to contractual employee protection as a 'barrier' to jobs. Moreover, the greater the 'risk' to businesses in an employment contract (in other words the greater the employee protection), the less effective any government employment policy would be. Scherf even went so far as to state that the deregulation of the employment market would actually contribute to the 'emancipating experience of standing on one's own two feet' (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, 2003).

### **Pragmatism and Office-Seeking Goals?**

Chapter One has shown that the PDS/Left could not be assumed to always favour principled opposition over participation in a coalition, even one that was intent on implementing cuts and privatisation. Examples from the eastern federal states have illustrated that for the PDS, becoming 'electable' as a junior partner in an SPD-led coalition government was not only realistic, but also palatable. Where the PDS had become a junior partner in Red-Red coalitions in the eastern states, the fulfilment of the responsibilities devolved to the *Länder* meant that the party had jointly introduced and implemented various cuts in social services, including those arising from Agenda 2010, while regional social services departments were responsible for processing welfare claims. The PDS was therefore directly complicit in implementing Hartz IV, meaning that 'in other words its regional programme (was) pretty similar to what it (was) now opposing on a national level in the shape of Hartz IV' (Becker, 2004).

For the PDS, the issue of ownership was at the heart of influence and relative strength in society (see Chapter One). Yet as the party's involvement in regional and local government in the eastern states grew (potentially in Bremen, too), debates arose within the party that appeared to cast doubt on the centrality of social ownership. For instance, the Berlin regional party questioned which policy choice would most severely compromise the competence of debt-ridden municipalities: the privatisation of social housing stock or debt servicing using the fiscal resources raised by such sell-offs (Klein, 2007, p.195). A pragmatic approach was encouraged that weighed up the relative benefits and disadvantages to privatisation of housing stock or non-medical hospital services on the one hand, versus budget cuts for essential services, with serious social consequences on the other (*ibid.*). Given the severity of Bremen's budgetary constraints, a future Left Party parliamentary group (let alone a coalition) would not be able to shrink from similar questions.

While the PDS had, for better or for worse, gained experience of government office in the eastern states, the dilemma of governmental responsibility had not been an urgent concern for the socialists in Bremen before 2007. But the initial cooperation between the PDS and the WASG had quickly developed into a new Left alliance that had already performed strongly in the 2005 General Election (particularly in Bremen) and now had a genuine prospect of entering Bremen's parliament; this of course gave new relevance to the issue of whether a new Left Party group might – at least one day – share responsibility with an SPD government.

Support for a pragmatic approach to coalition participation did indeed exist within the party. One participant in this research argued that the Left Party should 'utilise the balance of power and resolve to maintain sufficient strength' to deal with the SPD. For another, the decision was to be based on the potential for genuine policy maximisation potential; cooperation should be considered, but 'only if [the Left Party's] interests are upheld'.

On the other hand, there was little public support for an SPD-Left Party partnership in Bremen; just two per cent favoured a Red-Red coalition in 2007 (Neu, 2007b, p.27). Opposition was also clearly evident within the party itself. For instance, one research participant expressed concern about the consequences of cooperation not only for the Left Party, but also for the people whose interests it claimed to represent:



*The Left Party would then become superfluous. Until now, the Left has been the sole opposition to neoliberal developments. In a coalition with the SPD, all that would be over. [They would practise] Realpolitik, contrary to the interests of unemployed, disadvantaged and vulnerable people.*

Another participant, a local activist who sympathised with the Left Party, stated that the divide between the SPD and Left Party ran far deeper than differences over specific policies:

*The SPD has become a party that carries and maintains the system. The 'Agenda 2010' legislation (Hartz I-IV), the expansion of temporary employment contracts, the rejection of minimum wages and the military intervention in Yugoslavia etc., are all diametrically opposed to the Left Party programme. Without fundamental transformation, not only in terms of the manifesto but also in terms of mindset, a coalition isn't feasible.*

The election programme set out the Left Party's position on coalition participation, stating that the Left Party:

*(W)ill not participate in any government that cuts social services, privatises public goods or further curtails the rights of wage-dependent workers, the precariously employed, the unemployed, pensioners or immigrants. As the Bremen SPD is set to continue its policy of social services cuts (...) we shall therefore enter the Bremen Bürgerschaft strictly as a party of opposition. (DIE LINKE Bremen, 2007, p.16)*

The statement thus committed the party to an oppositional role in the Bürgerschaft so long as the SPD remained committed to austerity and cuts, and in so doing might have reassured members and voters anxious about the price to pay for government responsibility. Furthermore, while the statement did not explicitly rule out Left Party toleration of a minority government (whereby the Left would still remain in opposition but support key government legislation), the historical resilience of Bremen's SPD and the sustained popularity of the Greens rendered the arithmetical need for such an agreement unlikely. However, even though the Left Party was on course to enter the Bürgerschaft in an opposition role, at least in 2007, there were still opportunities for the party to become established within the parliamentary 'cartel'.

## Parliamentary Focus

The Left Party alliance had its roots on streets and squares, as people gathered to express their opposition to the Hartz reforms. In Bremen, this protest was overwhelmingly extra-parliamentary, bringing together an array of social groups and organisations, ranging from trade unions through to Bremen Peace Forum. As the PDS Bremen had failed to gain seats in the Bürgerschaft, the party could also technically be counted as part of this extra-parliamentary movement. At the same time, the party was represented on a number of local councils, even though these were not the exclusive reserve of political parties, and were concerned with issues at a very grassroots level. A Left Party (formerly PDS) councillor who participated in the research explained that there was ‘hardly any political controversy’, since the focus was on ‘practical, tangible matters that affect the residents in the neighbourhood (traffic lights, schools, social networks, aircraft noise, etc.).’ It can of course be argued that even if local issues fall outside the remit of a party manifesto, the framing of a problem and the approaches to its solution are rarely apolitical. Furthermore, while the Beirat provides an opportunity to become involved and established in local democracy, its non-partisan, collaborative atmosphere can also be seen as a ‘training ground’ for cooperation and collegiality among representatives.

Conversely, the WASG membership included disaffected left-wing social democrats and therefore had historical and cultural ties to the SPD, even though relations between the two parties were naturally strained by the breakaway. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to characterise the WASG as a straightforward social-democratic alliance. Indeed, Chapter One has described that some sections of the Left Party most emphatically opposed to government participation were former members of the WASG. The Left alliance therefore brought together a distinctly parliamentary-orientated PDS and a broad range of groups and organisations united under the WASG umbrella. Moreover, the WASG was originally founded as an initiative, rather than as a party, and encountered significant opposition within its members, some of whom had been long-standing critics of, among other things, the parliamentary tradition of the PDS. One research participant summarised the changing orientation as follows:

*The orientation of the party towards predominantly parliamentary activity was stronger in the PDS; the first years of the Linkspartei, on the other hand [were focused] more towards extra-parliamentary movements (anti-Hartz demos, Occupy, etc.).*

## Parliamentary Focus and Party Hierarchies

The Bremen Bürgerschaft vote was of course the party's first and most promising prospect of entering a western parliament. But concern existed within the national leadership that much of the new Left Party in the western states was organisationally weak, and consisted of 'leftist sectarians' as well as members with little experience of party politics (Brandt *et al.*, 2007). The WASG in particular was reported to be dominated by 'fundamentalists' (Seils, 2007). At one point, the Bremen WASG had even decided to field its own independent candidate, which would have involved standing against the Left alliance. Anxious not to risk Bremen quickly becoming an embarrassment that threatened to derail the party's strategy of establishment in the western states, the central party in Berlin issued written instructions to the WASG members of the Bremen party, demanding that they resolve the political differences or else risk jeopardising the Bürgerschaft campaign (Gajevic, 2007). The central party then sought to exert its authority over the selection of the lead candidate. After the first centrally endorsed candidate withdrew his decision to stand, Berlin next threw its support behind the economist and Bundestag member Axel Troost (*ibid.*). Originally from Bremen, Troost would have lent the campaign an element of personality politics. In addition, he had won his Bundestag mandate via the list in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, and therefore also enjoyed the support of the eastern party branch (Boecker, 2007). Nevertheless, the Bremen membership refused to accept any candidate imposed by the central party, and dismissed Troost as the national leadership's 'political commissar' (Kaiser, 2007, p.4)<sup>79</sup>. Instead, the grassroots members opted for Peter Erlanson, a then relatively unknown hospital works council representative, as its lead candidate. According to the *Junge Welt* newspaper:

*Clearly, the PDS and WASG federal executive committees preferred to see their own representative — himself a member of the WASG executive committee — heading up the Bremen Landesliste. (...) Erlanson, with regard to the shameful role of the Berlin Left Party, spoke out against any form of government participation and for 'genuine opposition. (ibid.)*

Following the party's entry into the Bürgerschaft, further attempts were made to exert pressure on personnel, this time in the first meeting of the parliamentary group. Despite an earlier agreement that, as the lead candidate, Erlanson should head the *Fraktion*,

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<sup>79</sup> The article explains that originally, the agreement was that if the first, third and fifth places on the party list were reserved for open list candidates, the WASG's candidate, Erlanson, could be the lead candidate. Berlin's decision to endorse Troost for the lead candidate position came at the last minute (Kaiser, 2007, p.4).

another newly elected member was suddenly proposed as an alternative and endorsed by the PDS group. Eventually, a compromise was reached that the seven-strong parliamentary group should have two lead speakers, one of whom was Erlanson (Brandt *et al.*, 2007).

A further example of intervention from the party in central office involved policies in the eleven-point action plan, the core of the campaign. Even though privatisation of Bremen's services had become a campaigning focal point, the federal executive in Berlin tried to have this theme removed from the already agreed manifesto, ostensibly on the grounds of design adjustments. It was only due to resistance from WASG representatives that the party's principled opposition to privatisation was eventually included in the leaflet (Meyer *et al.*, 2007). However, the attempt prompted one party member to complain that the national (PDS) party apparatus had demonstrated a lack of respect for the WASG position and, despite having no accountability for the financial resources used, had tried to carry out a 'sugar-coated' election campaign' (Jungclaus, 2007).

In addition to the above examples relating to the vertical hierarchy between the central, federal party and the regional party in Bremen, the decision-making capacity of grassroots members would also be challenged within the Bremen party's own hierarchy. After the election, in the aftermath of the controversy surrounding the head of the parliamentary group, the PDS representative at an election plenary meeting announced that discussion would no longer involve ordinary members but instead be confined to the seven deputies (*ibid.*). Once again, here was evidence of withdrawing influence away from the party base and concentrating it into the hands of the leadership<sup>80</sup>. Unsurprisingly, these decisions soured the relationship between the party in office (the *Landesvorstand*) and the party on the ground. One member summed up the scepticism regarding future party cooperation and transparency:

*Will the Bürgerschaft deputies take part in discussions in an open grassroots meeting? Will they take up grassroots members' suggestions and ideas and put them forward in the Bürgerschaft, and create transparency and accountability for their actions? Or will they, like deputies from the other parties, only feel an obligation to their 'conscience' (and, realistically, to the party apparatus (...))?* (*ibid.*)

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<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 3 for a description of the Bremen party structure.

Furthermore, the impact of the parliamentary focus was tangible at grassroots level. PDS strategy for party development in the western states had stressed the importance of political work that engaged with local social movements and issues. However, one member expressed frustration at how the prioritisation of entering the *Bürgerschaft* had transformed the concept of political work in the new party, as well as the nature of roles and tasks assigned to activists, commenting that 'only the lead candidates matter — (while) the rest of the party can just get on with pasting and putting up posters' (Meyer *et al.*, 2007).

### **Parliamentary Focus: Narrowing the Policy Scope**

On the day of Bremen's first Monday demonstration, Heidi Knake-Werner, the PDS Senator for Social Affairs in the Berlin regional government, dismissed demands to 'get rid of Hartz IV' as 'non-political slogans' (Knake-Werner, 2004). Instead, she argued that the truly political approach required PDS office holders to contribute to the efficient yet empathetic implementation of the measures contained in the Hartz legislation and to take 'corrective' action where necessary, for example in terms of assessing care for the elderly or determining what constituted 'reasonable' work for those returning to employment (*ibid.*). In this respect, the party's role in implementing the Hartz package could be seen as a continuation of the practical support provided by local PDS branches to citizens in the post-unification period (see Chapter One). Although Knake-Werner welcomed protest by those affected by Hartz, she felt her position as Senator precluded her participation. She also pointed out that the new reform was now a reality and, as such, the fight was already over (*ibid.*). Regarded from the perspective of Cartel Theory, comments about the inevitability of Hartz IV and cuts to public services can be interpreted as 'signals' that, despite the protests, the Left Party could be expected to adopt a critical stance but not to fundamentally oppose or obstruct these policies. Furthermore, distance from the protest might also be understood as symptomatic of office-holders' growing orientation towards (anchoring in) the state institution of parliament.

In an interview with *Junge Welt* newspaper, the Left's lead PDS candidate, Klaus-Rainer Rupp, admitted that the party was under no illusions about its leverage in relation to the SPD (Rupp, 2007, cited in Berg, 2007a). He explained that the main task of the Left Party was to exert pressure on the other parties in the *Bürgerschaft* so that it would be impossible for them to ignore certain issues: 'Were it not for (our) demands for a Social Ticket for public transport in Bremen and Bremerhaven, the SPD and Greens wouldn't be suggesting something similar now' (*ibid.*) Similarly, the SPD's

recent decision to support a minimum wage was attributed to the impact of the Left Party, especially now that it had (re)gained a strong national profile (*ibid.*)<sup>81</sup>.

Yet precisely these alleged indicators of Left Party influence prompted some of the strongest criticism within the party, especially among grassroots members and activists. Even though there was no realistic prospect of Left Party coalition participation following 2007, some members, chiefly ex-WASG, accused Rupp (formerly a member of both the SPD and DKP) of 'democratic centralism' and an over-eagerness to turn a future Left Party parliamentary group into a coalition partner-in-waiting (Meyer *et.al.*, 2007). In fact, according to one participant in this study, the misplaced conviction that it was possible to 'reform a gang of thieves' (meaning the SPD) suggested the new Left alliance was in danger of losing its radical profile.

A further consequence of the strategy of 'lobbying' from within the Bürgerschaft was that Left Party policy would be contingent on that of the SPD. In other words, rather than set out and fight for clear and ambitious policy alternatives, the Left would merely respond to the SPD 'default'. The issue of the minimum wage illustrates this point.

Ahead of the 2007 Bürgerschaft election, the SPD's lead candidate, Jens Börnsen, recognised the demand by public sector trade union *Ver.di* for a minimum wage of €7.50 per hour in Bremen (the Left Party had called for a rate of €8.00) (*ibid.*). As the national government had yet to agree in principle on a minimum wage, the step could be regarded as a bold, pro-worker step by Bremen's SPD. However, seen from the perspective of Cartel Theory, the minimum wage issue provides a further illustration of how adoption of a popular policy can be regarded as a measure for neutralising a challenge to the established 'cartel' of parties. On the one hand, even though the Left Party called for a slightly higher rate, SPD support for the minimum wage actually narrowed the Left Party's scope for mobilising around this issue (Meyer *et.al.*). In key low-income districts, where even €7.50 an hour would represent an increase in income for many people, the Left would face tougher competition to win over the poorest workers, since the differentiation was merely one of fifty cents, rather than clear-cut commitment or opposition to the minimum wage itself.

One party member therefore argued that rather than indulge in a war of rhetoric over the fifty-cent difference between the two parties' proposed minimum wage, the Left

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<sup>81</sup> This refers to the presence of the Left Party parliamentary group after the absence of a PDS group 2002-2005.

should seize the initiative, together with trade unions, and be out on the streets to demand a nationwide statutory *living wage* (Berg, 2007a). Although implementation of a national wage standard lay beyond the competence of the Bremen Bürgerschaft, the real crux of the matter here was whether the scope and ambition of Left Party's demands should be restricted to only those objectives achievable in parliament:

*Should we forfeit the goal of a statutory minimum wage or the demand for a shorter working week (...) just because neither (of these) can be realised in the Bremen Bürgerschaft alone? (Ibid.)*

When asked about the impact of the parliamentary focus on policy, a party member who participated in this research stated that although social justice still remained the central policy focus, the political *approaches* to addressing the issue had become more 'social democratic' in character. This led the member to identify:

*A degree of despondency regarding more radical opposition; the possibility of a different society is still discussed, but preferably in terms of the distant future.*

Summarising the Left Party's contrasting and often-contradictory character, the same participant (a former PDS member) explained: 'One section [of the party] believes it is able to exploit the weaknesses of the SPD in order to pull its strings. Another section, which is also the largest, consists of disappointed social democrats.' But he also pointed out that from *both* perspectives 'people simply want to be more left-wing, better social democrats.'

### **Summary**

So far in this section, evidence did indeed emerge of attempts by the national leadership (party in central office) to exert influence on the candidate selection process within the Bremen party, even though the regional party, and especially the grassroots membership, displayed its resilience to such intervention. Similarly, against the wishes of the central party, the Bremen Left succeeded in stating in its election campaign literature its principled opposition (rather than a pragmatic approach) to privatisation of Bremen's public services. Cartel Theory explains that such practices are symptomatic of a party prioritising the pursuit of parliamentary goals and politics.

The tensions regarding the (re)location of power, as well as surrounding the relative influence of the party leadership (party in central office), the future parliamentary group (party in public office) and the grassroots membership and activists (party on the ground) were reinforced by the political culture and tradition of the Left Party's constituent parts: the eastern-rooted, parliamentary and, to a degree, office-seeking culture within the PDS, and the mainly western-based, extra-parliamentary and policy-maximising WASG.

Furthermore, policy objectives were defined in terms of parliamentary activity and therefore restricted to issues and demands that could be addressed within Bremen's regional parliament. This too shifted the focus away from extra-parliamentary engagement and protest and towards the (potential) parliamentary party. In so doing, the Left Party risked becoming rather timid in its demands, since policy could become orientated to the Social Democratic 'default' instead of offering a clear alternative outside the narrow policy space offered by Bremen's established parliamentary parties.

### **4.3.2. Social Cleavage Theory**

This section continues the study of the explanatory frameworks in the context of Bremen's Left Party. The themes explored here relate to Social Cleavage Theory and look for evidence of a defined and articulated class cleavage, as well as class-based support for the Left Party.

#### **Framing the Anti-Hartz Protest**

Lipset and Rokkan explained that one of the prerequisites for the emergence of a social cleavage is for a sense of collective identity to form around a social tension. Consequently, to understand the importance of the anti-Hartz demonstrations in relation to the success of the Left Party, it is necessary to identify both the actors and the language of the protest. The actors in the protest determine how dissent and demands are articulated or framed, while the language (or framing) of a protest contributes to the feeling of identity related to the issue (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p. 125). In this section, the study is therefore looking for evidence of protest and demands framed in class terms.

The application to hold the first demonstration was made on behalf of a group called the *Bündnis Montagsaktion gegen Hartz IV* (Monday Action Alliance Against Hartz IV).



Responsible for the protest's organisation was the Bremen Social Plenum, formed out of the *Bündnis gegen Sozialkahlschlag* (Alliance against Austerity) (Sozialplenum Bremen, 2008). Convened in response to Agenda 2010 with the purpose of countering the restructuring policies of Bremen's parliamentary parties, the Alliance comprised a diverse spectrum of groups and individuals based in trade unions, the peace movement, anti-globalisation groups, anti-fascist and anti-racism groups as well as political parties (including the PDS and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany, MLPD).

However, as media coverage grew, it became apparent that the political orientation of the anti-Hartz protest in Bremen was far from clear. An alternative demonstration was to be held by a group called Aufrechter Gang (AG)<sup>82</sup> whose leader, Mathias Henkel, criticised the amount of public money wasted on the (by then) well-publicised 'prestige projects', and that funding should instead have been spent on fighting unemployment and improving infrastructure and education (Initiative Bremer Montagsdemo, no date, p11ff.). Therefore, in this respect, AG clearly articulated some of the key issues uniting the Left in Bremen. On the other hand, Henkel also emphasised law and order and described AG as a 'political self-help group' whose aim was not only to campaign against Hartz IV and to oppose the governing coalition, but also to challenge 'Green and other ideologies' (*ibid.*). In short, alongside the broadly left-wing Alliance against Austerity, a small right-wing and socially authoritarian movement was also emerging in Bremen's anti-Hartz protests. The Social Plenum (2004) issued a flyer, 'Don't give way to the right', urging the public not to support the AG demonstration and declaring opposition to the attempt of right-wing populists to exploit social protest.

During the opening speech at the demonstration, MLPD member Wolfgang Lange disassociated the protest and the Monday demonstration movement as a whole from the AG rally and informed those gathered that anyone had the right to speak, so long as their speech was based on anti-fascist and anti-racist principles (Initiative Bremer Montagsdemo, p.15ff.). Many of the speakers who took to the microphone were not attached to any political party, indicating the strength and potential of wide mobilisation around this issue. Alongside the WASG and local social movements, the PDS was a visible and active participant; photographs taken at the demonstration show party banners and flags, as well as a PDS information stand on Bremen's Market Square. The PDS campaign materials carried the slogan '*Hartz IV - das ist Armut per Gesetz - Weg damit!*' (Hartz IV is poverty by decree — let's get rid of it!) (*ibid.*, p.17ff).

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<sup>82</sup> Aufrechter Gang: literally translates as 'standing upright' (relating to human evolution) or 'walking tall' (indicating pride).

Several demonstrators remained and endeavoured to noisily disrupt the far smaller Aufrechter Gang rally that followed. In response, AG's deputy chair, Norbert Kück, specifically accused the PDS of provoking a cacophony of whistles and shouts, as well as physically assaulting some of AG's members. The PDS disruption was described as all the more ironic given that it represented a failed attempt to prevent a legitimate demonstration against unemployment and Hartz IV. Furthermore, recalling the earlier analogous reference to the citizens' protests in the GDR, Kück suggested that PDS efforts to disrupt the first Aufrechter Gang demonstration were to only be expected, since it was inevitable that the PDS, as the former state party of the GDR, would respond in such a hyper-sensitive manner to the Monday demonstrations. The PDS therefore stood accused of stifling free political speech, 'in the best tradition of the GDR'<sup>83</sup>.

What is noticeable about these clashes is that in spite of the numerical disparity in the attendance of the two demonstrations, the Hartz IV protest in Bremen was not unequivocally framed in a leftist narrative. Although Aufrechter Gang was specific to Bremen, involvement of the right was also evident in demonstrations held in other cities. Udo Voigt, the chair of the extreme right-wing NPD, declared that it was the historical task of the 'national opposition' to wholeheartedly support the developing people's movement and to steer it towards a nationalist course of thought. Banners and placards with slogans such as '*Hartz IV ist asozial / es dient nur dem Kapital*' ('Hartz IV is anti-social / it serves only capital') and warning of '*Zwangsarbeit und Hungerlohn-Sklaverei*' ('forced labour and starvation-wage slavery') actually utilised concepts and terminology commonly associated with the left, such as anti-capitalism, anti-globalisation and defence of the social state, whereby the latter was of course defined in strictly nationalist terms. However, it can also be argued that the right-wing/populist groups were also attempting to mobilise along class lines; support for the social state and critiques of capitalism and globalisation were not exclusively the property of the left. Furthermore, in Bremen – particularly in the municipality of Bremerhaven – working class areas supported not only the SPD but also small right-wing parties, such as the DVU or the locally-based Bürger in Wut (Enraged Citizens). As such, while the Hartz protests were expressed in class terms, it was not until February 2005, with the growing influence of the WASG – and therefore the trade unions – that the Bremen Monday Demonstration movement defined and documented its basic principles, which

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<sup>83</sup> Press release by Norbert Kück: 'PDS in Bremen macht Front gegen Arbeitslose', (Initiative Bremer Montagsdemo, p.16ff).

included a clear disassociation from the right, and cast the protest in plainly leftist, class-based terms.

Key to this more pronounced framing of the protest was the fact that the demand was very much focused on *soziale Gerechtigkeit* - social justice. This was important in a number of ways. First, the protest articulated something positive. In other words, it moved beyond mere rejection and negative protest such as 'get rid of Hartz IV' (inviting criticism that the demonstrations amounted to little more than 'non-political' slogans) and instead articulated a demand *for* social justice. Second, the term 'social' summed up the prevalent demand for social welfare; and 'justice' was a principle that, even if vaguely defined, had common appeal. Indeed, 'social justice' was sufficiently broad a term to allow the several groups forming the demonstration movement to unite behind it (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007, p.149). Furthermore, the growing expression of class interests and the positive demand for social welfare represented a counterbalance to the prevailing 'rhetoric of no alternative' and austerity.

### **The PDS as Mobiliser of Protest?**

The protest movement was by no means without internal disputes and rivalries. One of the WASG's centred on the historical inability of the PDS to mobilise working class support in Bremen. This chapter has already described the PDS's failure to establish a substantial voter base, even in working class districts. Instead, while fringe and right-wing parties managed to attract votes in the poorest areas of Bremerhaven, the PDS had taken the strategic decision to target middle-class Green-voting areas and the anti-military protest vote. Even in the midst of Bremen's restructuring and austerity programme, the PDS had been unable to challenge the SPD. We also know that the PDS in Bremen was, of course, burdened by the party's perceived 'easterness' (also instrumentalised by the AG) and the performance of SPD-PDS coalitions in the eastern states. In addition, there was a degree of mistrust surrounding suspected office-seeking goals. Yet even on top of these obstacles, which affected the western organisation as a whole, the conduct of the PDS Bremen did little to overcome this ambivalence.

Even though Bremen had a lively and diverse left scene, as evidenced by the groups that participated in the anti-Hartz demonstrations, the Bremen PDS appeared to be rather aloof from these social movements. One example occurred during the 2007 election campaign, when a broad alliance of citizens' groups in Bremen supported a day of action called by people who were employed in so-called 'one-euro' jobs and/or

were facing layoffs. The PDS had campaigned strongly against the employment market reforms, but rather than throw its weight behind the initiative, the party held its own meeting on social policy, which coincided with the event (Meyer *et.al.*, 2007). Whether or not the PDS was unaware of the groups' day of action, the clash reinforced the impression of a party seemingly out of touch with the people whose interests it claimed to represent. Later, with the growing prospect of formal PDS/WASG cooperation, some elements of the WASG favoured a broad electoral alliance for Bremen rather than a full merger with the PDS, believing this informal approach – rather than cooperation with the PDS – could have genuinely mobilised Bremen's grassroots protest groups and addressed local issues (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the PDS's perceived lack of anchoring and support in local social movements threatened to undermine the Left Party's credibility and with it, the new party's capacity for sustainably mobilising and articulating Bremen's class interests in leftist terms. In fact it was this view that resulted in the initial decision by the WASG to stand an alternative list of candidates in the Bürgerschaft election; as we have seen, the resolution was of course swiftly overturned with the intervention of the PDS-WASG national leadership.

To sum up, implementation of the Hartz reforms intensified existing socio-economic tensions, leading to a series of protests in Bremen. Along with various citizens' and social movements, the future Left Party mobilised and articulated the growing opposition to the government attack on welfare and workers' rights. Together, they framed the continuing demand for social justice in terms of class and from a left-wing perspective. As such, there is evidence of class-based expression of, and mobilisation around, the capital-labour cleavage.

Therefore, the next task is to identify the extent to which the Left Party alliance in Bremen was able to utilise this mobilisation of the protest movement to gain parliamentary representation in the 2007 Bürgerschaft election. The Left Party's strong result in the Bürgerschaft election exceeded the party's own goal of '7% plus X'. Yet it is still possible that these electoral choices might have been made according to factors other than class. In other words, a strong link between class and any party has not yet been established. What is more, the increased vote for the Left Party could be attributed to a variety of factors, rather than to class alone. To establish any connection of the Left Party vote to the class cleavage specifically, it is necessary to analyse the result in more detail.

## **Voting Patterns<sup>84</sup>**

Gender: The Left Party was slightly more popular with male rather than female voters. In particular, it was voters aged between 35 and 59 who were the strongest source of support for the Left Party; indeed, 15% (an increase of 13%) of men in the 45-59 age group, voted for the party (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.51). Prior to the election, a study by the Chamber of Labour revealed that some 40% of participants aged between 46 and 55 years old — in other words, respondents in the age group that proved most supportive of the Left Party – were certain that the politics currently on offer would be unable to solve Bremen’s existing and future problems (Probst, 2007, p. 26).

Educational attainment among voters revealed some contrasts between the three left-of-centre parties. Unlike the SPD, whose greatest share of voters (51%) had a low level of educational attainment or the Greens, for whom over a quarter (28%) of Bremen’s most educated electorate voted, the Left Party did not demonstrate a striking pattern of support in terms of educational attainment. While the largest proportion of the vote came from the highly educated (9%) this figure was only slightly greater than that for Left Party voters with only basic education (8%) which in turn was only one percent more than the figure for voters with medium educational attainment. In terms of increase, too, the distribution was quite even (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.53).

Population density: A more detailed picture of the PDS/Left Party vote begins to emerge in relation to locations of support. Unlike the Greens, whose support lies quite clearly in urban areas (22.4%), the SPD and Left Party have more evenly distributed support. However, the Left Party made its greatest gains in high-density areas, which is where the party finds its largest source of support (9.8%), the party finds its largest source of votes); it was also in these urban districts that the SPD lost its greatest voter share (-7.2%) in relation to population density (*ibid.*, p.38).

Unemployment rate: Although the SPD continued to receive support in areas with a high proportion of people out of work, and even managed to stave off particularly severe losses, the Left Party made its largest gains (+ 7.8%) in these areas suffering from high unemployment rates; indeed, such areas formed the major source of electoral support for the Left. The Greens, however, were quite clearly more popular in areas where unemployment rates were low (*ibid.*, p.104).

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<sup>84</sup> All election result data in this section is based on the official figures provided by the Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, and published by Infratest dimap (2007). Tables containing data relating to gender, age and educational attainment are shown in Appendix 4.

So far, we have seen that, focusing first on voter profile, there was no striking gender pattern to the Left vote (unlike that of the Green vote), but on the whole the party did prove slightly more popular with men than with women. In terms of age, both men and women aged between 35 and 59 (especially those over the age of 45) constituted the largest source of support for the Left. Neither did a distinct pattern emerge regarding educational attainment; voters with a basic level of education were only slightly more likely to favour the Left than better-educated voters. Again, this is in contrast to the other two left-of-centre parties. But a clearer trend is discernible in relation to socio-economic characteristics of neighbourhoods, as the Left Party performed best in highly populated urban areas with high or medium levels of unemployment and in neighbourhoods (with a high proportion of foreign residents). The full relevance of population density and in particular unemployment becomes clear in the more detailed analysis of class voting and Bremen's neighbourhoods later in this section.

### **Shifts in Support for the Centre-Left Parties**

An Infratest dimap study (2007), based on representative surveys carried out before the election, statistics from previous elections and exit polls, estimated the voter gains and losses among the respective political parties. The study also took into account non-voters, so-called generational change (i.e., first time voters as well as the deceased) and voters who had either moved to Bremen or moved away. In total, the electorate grew slightly compared to that of 2003, although voter turnout (57.6%) actually fell by 3.7%. The tables below set out the estimated gains and losses, both from/to other political parties and from/to voter groups, for the SPD and Left Party respectively.

**Table 4.3. Gains and losses: SPD and Left Party**

<b>Gains and Losses: (a) SPD</b>			
From / to	Gained / +	Lost / -	Balance
CDU	4,000	5,000	-1,000
Greens	3,000	8,000	-5,000
FDP	1,000	2,000	-1,000
Left Party	0	6,000	-6,000
Others	2,000	2,000	0
Total other parties	10,000	23,000	-13,000
Non-voters	7,000	14,000	-7,000
First time voters / deceased	4,000	9,000	-5,000
Moved to / moved away from Bremen	10,000	7,000	3,000

<b>Gains and Losses - (b) Left Party</b>			
From / to	Gained / +	Lost / -	Balance
SPD	6,000	0	6,000
CDU	1,000	0	1,000
Greens	3,000	0	3,000
FDP	0	0	0
Others	4,000	0	4,000
Total other parties	14,000	0	14,000
Non-voters	3,000	1,000	2,000
First time voters / deceased	1,000	0	1,000
Moved to / moved away from Bremen	2,000	0	2,000

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.33ff.)

Focusing on the overall balance, it becomes clear at first glance that the SPD lost voters to each of the political parties that were elected to the Bürgerschaft as a parliamentary group. The greatest aggregate loss of support was to the Left Party (-6,000), followed by the Greens (-5,000). However, an even greater number (-7,000) of former SPD supporters joined the ranks of the non-voters, and modest gains among voters new to Bremen were nowhere near enough to compensate for the loss in SPD support. The Left Party, on the other hand, in addition to the 6,000 voters gained from

the Social Democrats, also managed to attract 3,000 former Green voters in 2007 (even though the Greens performed well in the election). Although some former PDS supporters withheld their participation in the election altogether, the Left Party succeeded in achieving a positive balance regarding non-voters; indeed, it was the only party elected to the Bürgerschaft to do so (the Greens' balance was zero, while the SPD, CDU and FDP all lost out to non-voters). When considering the impact of generational change, it is notable that only the Greens and Left Party made overall gains (2,000 and 1,000 respectively). Both parties therefore demonstrated an ability to attract first-time voters.

Secondly, given the importance of dealignment in the Social Cleavage Theory, it is also necessary to identify areas in which the Left Party might be expected to perform well (or otherwise) in the 2007 Bürgerschaft election. Therefore, the next table (4.4) describes the political structure of the Bremen's districts. The political structure relates to the performance of each of the three left-of-centre parties in districts in which support for, respectively, the SPD, Greens and PDS is historically considered strong, medium or weak, based on previous electoral outcomes. The data also includes the percentage increase or decrease of the 2007 result in relation to the previous Bürgerschaft election in 2003 for the SPD and Greens. It should be noted, though, that the strength of the PDS is based on the party's performance in the General Election Bundestag (BTW) in 2005 election, rather than on the Bürgerschaft election outcome. By 2005, the PDS was already cooperating with the newly formed WASG and performed well in that year's general election. Given the historical weakness of the PDS, the comparison with the Bundestag election result thus provides a more realistic prediction of the Left Party's locations of support. The number of districts in each category is indicated in parentheses.



**Table 4.4. Political structure of local districts: relative strength of SPD, Greens and Left Party**

Political structure and party performance						
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
Districts (#)	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
<b>SPD vote</b>						
Strong (8)	42.5	-5.6	13.5	3.0	9.1	7.4
Medium (14)	36.8	-5.4	18.3	4.1	9.3	7.4
Weak (7)	28.4	-5.4	17.6	3.9	5.8	4.7
<b>Green vote</b>						
Strong (7)	31.7	-8.7	25.6	4.5	10.0	7.4
Medium (15)	39.0	-4.1	12.1	3.0	7.5	6.3
Weak (7)	41.1	-2.8	9.4	2.9	6.0	4.9
<b>PDS vote (BTW '05)</b>						
Strong (7)	37.1	-8.4	23.8	4.2	11.7	8.7
Medium (14)	39.7	-3.5	11.6	3.1	7.7	6.5
Weak (8)	27.0	-6.9	19.4	3.9	5.4	4.3

SPD vote: Strong: 46% or more; weak: under 38% (2003 Bürgerschaft election)  
 Green vote: Strong: 13% or more; weak: under 7.5% (2003 Bürgerschaft election)  
 PDS vote: Strong: 9.0% or more; weak: under 6.5% (2005 Bundestag election)

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.105)

Table 4.4 clearly shows the extent of the SPD's overall decline in voter share compared to its performance in the 2003 election. Significantly, the greatest decrease occurred in neighbourhoods where the Social Democrats had traditionally performed strongly (-5.6%). Conversely, the Left Party's largest gains (7.4%) were achieved in these SPD strongholds, as well as in neighbourhoods with historically moderate Social Democrat support. Where support for the SPD was already weak, the Left Party too made more modest gains. As such, there is already a positive correlation between SPD and Left Party locations of support. The Greens also made inroads in traditionally strong SPD neighbourhoods, but to a lesser extent than managed by the Left Party (3.0, the party's smallest gain from the SPD). Meanwhile, in Green strongholds, the greater the losses were for the SPD, the greater the gains were for the Left Party. In fact, it was in traditionally strong Green neighbourhoods that the SPD suffered its worst decline in voter share in all the neighbourhoods listed in the table (-8.7). Conversely, the Left Party vote was not only strongest (10%) in staunchly Green districts, but the increase

also equalled that achieved in the Social Democratic areas (7.4%). In districts where the PDS (in cooperation with the WASG) had performed strongly in the 2005 Bundestag election, the SPD suffered its second worst decline (-8.4), thereby mirroring the most substantial gain in voter share made by the Left Party (+8.7).

All in all, the Left Party performed well in districts with strong Social Democratic support, both in terms of voter share and increase on the previous Bürgerschaft election. However, the party's performance in Green strongholds was just as convincing, suggesting not one but two important concentrations of Left Party support in Bremen. Furthermore, the party was able to build on the support already gained by the PDS-WASG alliance in the General Election 2005.

We have already seen that the Left Party was able to attract voters who had previously supported extra-parliamentary parties. The WASG in particular had succeeded in attracting a broad leftist following, ranging from disenchanted Social Democrats through to left-wing voters and activists who had previously rejected the PDS. However, Bremen had also been fertile ground for small protest parties. Some, such as the Schill Party, Arbeit für Bremen, Bremen muss Leben or Bürger in Wut, were either short-lived and/or specific to Bremen. Bremerhaven in particular was also a relative stronghold for the far-right DVU; in the 2007 Bürgerschaft election, one DVU deputy was elected from the municipality, while overall the party missed out on becoming a *Fraktion* by less than one percentage point. Given this potential for protest voting and support for parties outside the mainstream, including on the far right, it is also useful to consider how the Left Party fared in the context of DVU votes as well as in relation to voter turnout, since low participation frequently benefits fringe parties on the right.

Focusing first on Left Party performance in relation to the strength of the DVU, it is perhaps unsurprising that the party achieved its best result (9.0%) in areas with only weak support for the far-right party. (The opposite is true of the other centre-left parties.) The actual strength of DVU support does not appear to have had a particularly great impact on the Left vote, as there is only about a two per cent difference separating the best and the weakest results for the party. Meanwhile, the comparison of the 2007 and 2003 elections shows that the Left Party was also able to make some inroads into areas of DVU support. However, given that DVU support is often higher in working class areas, it could also be argued that the Left Party failed to win over its potential core voters in these districts. The overall results have already shown that overall Left Party support in Bremerhaven lagged behind that in Bremen City.

**Table 4.5. Left Party performance in relation to DVU strength and voter participation**

<b>Political structure and party performance</b>		
	<b>Left Party</b>	
<b>Districts (#)</b>	<b>2007 (%)</b>	<b>+/- 2003</b>
<b>DVU vote</b>		
Strong (8)	6.9	5.8
Medium (12)	8.5	7.1
Weak (9)	9.0	6.7
<b>Participation</b>		
High (7)	10.0	5.4
Medium (15)	7.5	9.5
Low (7)	6.0	7.9

DVU: Strong: 3% and more; weak: under 1% (2003 Bürgerschaft election)

Participation: High: 69.5% and more; low: under 57% (2003 Bürgerschaft election)

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.105)

Secondly, the Left Party's best results were achieved in wards with a high participation rate. Yet in terms of the Left Party's ability to improve its voter share compared to the previous Bürgerschaft election, there was a noticeably more positive development in districts with either a medium or low turnout. However, as the participation rates relate to the 2003 election, the Left Party's increased support in 2007 is most likely explained by the party's ability to attract non-voters (see Table 4.3b above).

The following tables narrow down the focus to take a look at specific districts in order to establish a more accurate picture of Left Party support. For each of the left-of-centre parties, data is shown first for the six strongest wards overall and subsequently according to the most positive change for each respective party.

**Table 4.6. Top six districts by voter share: (a) SPD, (b) Greens, (c) Left Party**

District	(a) Top six districts by SPD share of vote					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
<u>Gröpelingen</u>	50.6	-3.2	9.0	1.1	10.4	8.0
<u>Woltmershausen</u>	45.9	-5.4	11.6	2.9	9.9	8.2
<u>Blumenthal</u>	44.1	-3.4	8.8	2.9	8.4	7.3
<u>Walle</u>	42.7	-5.4	16.6	2.5	11.9	8.8
<u>Vahr</u>	42.5	-0.9	9.5	3.0	8.0	6.5
<u>Osterholz</u>	42.3	-2.3	11.1	3.5	7.7	7.0

District	(b) Top six districts by Green share of vote					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
<u>Östliche Vorstadt</u>	27.6	-11.3	37.0	5.3	13.6	9.6
<u>Mitte</u>	28.7	-10.4	31.5	5.2	12.1	8.4
<u>Neustadt</u>	35.1	-9.7	25.5	4.8	12.1	9.1
<u>Schwachhausen</u>	25.0	-8.0	24.4	4.3	6.0	4.6
<u>Findorff</u>	37.1	-9.0	24.3	4.6	10.3	7.9
<u>Horn-Lehe</u>	30.1	-6.6	19.1	4.3	5.9	4.8

District	(c) Top six districts by Left Party share of vote					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
<u>Östliche Vorstadt</u>	27.6	-11.3	37.0	5.3	13.6	9.6
<u>Neustadt</u>	35.1	-9.7	25.5	4.8	12.1	9.1
<u>Mitte</u>	28.7	-10.4	31.6	5.2	12.1	8.4
<u>Walle</u>	42.7	-5.4	16.6	2.5	11.9	8.8
<u>Gröpelingen</u>	50.6	-3.2	9.0	1.1	10.4	8.0
<u>Findorff</u>	37.1	-9.0	24.3	4.6	9.9	8.2

(Tables a, b, c: Infratest dimap, 2007, p.109ff.)

Gröpelingen, a neighbourhood severely impacted by the decline and eventual closure of the AG Weser shipyard and, later, also the location of a costly and unsuccessful regeneration programme, was the sole ward where the SPD achieved an overall majority of the vote. However, the party still lost voter share (-3.2%) in this traditionally staunch social democratic area. Furthermore, in Gröpelingen the Left Party performed more strongly than the Greens, achieving a substantial 10% of the vote.

A striking feature of the tables is the difference between the respective locations of support for the SPD and Greens. This suggests that the two parties have developed quite distinct core electorates located in separate districts in Bremen. The characteristics of the districts in Table 4.6a confirm the finding that SPD support tends to be concentrated in low or medium density areas, as well as in areas of high unemployment. Similarly, Table 4.6b underlines the Greens' strength in urban areas (in particular Östliche Vorstadt, Mitte and Neustadt).

Conversely, the Left Party's strongest districts comprised both SPD and Green strongholds. The top three districts correspond with those of the Greens, while only Gröpelingen and Walle are common to both the Left and the SPD. These results therefore confirm that the Left Party has the ability to perform well not only in traditionally Social Democratic areas strength, but also in urban Green districts.

Looking at the districts in terms of the greatest positive development for the three parties in question (Table 4.7 below), two features stand out immediately. First, the SPD managed to grow its voter share in just a single ward, and even then by a decidedly modest 0.6%. Secondly, of the wards producing the best (or rather the 'least worst') developments for the SPD, the majority were located in Bremerhaven. Although the Left did increase its share of the vote in Bremerhaven, the SPD lost less support in the municipality than it did elsewhere, meaning that the Left's most substantial increases, both in terms of overall votes and percentage increase, remained firmly concentrated in Bremen City. A contributory factor to the weaker performance in Bremerhaven could be the earlier decision of the PDS, struggling with limited resources and personnel, had taken the decision not to stand candidates in Bremerhaven, thereby restricting the party's opportunity to nurture a core voter base in the municipality.

In the two Bremen City districts, Vahr (-0.9%) and Osterholtz (-2.3%), the Social Democrats have traditionally enjoyed solid support in these economically poor areas. Pre-election surveys had found that despite the challenges of government and the fact that it was no longer overwhelmingly regarded as the party of the 'ordinary person' (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.82) the SPD was still able to depend on some considerable goodwill from voters; slightly more than half of the electorate believed that it was the party that strengthened social justice (compared to the Greens 10% and Left Party 7%) (*ibid.*). Furthermore, specific factors such as investment in and complete

redevelopment of the run-down 'problem' estate in Osterholtz-Tenever<sup>85</sup> may also have curbed further losses for the SPD.

However, the election results show that despite this goodwill towards the SPD, the Left Party managed to attract voters in areas important for the social democrats. The SPD suffered losses in its stronghold of Gröpelingen, where the Left improved its share to 10.4%, an increase of some 8.0% that clearly ate into SPD support. In Walle, too, similarly an SPD district, the Left Party was able to increase its share, largely at the expense of the social democrats. Although the Greens shared none of the wards with the most positive development for the SPD, they did increase their share of the vote in these areas, as did the Left Party. The Greens increased their vote in the central wards of Östliche Vorstadt and Mitte, both established Green strongholds, but the greatest increase was actually in the more rural, CDU heartland of Blockland.

**Table 4.7: Top six districts by positive change: (a) SPD, (b) Greens, (c) Left Party**

District	(a) Positive change for SPD					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
Bremerhaven-Leherheide	34.4	0.6	10.0	2.8	6.3	5.4
Vahr	42.5	-0.9	9.5	3.0	8.0	6.5
Bremerhaven-Surheide	41.7	-1.9	12.4	3.0	6.8	5.5
Bremerhaven-Schiffdorferdamm	38.8	-2.0	11.7	1.7	5.7	4.9
Osterholz	42.3	-2.3	11.1	3.5	7.7	7.0
Bremerhaven-Geestemünde	35.8	-2.3	10.5	2.4	6.7	5.8

<sup>85</sup> The high-rise 1970s development of Tenever was blighted by many of the social problems common to such developments (isolation, 'ghettoisation', vandalism), and suffered from high unemployment and poverty (including child poverty). The volume of Hartz IV recipients was one of the highest in Bremen. The *Soziale Stadt and Stadtumbau* (social city and urban redevelopment) investment and rebuilding programmes were largely focused on the area (Farwick *et.al.*, 2007, p.33).

District	<b>(b) Positive change for Greens</b>					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
Blockland	17.0	-5.7	10.1	6.9	4.9	4.5
Östliche Vorstadt	27.6	-11.3	37.0	5.3	13.6	9.6
Mitte	28.7	-10.4	31.6	5.2	12.1	8.4
Seehausen	33.7	-8.4	9.0	5.1	8.7	6.9
Neustadt	35.1	-9.7	25.5	4.8	12.1	9.1
Findorff	37.1	-9.0	24.3	4.6	10.3	7.9

District	<b>(c) Positive change for Left Party</b>					
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
Östliche Vorstadt	27.6	-11.3	37.0	5.3	13.6	9.6
Neustadt	35.1	-9.7	25.5	4.8	12.1	9.1
Walle	42.7	-5.4	16.6	2.5	11.9	8.8
Mitte	28.7	-10.4	31.6	5.2	12.1	8.4
Woltmershausen	45.9	-5.4	11.6	2.9	9.9	8.2
Gröpelingen	50.6	-3.2	9.0	1.1	10.4	8.0

(Tables a, b,c: Infratest dimap, 2007, p.116ff.)

The most positive developments for the Left Party were in Östliche Vorstadt and Neustadt. If Mitte is also taken into account it becomes clear that in each of these strong districts for the Left Party, the SPD suffered some of its most severe losses; in fact, Östliche Vorstadt accounted for the greatest decrease in SPD voter share in the 2007 election. Once again, this is in line with the trend identified in Table 4.4, which showed the party tended to gain support in areas where the SPD was traditionally either (moderately) strong, as well as in Green strongholds. These same neighbourhoods were also the source of the strongest PDS support from 1995 through to the Bundestag election of 2005.

So far, we have seen that the SPD suffered substantial losses in voter share in several but not all of its core districts. Secondly, as expected, the Left was able to develop its existing modest voter base in Green strongholds that were also characterised by moderate SPD support. However, it is also striking that the strong performance of the Left in these Green appeared to be at the considerable expense of the Social Democrats, whose voter share in Östliche Vorstadt shrank by approximately one third. Now, having identified the pattern of gains and losses in relation to location and traditional party strongholds, we need to turn to the question of class voting in Bremen and whether the 2007 election provided evidence of class-based voting for the Left Party.

### **Voting Patterns: Socio-Economic Factors**

To gain an insight into how socio-economic class relates to the Left vote in Bremen, Table 4.8 below identifies electoral behaviour according to occupational status. Focusing first on the other centre-left parties, it is clear that the Social Democrats still received the majority of their support from workers. Indeed, while the party lost voter share across all the occupational groups, it managed to minimise losses among this core group (-2%). Furthermore, manual workers who were also trade union members continued to provide strong support for the SPD, albeit to a lesser extent than in 2003 (-7%). But the Social Democrats suffered the most substantial fall in voter share among the unemployed members of the electorate. Whereas in 2003 SPD support stood at over 40%, in 2007 this fell to 32%, just behind the figure for civil servants. Unemployed voters also turned away from the Greens, too (-9%), representing the only loss for the party, who otherwise managed to grow its voter share in all other occupational groups, including a slight increase in support from workers (+1%). The largest growth in Green support came from the self-employed, while apprentices constituted the main source of support. However, the Greens' weaker support among unemployed voters is perhaps not entirely unexpected; the party tended to fair less well in areas of high unemployment and even though in opposition in Bremen at the time was part of the national government coalition, together with the SPD, responsible for introducing Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV.

Turning now to the Left Party, it is striking that unemployed voters account for not only the largest source of support (20%) but also the greatest increase in voter share (+16%). Furthermore, workers represent both the Left's second largest group of voters (12%) and the second largest percentage increase (+11%). In both occupational groups, the Left clearly outperformed the Greens, and its 20% share of the unemployed



vote meant that the party was second only to the SPD (i.e. also stronger than the CDU). Among the remaining occupational groups listed, the Left increased its voter share by an average of just under 6%.

**Table 4.8: Voter share and relative increase/decrease (2007-2003): occupational group and trade union membership**

Occupational group and trade union membership						
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
Occupation						
Worker	45	-2	8	+ 1	12	+ 11
Salaried employee	36	-7	22	+ 3	8	+ 6
Civil servants	34	-2	29	+ 4	9	+ 7
Self-employed	20	-5	26	+ 8	8	+ 6
Retired	42	-4	9	+ 5	7	+ 6
Apprentice	30	-8	32	+ 6	8	+ 3
Unemployed	32	-9	13	-9	20	+ 16
Trade union membership						
Member	45	-6	17	+ 3	13	+ 10
Member, manual worker	47	-7	7	+ 1	17	+ 15
Non-member	34	-5	17	+ 4	7	+ 6

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.53)

While the pre-election survey found that the majority regarded the Left not as a problem solver but rather as a party that ‘tells it like it is’ (Infratest dimap, 2007, p.85) just under half (47%) of Bremen voters, including those who voted for parties other than the Left, agreed that the party was actively engaged on behalf of the socially disadvantaged (ibid.) Participants in this research echoed this finding. Some of the participants were unemployed; two thirds were employees who earned an annual income of less than €27K. They too made a strong association between the Left Party and the representation of the interests of workers and unemployed people, describing this as an ‘influential’ or even ‘decisive’ factor in their voting decision. Just under half the research participants specifically cited the SPD’s ‘betrayal of working and unemployed people’ as their reason to support the Left Party.

The PDS had always struggled to establish ties with organised labour, so a further important development for the Left Party was its increased popularity among trade union members. Overall, 13% of trade union members voted for the Left Party, an increase of 10% compared to the previous Bürgerschaft election. This result is even stronger, both in terms of voter share and percentage increase, among trade union members who are employed as workers: 17% of workers organised in trade unions supported the Left (compared to 7% of workers who were not members of a trade union), thus representing an increase of 15% on the 2003 result for the same group (and compared to an increase of 6% among non-members). Furthermore, of the participants in the research who had voted for the Left in 2007, the majority (70%) were also members of a trade union. The SPD, on the other hand, suffered losses among organised labour, particularly among workers. Although general disillusionment with the SPD would certainly seem to account for the Social Democrats' weaker performance, the fact that the Left Party was able to strengthen its voter share among trade union members (the Greens managed only a slight increase) strongly points to the influence of the WASG and its associations with – and indeed origins in – organised labour.

The detailed Bürgerschaft results have so far presented a picture of diminishing SPD support among workers, the unemployed and trade union members, which in turn has been reinforced in the anecdotal evidence from the Left Party sympathisers who contributed to this research. Elff & Rossteutscher demonstrated the declining ability of the SPD to attract the votes of workers in the western states from 2005 onwards (see Chapter Three). The data from Bremen does not fully conform to these findings, since it shows that in 2007 workers still voted for the SPD far more than for any other party (SPD: 45%; Left Party: 12%). Moreover, the SPD continued to attract the greatest overall share of the vote from trade union members (SPD: 47%; Left Party: 17%). Here, it is probably important not to underestimate either the residual goodwill towards Bremen's SPD or the Social Democrats' historic strength of the party in Bremen. A further important contributory factor is of course the historical weakness of the PDS, both in Bremen and the western states in general.

On the other hand, among unemployed voters, the gap was far narrower (SPD: 32%; Left Party: 20%). This suggests that although workers still voted primarily for the SPD, a degree of class-based dealignment was taking place. Naturally, it does not necessarily follow that a *realignment* of class voting occurred in favour of the Left Party. However, evidence so far does point to the existence of a link between class and the

Left Party vote, and this becomes clearer when the locations of support are taken into account. The following example of two Bremen City districts further illustrates this point.

The election data has shown that the district of Gröpelingen was a staunchly SPD area and remained the sole district in which the party maintained an overall majority (50.6%) in 2007. Yet here, too, the Social Democrats lost voter share (-3%). The district is one of the poorest in Bremen City: in 2007, the average personal income was just €18,000 (Muscheid and Strüßmann, 2011, p.11), and over half the residents had an annual income of €15,000 or less (*ibid.*, p.9). Unemployment was also a problem, with 22.4% of residents out of work (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, 2007, p.144). Of these, 27.2% were classified as belonging to the 'workers' occupational group, and 42.5% were long-term unemployed (*ibid.*). In the Bürgerschaft election, the Left Party was able to record one of its best results in Gröpelingen, both in terms of overall share (10.4%) and increase in relation to the PDS result in the previous Bürgerschaft (8%). Conversely, the Greens did not make substantial gains and, with an overall result of 9.0%, actually finished behind the Left Party.

Looking at this district in greater detail, the neighbourhood (*Ortsteil*) of Lindenhof, which is classified as a working-class residential area (Farwick *et. al.*, 2007, p.68), demonstrates the same pattern at a more grassroots level. Here, although the Social Democrats managed to retain their overall majority, the Left Party vote significantly increased (to 11.5%) in this SPD stronghold (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, 2007, p.228). Again, the area is characterised by low personal annual incomes (€17.8K) (Muscheid and Strüßmann, 2011, p.11) and high unemployment; in July 2007 the jobless figure for Lindenhof stood at 26.9% (Farwick *et. al.*, 2007, p.88). Notably, Left Party voter share in Lindenhof first exceeded that of the Greens (whose performance tends to be weaker in areas of high unemployment) in the general election of 2005, when the PDS first cooperated with the WASG (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, 2007, p.225). The party went on to strengthen this result in 2007, whereas the Green vote further declined compared to that of 2005.

However, the chapter has also already shown that the Left Party vote was far from confined to SPD-voting, working-class districts blighted by high unemployment. The district in which Left Party achieved its best election results, both in terms of voter share and increase, was Östliche Vorstadt. The Greens further consolidated their vote in 2007, and were once again the largest party; conversely, it was here that the SPD suffered its greatest loss of voter share in Bremen (see also Tables 4.6 and 4.7). In this

fashionable district, close to the centre of Bremen City and classified as a middle-class residential area (Farwick *et. al.*, 2007, p.68), the average annual income was over €29K (€11K higher than in Gröpelingen) (Muscheid and Strüßmann, 2011, p.11), and unemployment stood at 16.1%, which although substantial, nevertheless reflected the average rate for Bremen. Workers accounted for 25.2% of the jobless figure, while 41.3% were long-term unemployed (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, 2007, p.142).

Looking again at the *Ortsteil* level, it was in the Steintor neighbourhood that the Left Party recorded by far its best result across the whole of Bremen, with just over 17%. Of the four areas that constitute Östliche Vorstadt, Steintor had the lowest average income (ca. €28K); at 15.7% the unemployment rate was marginally below the Bremen City average (15.9%) and around ten per cent lower than in Lindenhof (Farwick *et. al.*, 2007, p.88). Even here, in Östliche Vorstadt's 'weakest' area, the Greens achieved their best result (41.5%), while the SPD actually lost voter share and finished only six per cent ahead of the Left Party (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen, 2007, p.226).

These examples of two contrasting districts and local neighbourhoods contained within them demonstrate two 'typical' locations of strong Left Party support. The first is a staunchly social-democratic working class area with low income and higher than average unemployment. The second is a middle-class residential Green stronghold with a higher annual income and a lower than average rate of unemployment. Furthermore, the latter had also delivered the strongest support for the PDS (notably Östliche Vorstadt and Mitte). Consequently, it is necessary to consider the existence of an additional explanation of the Left Party vote that does not strictly fit the class cleavage framework.

### **An Alternative – or Additional – Explanation of Left Party Support**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in the mid-1990s the PDS settled on the strategy of campaigning specifically on the issue of peace and anti-militarism. The party targeted traditionally Green-voting districts such as Östliche Vorstadt and Mitte in the hope of attracting the support of voters who opposed the Red-Green federal government's decision to involve the Bundeswehr in military action abroad. Anti-militarism was of course also a key PDS policy at national level. Interestingly, while SPD 'betrayal' of workers and the unemployed was the reason most commonly cited by Left Party voters contributing to this research, the second most frequently identified explanation for voting Left was that it was 'the only party against foreign engagement of the Bundeswehr'. Although foreign policy, like Hartz and the setting of a national

minimum wage, is a competence of federal government, rather than of the *Länder*, a feared 'watering down of [Left Party] foreign policy' was also cited among the participants as a reason for opposing a potential coalition with the SPD. Another contributor identified both peace and social justice as priority issues for Bremen, thus echoing the perception that both the Agenda 2010/Hartz measures and Germany's international military intervention created an irreconcilable cleft between the SPD and the Left Party (see Cartel Theory above).

Furthermore, the issue of antimilitarism has particular relevance for Bremen. A number of the state's institutions and industries, including the port, are involved in the research, manufacture or export of weapons. Indeed, the Bremen Left Party has continued the initial efforts of the PDS and built strong relations with the Bremer Friedensforum (Bremen Peace Forum), itself an early member of the anti-Hartz demonstrations. It has cooperated with the organisation on a number of occasions, for example in the struggle to uphold the *Zivilklause*<sup>86</sup> at Bremen University.

The (by western standards) relatively promising PDS vote and, subsequently, the strong performance of the Left Party in these districts therefore suggest that antimilitarism, both in terms of federal foreign policy but also in the regional context of Bremen, represents a further important source of electoral support for the Left. However, given the volume of employment resulting from these activities, this issue could potentially give rise to a conflict of interests for Bremen's Left Party, particularly if it were to enter into a coalition required to make decisions about the future of the industry and a significant number of jobs.

To sum up, the Left Party's performance in these traditionally Green neighbourhoods strengthened the modest inroads already made by the PDS from the mid-1990s. Therefore, this source of electoral support, although extremely important for the party, did not actually represent a major shift in the Left vote in 2007. The question remains of the class cleavage and the extent to which this accounted for the party's success.

While the SPD lost the support of, above all, the unemployed, the Left Party significantly increased its share among jobless voters, as well as among manual workers. Workers organised in trade unions represented another voter group who turned away from the SPD. Again, the Left Party was able to grow its voter share

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<sup>86</sup> Literally 'civil clause', meaning an undertaking by academic/scientific institutes to abstain from research and teaching for military purposes.

among this section of the electorate. Given the political climate at the time, as the impact of the Hartz employment market and welfare reforms, high unemployment and rising poverty continued to bite, it might not have seemed surprising that the Left Party was able to make strong gains among these groups, but the disappointing experience of the PDS shows that a class-based dealignment from the SPD and a realignment to another party on the left of the Social Democrats could by no means be assumed. In other words, a series of specific circumstances were required to allow the new Left Party to successfully mobilise along the class cleavage.

The magnitude of a social cleavage's expression varies over time, depending on the particular given conditions and relationships and also, accordingly, favours either a consensual or more conflict-driven approach. It has been stated (see Chapter Three) that expression of the class cleavage occurs somewhere between the instrumental and ideological poles of the functional dimension; in other words, between negotiating concessions, especially in parliament, on the one hand, and principled opposition on the other. Factors such as the state of the economy, industrial sector, political conditions and the institutional context all play a role in determining the articulation of the class cleavage.

In Bremen, the prevailing conditions had long been economic austerity, privatisation, long-term unemployment and industrial transformation, all implemented by the social democrat-led government, which, despite dwindling support, continued to dominate the state's politics. However, opposition to the recently introduced Hartz reforms resulted in the establishment of a collective identity that did not restrict its demand to merely modifying Hartz, but called for its abolition. Furthermore, the movement, which was overwhelmingly extra-parliamentary, also called for social justice and framed this demand in clear class terms.

Social Cleavage Theory also identifies the need to express an emerging collective identity through some form of political organisation, most commonly a political party. Initially, this organisation was the gathering of the loose alliance of social groups and individuals at the Monday demonstrations. The PDS, though a regular participant in the protests and an opponent of the Agenda 2010, was not in a position to fulfil the role of the mobilising party, due to its perceived 'easterness', its weak ties to Bremen's social movements and what one research participant termed its well-trodden 'path of conformity' towards the SPD. According to Social Cleavage Theory, if it is not possible for the mobilising movement to align to an existing party, then factors such as political

culture and institutions determine whether a new party may form to articulate the new or revived cleavage. The conditions were favourable in Bremen: the state's electoral law had already facilitated the emergence of political newcomers, including locally based initiatives and there also existed a strong tradition of left-wing, extra-parliamentary activism and social movements. The Greens had also made their electoral breakthrough here in the political 'laboratory' of Bremen. These conditions therefore allowed the newly-founded WASG to quickly become the key articulator of the demand for social justice.

As seen earlier in the chapter, there were concerns, certainly among WASG members as well as among activists within social movements, that a more formal cooperation with the PDS risked too much emphasis on a parliamentary approach — in other words, a more 'instrumental' articulation of the class cleavage.

Nonetheless, as the analysis of the election shows, the Left Party, with its class-framed opposition to Hartz IV and demand for social justice, succeeded in attracting votes away from the SPD. A research participant criticised the SPD from a class perspective, observing that, 'historically, at decisive moments, had always voted in favour of the ruling class'. Another contributor cited a commitment to socialism as the grounds for their voting decision:

*The Left Party is the only party that represents a break with neoliberal politics and, at least in its basic approach, is for a socialist society.*

While the anti-military issue and voters in traditionally Green inner city areas continued to be important sources of electoral support, it was workers, trade union members and, above all, the unemployed — the group most directly affected by Hartz IV — that accounted for the success of Bremen's Left Party in 2007.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Outlook

The aim of this research has been to determine the extent to which Cartel Theory and Social Cleavage Theory (specifically the class cleavage) can explain the electoral success of the Left Party in Germany's western states. The current chapter now reviews the key findings and then opens up the discussion to consider evidence from other western states.

The starting point of the research was an analysis of the PDS/Left Party and its development in the western states. After an initial explanation of the PDS's origins in the GDR's party of state socialism, Chapter One gave an account of the party's early efforts to establish an organisational and voter base in the western *Länder*. The chapter identified the fundamental challenges facing the PDS during the post-unification period, including organisational weakness, the party's perceived 'easterness' and the inability to become a uniting force for the West German left. The same challenges continued to hinder the party's endeavours right up until the alliance with the WASG and indeed influenced the negotiations between the two parties. Chapter One also explained the importance of the western states for the PDS. Given Germany's federal structure, electoral system and demographic character, a solid and long-term voter base in the West, rather than one confined to the East, was essential for the party. Moreover, a nationwide voter base would lend credence to the PDS's self-identification as a socialist party for the whole of Germany. The party had to appeal to its eastern core but also attract activists and voters, especially in the West, who were critical of state socialism and the SED. The PDS campaigned on three key policy areas: the representation of eastern interests, socialism and antimilitarism. The chapter then outlined the catalyst for the alliance between the PDS and WASG, namely the introduction of the Hartz welfare and employment market reforms, and described the process of the cooperation and the circumstances leading to the eventual merger. From this starting point of the historical, strategic and ideological factors identified and explained in the chapter, it has also been possible to understand the debates surrounding the foundation of the Left Party. Furthermore, this foundation provided a context for the subsequent theoretical frameworks and the Case Study.



Chapters Two and Three introduced the theories explored in the research. Both chapters set out the basic elements and reviewed the key aspects relating to the respective theory. Chapter Two focused on Cartel Theory, first conceptualised by Katz and Mair to explain the changing relationship of parties and the state, and the implications for party democracy and representation. The chapter also outlined the main challenges to Cartel Theory (Kitschelt, Detterbeck), before considering later developments to the theory (Blyth and Katz) that explored Cartel Theory in the context of globalisation and the consequences for competition in the political 'marketplace'. The chapter concluded by identifying aspects of the framework that could be applied to the Case Study of the Left Party in Bremen. These focused on leadership and representation within the party, as well as party competition.

Chapter Three approached Social Cleavage Theory in a similar manner. First was an explanation of Lipset and Rokkan's model of social cleavage, followed by a definition of the capital-labour cleavage that this research has discussed in relation to the Left Party. The chapter then gave an outline of arguments citing economic change, social mobility and the emergence of a new, values-based dimension (post-materialism) as factors in the decline of the class cleavage. However, the continuing importance of the class cleavage was explained by means of class categorisations based on the character of working relationships within the modern employment market. The chapter then referred to data (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007) that demonstrated the continued demand for welfare and redistribution, despite the rhetoric and realities of the flexible labour market. Election results depicted voter support for the SPD and Left Party according to occupational group (Nachtwey and Spier, 2007) and changes in workers' propensity to support either of the two parties (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011). Finally, key aspects of Social Cleavage Theory were identified for further study in the context of Bremen's Left Party.

The Case Study brought together the earlier analysis of the PDS/Left Party and the theory chapters to test the explanatory frameworks in the city-state of Bremen. First, a contextual section introduced Bremen's political and economic character as a region that was electorally dominated by the Social Democrats and suffering the consequences of industrial decline, including poverty fuelled by high unemployment and a growth in the low-pay sector. Next, the study outlined the strategic and electoral development of the regional PDS, thereby recalling the themes explored in Chapter One, such as the party's organisational weakness and lack of local political 'roots'. The final contextual part of the study concentrated on the 2007 Bürgerschaft election,

providing an overview of the campaign goals and political focus of the three left of centre parties, as well as the election results. The chapter then moved onto the analytical part of the study, focusing on the two theoretical frameworks in turn. For both frameworks, qualitative research was carried out by means of questionnaire to gain first-hand insights of Left Party supporters and members.

First, the study considered the narrowing of the policy supply predicted in Cartel Theory. Evidence was sought in the 'restructuring' policies of the SPD-led government, the rhetoric associated with these policies, as well as in the response of Left Party. In particular, the study set out to discover indications of 'signalling' on the part of the SPD and Left Party that suggested a willingness to cooperate and further restrict policy in return for a (future) share in power. The second area of focus concerned the organisational character of the Left Party. Here, the study was looking for symptoms of prioritising office-seeking goals and signs of an ascendant party in central office, particularly in the context of the focus of campaigns and candidate selection, as well as in the relationship between the PDS and WASG.

The analysis of Social Cleavage Theory began by considering whether there was evidence of a distinct and articulated class cleavage in Bremen. The anti-Hartz protests were a key source of insights regarding mobilisation of the class cleavage as well as its framing and articulation. Next, the more detailed breakdown of the 2007 election results identified patterns of Left Party support and in particular whether there was indeed a class element to the Left Party's vote. The analysis focused on factors including voters' occupational group, the political and economic character of the district and clues provided by the increase or decrease in support for the other left of centre parties. Finally, this section also considered whether factors other than the class cleavage accounted for the strong Left Party vote.

## **5.1. The Left Party Elsewhere in Western Germany: The Bremen Results in a Comparative Perspective**

### **5.1.1. Cartel Theory**

Chapter Two identified both internal and external aspects of Cartel Theory for further investigation in the Bremen Case Study. The first set of characteristics related to leadership and organisation, while the second set was concerned with competition between political parties. The Case Study revealed that certain aspects of Cartel

Theory were indeed evident in the Bremen's Left Party leading up to the 2007 Bürgerschaft election. This discussion now focuses on whether the characteristics identified were specific to Bremen and the circumstances that existed within the setting, or whether similar patterns could be found in other western federal states. As Bremen is a small city-state in which the Left Party was (at least by its western standards) relatively well established, the discussion pays particular attention to the 'area state' of Hessen, where the PDS had not previously participated in regional elections. Additional comparisons focus on the large area state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city-state of Hamburg.

### **Organisation and Leadership**

The Bremen campaign was orientated to the party's anticipated entry into the Bürgerschaft, prompting concerns among some members that the parliamentary focus threatened to sideline the party's grassroots engagement with social movements and extra-parliamentary activism. Moreover, the Case Study found that the national leadership had intervened (unsuccessfully) to prevent the campaign being headed by an inexperienced lead candidate who was critical of the PDS/Left Party participation in eastern regional governments, especially the track record of the Berlin coalition, and instead favoured an approach of principled opposition in Bremen. In place of the democratically selected Erlanson, a leadership-approved, higher profile candidate was to steer a more moderate, pro-coalition course in Bremen. In the federal state of Hessen, where the Left Party was contesting an election for the first time, the party's candidate list for the early 2008 election consisted of unknown and inexperienced candidates (Schroeder 2008a,10'). The lead candidate Pit Metz stirred up some controversy by directly comparing the actions of armed guards on divided Germany's east-west border and the military participation of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. In the resulting media storm, the national leadership intervened to remove the candidate and Metz was forced to stand down (*ibid.*).

The leadership's involvement in Bremen centred on social and economic policy, namely Erlanson's criticism of the Red-Red coalition in Berlin and the decision to include a 'no privatisation' commitment in the party's eleven-point plan, which would have ruled out any cooperation with an SPD-led government intent on continuing Bremen's 'restructuring'. In Hessen, it was the reaction to Metz's statement, which managed to touch on two controversies (German military engagement and the GDR) that made his position untenable and prompted the central party to intervene. However, Schroeder (*ibid.*) considers the inevitable removal of Metz to be the pathway for the national

leadership, and particularly Gysi and Lafontaine, to ensure that a more moderate and pragmatic course was steered in Hessen. As in Bremen, which had long been considered the trailblazer for the westward expansion of the PDS, great hopes had recently been pinned on the Hessen party. A resurgent and more left-leaning SPD was hoping to unseat the incumbent CDU-led government and form a new coalition with its preferred partner, the Greens. Although SPD leader Andrea Ypsilanti had ruled out any form of cooperation with the Left, preferring to rely on the pro-business FDP for support if necessary (DIE LINKE Hessen, 2008a), it was unclear whether the SPD and Greens would be able to muster sufficient voter share. The Left Party's national leadership therefore took a keen interest in developments in Hessen and the potential 'Wiesbaden Model', in other words a western counterpart to the eastern 'Magdeburg Model' of PDS toleration of minority government. The regional party associations in both Bremen and Hessen were therefore under the spotlight in terms of their groundbreaking potential and thus attracted the direct (and sometimes unwelcome) involvement of the national leadership. In Lower Saxony, a DKP member standing on the Left Party's open list was expelled for appearing to justify the existence of the Stasi as a necessary measure to defend against reactionary forces; later on in Bremen two members of the parliamentary group's staff were sacked for unprofessional conduct, and a speaker resigned after just three days (Patton, 2008, p.17). Although these incidents could be regarded as unfortunate but individual incidents, they nevertheless demonstrate the leadership's readiness to intervene lest such behaviour undermine the party's parliamentary goals. Furthermore, Patton speculates that the controversies point to greater unruliness within the western associations that makes them more difficult to 'manage' from above than their eastern counterparts (*ibid.*), thus underlining the contrasting political culture in the two regions.

However, at least in the case of Hessen, the central party's active role is also explained by the regional party's organisational weakness. The party's membership and support was concentrated in the south of the state and particularly in the metropolitan area of Frankfurt, leaving sizeable parts of Hessen with little in the way of a grassroots organisation, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, there was a poorly developed activist base, which leads Schroeder (2008b) to conclude that the Hessen party was primarily rooted in trade unions, with few connections to new social movements (such as the peace movement). Echoing the earlier experience of the PDS in the West, the lack of personnel and resources necessitated greater dependence on 'outside' support, in this case the national leadership. Added to this was the overall political inexperience

of the candidates, which forced the Hessen campaign to rely heavily on the participation of well-known national Left Party figures.

Following the election, when the party held a vote among the Hessen members on whether to support Ypsilanti's election as Prime Minister and prop up a minority SPD-Green government, less than half of the membership (which numbered approximately 2,100) actually participated (Schroeder, 2008a,13'), thus reinforcing the claim that it was a passive, rather than an activist-based party. The lack of a solid grassroots activist movement within the party was also evident in relation to the policy on the separation of office and mandate. At the party's founding congress in 2007, the decision had been taken to ensure the separation of the two functions. However, due to the organisational weakness of the party, the decision resulted in something of a power vacuum, with no-one available or willing to fulfil the vacated party officers' positions once the parliamentary group was established. Consequently, the policy was abolished, thus allowing mandate holders to continue occupying officer positions (Schroeder, 2008a, 22'), a step which can be seen as further strengthening the influence of parliamentary rather than grassroots politics.

### **Party Competition**

The second and related aspect of Cartel Theory explored in the Case Study was political competition. Blythe and Katz used the analogy of economic oligopolies to explain parties' restriction of policy output. Faced with tighter fiscal limitations, social democratic parties in particular sought new ways to become absolved of the responsibility for the supply of public goods while maximising 'profit' (security and resources) for the party. The rhetoric of 'no alternative', especially surrounding globalisation, provides the means of downsizing voter expectations and demands, while decision-making is placed outside the reach of political 'interference' or, looking at it another way, beyond democratic accountability. According to this theory, for social democratic parties, the shift in the provision of public goods from being a responsibility of the state to one of the market was interpreted as signalling to the centre-right parties their willingness to restrict output and cease competition.

The Bremen case study has depicted a narrowed range of policies offered by the parties represented in the Bürgerschaft before 2007. The SPD-led government had implemented a range of far-reaching cuts and privatisation measures, and could rely on the broad support of the other parties in the legislature. There had also been additional proposals that would have seen the role of the state reduced to that of coordinator of

the public services 'market'. The discourse surrounding the government programme emphasised the importance of 'emancipating' people from welfare and the need to do away with employment rights as 'barriers' and 'risks' to business. Furthermore, the privatisation of state assets and services resulted not only in the long-term loss of income, but also restricted the fiscal resources and the legal scope available to future governments, regardless of party commitment to, or voter demand for, public services.

Although Bremen faced particularly tough economic and social problems, including those related to its status as a city-state, it was by no means the only western state facing budget challenges. Moreover, the Left Party's first entry into some western parliaments coincided with or took place in the aftermath of the 2007/8 financial crash<sup>87</sup>. A national cap on new borrowing ('*Schuldenbremse*' - literally a 'debt brake') was adopted into Germany's Basic Law constitution, prohibiting any new borrowing as of 2020. In preparation, all sixteen federal states are required to bring their deficits under control (maximum 0.35% of GDP) by 2016. It is two western states, Bremen and Saarland, that have experienced the greatest difficulty meeting these requirements and as a result are expected to make still further cuts (*Spiegel Online*, 2014). The Left Party pursued legal means to challenge the *Schuldenbremse* on the grounds that it compromised the independence of the *Länder* and the capacity of the state to act, but the challenge was unsuccessful (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2013; *Neues Deutschland*, 2014). Consequently, both the cap itself as well as the efforts to bring debt within the permitted parameters place further legal restrictions on the ability of governments to invest in the economy, housing and education. Just as future governments are already obliged to implement the employment and welfare reforms, so too will they be required to abide by these constitutional requirements or, as they are described in Cartel Theory, 'binding quotas'.

Cartel Theory also regards a narrowing in the policy scope by individual parties as a possible signal of readiness to 'join' the established cartel. Analysis of the policy programme as well as and the attitude towards office-seeking goals and potential coalition-building are both useful in this respect. Chapter Four showed that in Bremen the Left Party's *Bürgerschaft* campaign identified a consensus among the established parties, which had subjugated themselves to supposed fiscal constraints to such an extent that people would be 'completely and utterly' at the mercy of economic interests

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<sup>87</sup> Western federal state elections in which the Left Party entered the regional parliament for the first time: Hessen and Lower Saxony: 27.01.08; Hamburg: 24.02.08; Saarland: 30.08.09; Schleswig-Holstein 27.09.09; North Rhine-Westphalia: 09.05.10. See Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2014.

(DIE LINKE Bremen, 2007, p.9). The party's key policy areas included the retention of public services and corporations, the return of already privatised areas to social ownership, as well as strengthened investment in public services, education and healthcare (*ibid.*, p.9ff), funded by tax increases and the allocation of underspent resources (*ibid.*, p.13). The Case Study also revealed that some Left Party members expressed concern that policy was too focused on the SPD and that the party had thereby squandered an opportunity to build a more convincing profile as an alternative to the prevailing neoliberal policies of the established parties, including the Social Democrats. On the other hand, the party did plainly state its rejection of cooperation with any government implementing cuts, privatisation or other measures that would worsen the circumstances of, for example, wage-dependent workers and those in precarious employment (*ibid.*, p.14). As such, the Left Party was preparing to enter the Bürgerschaft strictly as a party of opposition. Although this approach would not have automatically ruled out a toleration agreement, it was unlikely that the SPD, even with its predicted losses in the election, would have had to rely on the informal support of the Left in order to prop up its preferred coalition with the Greens. To sum up, Chapter Four found that the Bremen Left Party set out redistributive policies that explicitly opposed privatisation and cuts, and favoured investment in and expansion of public services, welfare and publicly funded job creation. There was also a clear statement of the party's oppositional role. But what is the evidence from other western states?

The familiar themes of privatisation, poverty and working conditions dominated the Left Party's 2010 regional election programme in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). By then the party was already represented in six western parliaments, so expectations were high for a similar success in Germany's most populous state, where the previous regional election (2005) had precipitated the demise of the SPD-Green federal government. In its analysis of the financial crisis, the programme set out a critique of the historical and inherent crises of capitalism (DIE LINKE NRW, 2010, p.2) and strongly emphasised the democratisation of the economy (*ibid.*, p.6). Of specific relevance for NRW was the policy of bringing the huge privatised energy companies such as E.ON and RWE into municipal ownership, as well as a state-wide ban on the production, processing or transportation of atomic energy and materials (*ibid.*, p.6). Regarding the Hartz measures, the NRW Left Party demanded a higher statutory rate for claimants, as well as the abolition of sanctions (*ibid.*, p.15). Further demands included an end to 'mini-jobs', a minimum wage of 10 euro (*ibid.*, p.20), and the introduction of a shorter working week with the same pay (*ibid.*, p.4). The Left Party also campaigned strongly on these issues in the federal state of Hessen. The Hessen

party's organisational weakness necessitated a more general approach to the campaign, which focused on the Left's key issue of social justice as well as regional themes such as the airport, the prevention of railway privatisation, an end to the sell-off of stakes in the already privatised Telekom and to return the Hessen-based company to state ownership (DIE LINKE Hessen 2008b, p.12). Describing privatisation as 'theft from citizens' (*ibid.*, p.11), the party stated its intention to provide a parliamentary platform for the broader movement striving to overcome neoliberalism.

In the city-state of Hamburg, the campaign against privatisation centred on energy and hospitals. The party demanded an end to coal and atomic energy (DIE LINKE Hamburg, 2008, p.36) and insisted that healthcare was not a commodity to be placed in the hands of private interests (*ibid.*, p.19). Education was another key theme and was directly linked to the problem of child poverty in Hamburg; the programme pointed out that despite the Hamburg's significant wealth, one in five children was growing up in poverty, while educational opportunities were increasingly defined primarily by parental wealth (*ibid.*, p.4). Like Bremen, Hamburg was also experiencing budget problems exacerbated by investment in so-called prestige projects, which the Left Party claimed was diverting money away from urgently needed social programmes. The party called for tax increases to fund a package of investment and social welfare measures (*ibid.*, p.62). An additional similarity to the Bremen campaign was the concern about militarisation of the economy. As a port city, Hamburg was an economic centre for international weapons exports; it was also a location for national military planning and training (*ibid.*, p.29ff). The Left Party set out a policy that would ban weapons passing through Hamburg's port or airport, bring about the 'demilitarisation of culture' (prohibiting an overtly military focus for museums, events and even street names) and place a ban on school visits by military youth officers and recruiters (*ibid.*, p.30ff).

This next main question within Cartel Theory concerns the 'signalling' of willingness to modify policy in return for cooperation opportunities. In Bremen, the Left Party declared itself the party of solidarity, jobs and social justice that stood as a clear alternative to the policies of the established party. As the first regional association to enter an election, Bremen's Left Party cited the success of the pre-merger Left alliance in the 2005 Bundestag election as proof that it was already a counterbalance to neoliberalism and social austerity. Furthermore, the party plainly stated there would be no participation in a government that implemented cuts or privatised public sector goods, or further undermined the situation of workers, the unemployed, pensioners or



immigrants. Given the SPD's stated intent to continue its 'restructuring', Bremen's Left Party thereby committed itself to an oppositional role. The Left Party in Hamburg took a similar position in its programme, stating that it would oppose measures such as cuts and privatisation. However, the election outcome delivered the opportunity to remove the CDU government with the formation of an SPD-Green-Left (Red-Green-Red) coalition. Having rejected a coalition so unequivocally in its programme, the Left Party could not risk losing its credibility by then entering into such an alliance; it did, however, offer its informal support or toleration of a minority SPD-Green government (Hartwig, 2008, p.7). Nonetheless, there were few signs that either the SPD or, in particular, the Greens, would have accepted a toleration model; furthermore, the Greens (who stand in Hamburg as the Green Alternative List - GAL) were already known to favour a coalition with the incumbent Christian Democrats (*ibid.*).

Conversely, there appeared to be greater clarity regarding potential coalitions or informal support in North Rhine-Westphalia. Here too, the Left Party rejected in its programme participation — either on a coalition *or* toleration basis — in any government committed to cuts and privatisation, and emphasised the party's openness to extra-parliamentary movements and activism as a key requirement of any future *Fraktion*. Oskar Lafontaine lent support to the campaign and also ruled out a 'Magdeburg Model' of toleration in NRW. He stated that the principal condition for any such cooperation would be no social cuts not only in NRW, but also in the Bundesrat (*Stern*, 2010a). Once again, given the policy intentions of the SPD, Lafontaine's statement effectively committed the Left Party to its oppositional role. Among voters, rather than members, however, the approach to Left Party involvement or toleration in government was rather different; although only 33% of SPD voters and 40% of Green voters favoured serious consideration of such a model, among Left Party voters support rose to 94% (Neu, 2010, p.34). The leader and key candidate of the NRW Social Democrats, Hannelore Kraft, had already stated her refusal to turn her back on policies to which she was wholeheartedly committed (i.e. Agenda 2010) (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2010). In so doing, Kraft in turn rejected any cooperation with the Left Party unless it relinquished its core policies and accepted Agenda 2010. The Greens, meanwhile, were not opposed to cooperation with the Left Party in principle, but dismissed the notion due to the incompatibility of the Left's programme and campaign, with federal Chair Claudia Roth also ruling out Left Party toleration of a minority Red-Green government (*Stern*, 2010a). Although the SPD and Greens did meet with the Left Party to discuss possible terms of the party's support, talks broke off after one day, with Kraft citing the Left's 'GDR' mentality and 'understanding of democracy' as the

factors rendering it neither '*koalitionfähig*' nor '*regierungsfähig*' (*Stern*, 2010b). However, this explanation indicates the SPD's resistance to engage with the Left Party over specific key policy areas such as Hartz, cuts and privatisation, while instead emphasising the GDR 'stigma' that the PDS had been unable to overcome in western states.

In the examples discussed so far, the prospects of the Left Party entering into cooperation with the Social Democrats was decidedly slim; either because the balance of power rendered such cooperation superfluous (Bremen) or arithmetically impossible (Hamburg); or because of unequivocal rejection by both parties before and after the election (NRW). In Hessen, however, a far more complex picture emerged, which this discussion now considers in greater depth.

As the SPD's lead candidate in Hessen, Andrea Ypsilanti attempted to steer the Social Democrats on a more leftist course than that of the party at federal level. Nevertheless, the Left Party programme heavily criticised Ypsilanti on the grounds that her supposedly left-wing direction was mere electioneering, even though she had previously expressed reservations about some aspects of Agenda 2010 (*DIE LINKE Hessen*, 2008b, p.5). The manifesto made no distinction between the CDU, SPD, Greens or FDP, as the parties all 'shared responsibility' for falling wages, the lack of a minimum wage, an increase in precarious employment, cuts, privatisation and the dismantling of the welfare state (*ibid.*, p.6). What is more, the four parties were all potential partners in various feasible coalition constellations, further underlining the compatibility of their policy offers. Yet despite placing clear ground between itself and the established parliamentary parties, the Left Party also stated its readiness to vote out the incumbent Prime Minister Koch (CDU), which would most likely require the Left to at least support the election of Ypsilanti as Prime Minister (*ibid.*). Despite the SPD's rejection of any kind of cooperation with the Left Party, when the election result produced a majority neither for a CDU-FDP nor for an SPD-Green coalition, Ypsilanti then considered building a minority Red-Green government dependent on ad hoc support of the Left Party (*Focus*, 2015).

The SPD produced a paper setting out a list of conditions to be fulfilled by the Left Party, including renunciation of the GDR, evidence that no deputies had had Stasi involvement, unconditional support of the budget for the entire legislative period and the commitment to work towards a balanced budget (Öfinger, 2008). The Left Party was also expected to guarantee its support for all key legislation for the five-year

duration of parliament, with no influence over personnel decisions. Furthermore, Hessen's intelligence service would continue to keep the Left Party under observation for extremism. As such, the document represented 'above all a rejection of any further Left Party demands' (*ibid.*). However, the Left Party took steps to fulfil many of these conditions, including an agreement not to open its lists to DKP candidates (Schroeder, 2008b, p.25). Although some sections of the Hessen Left Party were committed to principled opposition and were concerned that there would be too great a price to pay, the toleration model generally met with broad support among members (at least among those who participated) keen to bring about an end to the CDU-led government. Oskar Lafontaine commented that, 'with a voter share of 5.1 per cent we obviously can't determine one hundred per cent of policy' but also that the Left's election promises would be 'nothing but smoke and mirrors' if it did not positively contribute to a change of political direction (*Neues Deutschland*, 2008a); in other words support the election of Ypsilanti as Prime Minister. Lafontaine's statement on the prospective toleration model in Hessen therefore differed somewhat to his outright rejection of a similar agreement later on in North Rhine-Westphalia.

However, a newly elected SPD deputy declared her willingness to vote against Ypsilanti's election as Hessen's Prime Minister if the Left Party was in any way involved in cooperation. Cited as the chief reason was the party's (or at least the PDS's) GDR heritage. The response to Ypsilanti's reconsideration of Left Party support was not so much based on specific policies as such, but on talk of broken promises, doubts (especially among the Greens) about the *Politikfähigkeit* of the Left and warnings about the party's 'easterness'. Other deputies followed suit, thereby dashing the opportunity to form a Red-Green alternative to the CDU-FDP coalition. Labelled a traitor for reversing her pre-election promise not to cooperate with the Left Party and no longer able to muster the votes required to become Prime Minister, Ypsilanti withdrew from the election, leaving Koch in power as Hessen's acting PM. The question to answer here is why the SPD actively prevented the formation of a minority government with Left Party support and, in so doing, enabled the conservative government to continue in power. After all, given the track record of the Left Party (and previously the PDS) in eastern government coalitions, there appeared to be little evidence to suggest that the Left, once in a position of responsibility, would not act in a similarly compliant manner in Hessen.

Cartel Theory offers an explanation. Katz and Mair argue that even a party in opposition continues to influence policy and because of policy convergence is assured

that the incoming government will continue to implement core elements of its policy. Back in 2005, alarmed by the SPD's defeat in NRW, Chancellor Schröder took the unusual decision to dissolve parliament in preparation for an early General Election rather than concede any part of the Agenda 2010 and Hartz measures. When the election failed to produce the expected CDU-FDP majority, the SPD joined the 'opposition' CDU in the Grand Coalition led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, in the knowledge that the CDU was also committed to the Agenda policies. Similarly, in the case of Hessen, the SPD demonstrated that regardless of voters' preference for the centre-left parties opposing Koch (SPD, Greens and Left Party), the Social Democrats would not deviate from the policies of Agenda 2010. A telling statement in respect of the SPD's decision to remain in opposition was a declaration by the party's *Seeheimer Kreis* (Circle) group (Seeheimer Kreis, 2008), which described 'the concept of Left and Right' as 'obsolete' and fit only for theoretical debate. Influential in the decision to remain in opposition in Hessen, the Seeheimer Circle is a group within the SPD that according to its website rejects 'clinging dogmatically' to social-democratic traditions. The group regards globalisation as a potential source of wealth, views deficit spending as unsocial, and insists that the unemployed should make a 'contribution' in return for social welfare (Schuster, 2009). Furthermore, the Seeheimer Circle rejected 'ideological blinkers or utopian ideas' on the grounds that they were incompatible with policy-making (*ibid.*). In choosing to allow the CDU to remain in power, the SPD's 'message', therefore, was that voter policy preference and periods out of governmental office were secondary to the priority of continuing the deregulation and restructuring of Germany's employment market and welfare system.

### **5.1.2. Social Cleavage Theory**

The Case Study analysed election results as well as locations and patterns of support to test the influence of the class cleavage based in the Left Party vote in Bremen. Two main patterns of Left Party vote emerged. First, the party made its most significant gains from former SPD voters. This trend was also visible in terms of locations of support, as the party made important inroads into traditionally SPD-voting districts characterised by relatively high unemployment and low income. Regarding occupational group, the overwhelming support for the Left Party was found among the unemployed, workers and trade union members. As such, this trend confirms the existence of a strong class-based vote for the Left Party in Bremen. Furthermore, the political mood at the time was one of protest focused on the Hartz reforms of welfare

and employment. Alongside the various citizens' and social movements, the PDS and especially WASG mobilised this protest and framed the continuing demand for social security and justice in class terms.

The second pattern identified in Bremen was particularly strong Left Party support in Green-voting middle-class residential areas with average unemployment and slightly higher incomes. In fact, it was these districts that produced the best results for the party, as seen in the substantial voter share of around 17% in the Steintor neighbourhood in Östliche Vorstadt. Furthermore, whereas the party's strength in working-class SPD strongholds was a new phenomenon in 2007, the inner-city 'Green' districts could be regarded as having been fledgling 'strongholds' for the PDS since 1998, albeit on a very modest scale.

Once again, the task now is to consider the extent to which these two patterns were specific to Bremen or whether they were replicated in other western states. The results from regional elections in the 'area states' (North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen and Lower Saxony) as well as the city-state of Hamburg are analysed for the same indicators.

In Hessen, the SPD managed to increase its voter share compared to that of 2003 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2008, p.1). Naturally, this represented a contrast to the slump in the Social Democratic vote in Bremen, but it should be borne in mind that in Hessen the SPD was in opposition, whereas in Bremen the party had been in government since 1945<sup>88</sup>. Interestingly, the main source of the SPD gains in Hessen was former CDU voters, suggesting that dissatisfaction with the incumbent CDU and in particular its polarising Prime Minister was a contributory factor in the upturn in the SPD's fortunes (Infratest dimap, 2008a, p.9). This is further underlined when taking the voting behaviour of occupational groups into consideration: the CDU lost voter share across all groups, in other words, workers, salaried employees, civil servants, the self-employed and the unemployed, while the SPD increased its share across all of these groups (Neu, 2008, p.36). What is more, although workers and the unemployed still constituted the SPD's largest voter groups, they also accounted for the weakest growth in the party's voter share. Consequently, the strongest growth for the SPD was found among salaried workers, civil servants and the self-employed (*ibid.*, p.40). Therefore, it can be argued that despite the SPD's 'left turn' and the goodwill towards Ypsilanti, the party actually underperformed among its traditional core electorate.

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<sup>88</sup> As the case study pointed out, in spite of the enduring goodwill towards the SPD in Bremen, the party was also suffering from the burden of 'double governmental responsibility', i.e. at *Land* and at federal level.

The Left Party did not participate in the 2003 election, so it is not possible to calculate percentage increase/decrease for 2008. However, the 2008 results revealed support for the party was chiefly concentrated in urban rather than rural areas, and mainly in SPD strongholds (Schroeder, 2008b, p.12). Although the SPD strengthened its profile as the party voters considered most competent to address the issue of social justice, it is likely that former CDU voters once again accounted for this increase; as the election neared, the Left Party, whose campaign focused heavily on social justice, doubled (from four per cent to eight) the share of voters who believed it was in the best position to solve the problem (Neu, 2008, p.66). Moreover, it was primarily former SPD voters who switched their support to the Left, followed by non-voters, Green voters and, uniquely, supporters of other parties not represented in parliament (*ibid.*, p.38), which points to the Left's ability to also mobilise protest votes. In terms of social groups, it was the unemployed (15.3%), workers (8.4%) and trade union members (9.2%) who constituted the largest source of Left Party support (Schroeder, 2008b, p.15). Also, given that the share of support for the Left Party among these groups outweighed the increase in support for the SPD, it is again reasonable to conclude that the decision of former CDU to switch to the SPD masked the inroads made by the Left Party into the Social Democrat voter share, particularly in relation to workers, the unemployed and union members, as well as over credibility regarding social justice.

Another CDU-governed state, Lower Saxony, went to the polls on the same day as Hessen and saw the SPD not only lose ground, but also experience its worst ever result (Neu, 2008, p.23). Even though the Social Democrats did manage to gain a substantial number of former CDU voters, they lost even more to the Left Party, while other former Social Democrat voters chose not to participate in the election at all (Infratest dimap, 2008b, p.18). Among the occupational groups, it was primarily workers, trade union members and the unemployed who abandoned the SPD; conversely, the same groups accounted for the most significant share of the Left Party vote: just under a quarter of all unemployed voters, nearly ten per cent of workers and around twelve per cent of trade union members supported the party (Neu, 2008, p.83), which was standing for the first time in Lower Saxony. A study carried out in the Left Party's strongest electoral districts showed that among voters who regarded themselves as 'losers of modernisation' (Kulick and Onken, 2008, p.8) as a result of the employment market and welfare reforms, over a third gave their support to the new Left Party. Furthermore, nearly all Left voters (90.7%) cited social justice as the main priority in the election, compared to 79.9% of SPD voters (*ibid.*, p.13). In addition,

46.7% of Left Party voters subjectively saw themselves as belonging to the 'lower classes' (*Unterschicht*), whereas supporters of the four established parliamentary parties described themselves as 'middle class' (*ibid.*:10). Although Chapter Two highlighted some of the difficulties in classifications of socio-economic class, the study's results nevertheless reveal some clear differences at least in terms of self-perception on class lines between Left Party voters and the voters of the other parties.

In North Rhine-Westphalia the WASG had already participated in a regional election (2005), when it stood separately from the PDS; Chapter One explained that the failure of both parties to clear the five per cent electoral threshold was a contributory factor to the merger decision. The 2010 election, when the Left Party first entered the NRW regional parliament, therefore permits an early comparison of the party's votes over two elections by combining the 2005 results of the PDS and WASG. Traditionally an SPD heartland, NRW had been governed by a CDU-FDP coalition since the Social Democrats' defeat at the previous election. In 2010, however, it was both major catch-all parties that lost voter share (SPD: minus 2.6%), while the smaller parties (Greens, FDP and Left) improved their results; in relation to the combined PDS-WASG vote, the Left Party increased its share by 2.5% to achieve 5.6% (Infratest dimap, 2010, p.5), even though around 20,000 voters who had supported the former PDS or WASG stayed away from the 2010 election (Neu, 2010, p.14). In terms of occupational groups, the SPD lost voter share in all categories. However, the most pronounced losses were among civil servants and the self-employed, whereas support among workers and the unemployed fell only by around 1%, with workers still constituting the largest voter group (44.4%) (*ibid.*:25). Among trade union members, too, it was self-employed members rather than workers who turned away from the SPD (*ibid.*). One explanation for this result is that the CDU suffered some of its heaviest losses among workers and the unemployed, and that these voters switched their support to the SPD, thus compensating for and disguising Social Democrat losses among these groups (*ibid.*) and partial realignment to the Left Party.

The Left Party was able to strengthen its appeal across all occupational groups, but the familiar pattern that had emerged both in the Bundestag election (Soltz, 2007, p.21) and in subsequent regional elections was once again evident: in 2005 the strongest source of support for the PDS-WASG had been unemployed voters (9.3%), and in 2010 this rose to 16.7%. Workers had voted for the PDS-WASG to a lesser degree, but still represented the second largest voter group in 2005 (4.5%); in 2010, however, 7.7% of workers voted for the Left Party (Neu, 2010, p.25). Taking trade union membership

into account, it was again workers who accounted for the greatest voter share in each election (4.9% and 9.0% respectively)(*ibid.*). Thus, the Left Party's strongest results both in terms of overall voter share and increase were found among the same voter groups that had accounted for the PDS-WASG's combined support in 2005. It is therefore possible to identify an early Left Party core electorate consisting of unemployed voters, workers and trade union members emerging in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The final state to consider is Hamburg, also governed by the CDU at the time of the 2008 election. Once again, Left Party support was disproportionately high among the unemployed (19%) and workers (10%), with both occupational groups accounting for strong increases in the party's voter share (Hartwig, 2008, p.6). Conforming to the voting patterns described above, the source of the party's greatest gains was former SPD voters, followed by non-voters. Social justice was again cited by Left Party voters as their main policy concern, while of the former SPD and Green voters who switched to the Left, just under three quarters named social justice as their primary motivation for their decision (*ibid.*). The location of key Left Party support also repeated the pattern found in other western states: Left Party voters tended to reside in SPD-voting districts with a high proportion of welfare claimants, whether in the form of unemployment benefits or income support for low-paid workers (the '*Aufstocker*' described in Chapter Three). The proportion of people living in poverty was also high in these areas (*ibid.*, p. 3).

Interestingly, the results of the Hamburg election also revealed a second key location and source of Left Party support. The party performed particularly strongly in inner city districts (8.3% compared to 6.7% for Hamburg overall). While the SPD's electorate was fairly evenly distributed across the city-state, GAL (Green) support, too, was clearly concentrated in these inner city areas (Hartwig, 2008, p.4). Analysis carried out on behalf of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation determined the correlation between the parties in terms of the districts in which they attracted the greatest voter share. The study found that there was clearly a positive relationship between concentrations of Left Party support and those of the SPD (0.67) and, to a lesser extent, those of the GAL (0.38). Focusing on locations of SPD support, the greatest similarity was with the Left Party (0.67), while the relationship between SPD and Green support was just 0.07, indicating that there was little common ground between the geographical locations of the two parties' electorates (*ibid.*, p.5). The urban locations of GAL as well as Left Party support are characterised by a high proportion of people who have completed higher



education, many of whom work in relatively well-paid fields such as education, social work and the 'creative economy'. These voters have been referred to as the 'critical educational elites' (*kritische Bildungseliten*). Although Left Party voters in Hamburg as a whole demonstrated neither a particularly high or low level of educational attainment, the party's strong performance in these districts suggests that a high proportion were highly educated (*ibid.*, p.9). Therefore, it is possible to recognise a parallel between the electorate of the Left Party in Hamburg and that in Bremen, where the party attracted voters not only in SPD strongholds consisting primarily of workers and characterised by high unemployment and poverty, but also Green-voting inner-city middle class residential areas.

To sum up, the Bremen Case Study found that the Left Party entered the regional parliament with two different categories of support. The first group consisted of unemployed voters and blue-collar workers. Trade union members, particularly blue-collar workers, were a third key source of support. As the discussion of Hessen, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg has shown, this was a pattern replicated across other western federal states. In the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg, voter share among these groups was located in residential areas outside of the inner city, while in the 'area states' (*Flächenländer*), support was concentrated in urban rather than rural areas. Another common characteristic is that the party was able to attract these social groups chiefly from the SPD, and also managed to mobilise non-voters. Furthermore, the Case Study identified social justice as a key policy priority among Left Party voters.

The second key source of Left Party support was located in inner-city districts with a strong Green vote, less affected by unemployment and poverty, and characterised by higher incomes and educational attainment. This electorate appears to be particularly important in the two city-states. However, it is difficult to draw a direct comparison between Bremen and Hamburg on the one hand and Germany's third city-state, Berlin on the other, given the PDS's particularly strong performance in the east of the city since unification. One contrast between the two western city-states is that whereas the Left Party in Hamburg achieved its strongest vote in typically SPD-voting areas, in Bremen by far the best result for the party was achieved in the inner-city 'Green' districts, building on support that had slowly developed for the PDS. Yet it is important to bear in mind that the SPD lost heavily in these areas, while overall Bremen's Greens proved less able than the Left to attract workers and particularly the unemployed (the sole loss for the Greens in Bremen). This suggests that even in the 'Green' districts, the

Left Party was still able to attract support from the unemployed, workers and trade union members, thus actually further emphasising the party's ability to mobilise on class lines.

Both Bremen and Hamburg were port cities with economies built around weapons development, manufacturing, export and, in the case of Hamburg, military planning and training. Opposition to this militarisation of the economy was likewise well-established in the two city-states, particularly in Bremen, where the Peace Forum has cooperated closely with both the PDS and Left Party. As Chapter One has explained, antimilitarism became a key Left Party policy area, and one which featured prominently in the Bremen and Hamburg election campaigns in particular. Left Party voters in the Bremen Case Study also cited the party's commitment to antimilitarism as their primary motivation for supporting the party. Therefore, it can be concluded that as well as socio-economic factors, antimilitarism was potentially an additional contributory factor to the party's success in the 'Green' districts of the two city-states.

## **5.2. Conclusions**

Chapter Two identified various organisational traits that, according to Cartel Theory, develop within parties. The first feature is an ascendant party in central office. Given Germany's federal structure, the party in central office is not limited to just the national level, but can also include the party executive within an individual federal state. The Case Study has described how the national leadership sought to influence local matters in Bremen by attempting to remove a democratically selected but inexperienced candidate who was committed to principled opposition, and instead impose a more 'reliable' and well-known pro-office-seeking candidate. Efforts were also made to remove the anti-privatisation policy from campaign materials. In Hessen, too, the national leadership intervened over the lead candidate. Even though the involvement was mainly prompted by controversy surrounding the candidate's comments, rather than by policy modification (as was the case in Bremen), the net result was still the greater influence of the national leadership, which in turn led to a more pragmatic political direction in Hessen. Furthermore, the party's lack of experienced personnel, including among the parliamentary candidates, combined with organisational weakness in parts of the state were all characteristics that again once

again paved the way for federal politicians and resources to play a more influential role in Hessen.

A further aspect of Cartel Theory identified in Chapter Two for investigation was an increased focus on parliamentary politics. The theory anticipates an increasingly top-down approach to decision-making that favours the parliamentary group and potentially sidelines the influence of activists. In Bremen there was concern that preoccupation with parliamentary work would lead the Left Party to define itself in relation to the SPD; in other words, the Social Democrats would become the main point of reference, thus diminishing the Left Party's own socialist identity and policies. Activists in Bremen also expressed frustration that their work was increasingly focused on supporting candidates, rather than on engagement in local issues. However, it is natural for a party with a realistic chance of gaining parliamentary seats to concentrate its resources to support the campaign, and for the Left Party the regional elections of 2007 onwards represented the first such opportunity; even in Bremen, the prospects of actually gaining seats in the Bürgerschaft had been decidedly remote for the PDS while in some other western states the PDS had not even contested previous elections. Consequently, it was inevitable that the focus and intensity of campaigning would reflect this genuine opportunity to enter parliament. Nonetheless, there was also evidence beyond election campaigns that the overall direction of the party might be shifting towards a dominance of parliamentary politics. In Bremen, for example, decision-making rights were removed from grassroots members. In Hessen, whereas no single wing of the party, whether pragmatic office-seekers, trade unionists or the opposition-focused 'movement', had gained overall dominance before the election, the party's subsequent reversal of its ruling on the separation of office and mandate paved the way for the parliamentary group in Hessen to become the driving force in the party (Schroeder, 2008a).

Cartel Theory also argues that parties' prioritisation of parliamentary politics and anchoring in the institutions of the state results in the narrowing of policy. An additional consequence of the parliamentary focus was that in Bremen and in the other western states discussed in this chapter, the campaigns generally concentrated on policies achievable within the competence of the Bürgerschaft or Landtag. Although the campaign to abolish the Hartz measures was extremely prominent at national level and had of course driven the protests that had led to the creation of the Left Party, the scope of demands in regional campaigns was limited mainly to the abolition of sanctions on Hartz IV recipients, while calling for a raise in statutory payments.

Naturally, the abolition of Hartz could not be achieved in Bremen, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen or indeed in any other individual state, but as the Bremen study has shown, the absence of more far-reaching demands failed to quell criticism that the Left Party, despite its declared opposition to Hartz and its intention to work with extra-parliamentary groups such as trade unions and anti-globalisation campaigners, was *consciously* restricting its ambitions to the parliamentary context, also to facilitate cooperation with the SPD and Greens<sup>89</sup>.

Trade union support was essential for the party's breakthrough in each regional election. As discussed in the Bremen Case Study, the WASG played a key role in mobilising trade union members, since the PDS, chiefly for historical reasons, had failed to attract these voters. These factors — the party's perceived 'easterness' and lack of a grassroots basis in the West — were just as problematic for the PDS in other western states, perhaps even more so than in Bremen, where the party had at least built up some modest support in the inner-city areas and at Beirat level. The groups from which the WASG would emerge, namely traditional Social Democrat voters and trade union members, had remained beyond the reach of the PDS. However, as the 2005 election in North Rhine-Westphalia demonstrated, the WASG too lacked the individual organisational strength to mobilise the amount of support needed to gain parliamentary seats. The evidence from Bremen and from other *Länder* discussed here confirms that both parties were essential to the creation of a united and credible political force in the western states. The Bremen Left Party Bürgerschaft deputy and former PDS Chair Klaus-Rainer Rupp summed this up as follows:

*Were it not for a number of people who in 1989 decided against throwing socialism overboard and who instead decided to found the PDS — despite all the challenges — then there would have been no partner for the new Left — and therefore the Left Party would never have happened. Likewise, neither would it have happened without the WASG. (Neues Deutschland, 2008b).*

Having considered the various characteristics of Cartel Theory in context, the task is now to establish the extent to which this theory, or parts of it, explain the Left Party's electoral success in 2007 onwards. Not all central party attempts to influence regional candidates and policy were successful, but leadership involvement in campaigns did in

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<sup>89</sup> Even though it was the SPD and Greens who introduced Hartz IV, both parties claimed to support improved benefits. For example, the GAL (Greens) in Hamburg called for the statutory benefits to be 'substantially' increased and also for the introduction of a minimum wage, although in neither case was a value specified (Bündnis '90/Die Grünen GAL Hamburg, 2008).

general ensure that the regional organisations and their campaigns were 'on message'. Policy goals were set within the parameters of the national party programme as well as within the competence of the respective legislature. Clearly stating the party's parliamentary ambitions, the campaigns presented the Left Party as the parliamentary arm of the anti-Hartz, anti-privatisation movement for social justice, which was largely based in the trade unions.

Overall, there was an increased emphasis on the uniformity of campaigns, approved candidates and orientation towards parliamentary politics. This approach was intended to manage the presentation of the party and set the framework for policies, and indicates the influence of an ascendant central party on leadership and organisation. Yet as Chapter One and the Case Study have shown, neither the top-down management of the party nor the tension between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary focus were anything new, and therefore did not represent a significant qualitative change at the time of the party's electoral breakthrough. Elsewhere, the active involvement of the central party was explained at least in part as a necessity arising from the organisational weakness of the regional association. Furthermore, there was no clear evidence to suggest that the electoral choices of voters (as opposed to members) were determined by internal characteristics relating to leadership and organisation. Rather, it was policy, and the value of social justice, that were most frequently cited as the key reason for voting for the Left Party.

In terms of party competition, the regional election campaign in Bremen and in the other western states examined here have shown that the Left Party offered a programme that was unmistakably redistributive in character. Some common ground did exist between Left Party policy and that of other parties, for example the introduction of a minimum wage demanded by both the Left and the SPD (for instance in Bremen and Hessen), or the call to improve the statutory rate and conditions for Hartz recipients. Furthermore, existing legal and fiscal restraints, together with the Left's experience of government responsibility in eastern *Länder* both placed a question mark over the party's capacity and credibility regarding the implementation of its programme. The evidence from Hessen also suggested a degree of willingness to compromise in order to bring about a more general *Politikwechsel* (change of political direction). But at least in their intentions, the Left Party's core policies centred on tax-funded investment and spending on public services rather than cuts and on the democratisation of the economy instead of privatisation. In this respect, the Left Party programme represented a set of alternatives that countered the prevailing politics

practised at regional level (notably in Bremen, where the SPD was established in government and driving the reforms) and offered by the mainstream parliamentary parties, a situation Solty (2007, p.21) sums up as follows:

*For the time being, in the struggle against the neoliberal pensée unique, DIE LINKE is the sole occupant of a wide-open field.*

As such, it is reasonable to conclude that policy convergence between the Left Party and other centre-left parties did not account for the Left's success. What is more, it is possible that the presence of the WASG, many of whose members (for example in Bremen) were committed to principled opposition, could act as a counterbalance to any office-seeking tendencies on the part of the central party or from within the former PDS.

To sum up, the leadership and organisational characteristics associated with Cartel Theory do not actually account for western electorates' sudden support for the Left Party, while policies of redistribution and economic democracy were distinct from the prevailing policies of austerity, privatisation and the flexible employment market. Nevertheless, as Chapter One has explained, the merger of the PDS and WASG was itself characterised by a top-down approach, driven by a strong leadership with the formal support of the wider and more passive membership. The PDS in particular had some organisational strength, even though far less developed than in the eastern states, plus governmental experience in the eastern states and at national level. A parliamentary focus was also evident within the new party, as expressed in the regional campaigns and programmes discussed in the Case Study and in this chapter.

Despite the strengthened organisation and parliamentary focus of the Left Party, a more pronounced qualitative change was the establishment of ties to organised labour. Close political links to trade unions had eluded the PDS, but were facilitated by the cooperation with the WASG and proved essential to the Left Party, as demonstrated by the consistently strong voter share among trade union members in all of the regional elections discussed in this research. Secondly, the WASG's organisational and political origins played an important role in remedying a further weakness of the PDS in the western states, namely negative associations with the party's easternness. Even so, the campaigns conducted by other political parties continued to instrumentalise the Left's (PDS's) eastern roots, notably in North Rhine-Westphalia and Hessen, whether in terms of the 'GDR mentality', the political unfitness of 'the communists' or the party's SED heritage. Furthermore, while the PDS had struggled to establish itself as a socialist alternative to the left of the SPD, the familiar, social democratic, trade union

based roots of the WASG made the Left Party electable for disillusioned SPD voters, as evidenced by the volume of former SPD voters who switched to the Left Party in the regional elections. Yet the reverse side to this particular coin was the concern expressed by some members in Bremen that Left Party policy and strategy would inevitably become orientated towards the SPD 'default', leading the Left Party along the road to becoming a useful appendage (*Anhängsel*) of the Social Democrats.

The research carried out in Bremen demonstrated the existence of persistent unemployment combined with an expanding low-paid sector and precariat, which in turn intensified the problem of poverty. Opposition to the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms was framed in class terms, thereby fulfilling the mobilisation criteria established in Social Cleavage Theory. In the broader context, too, the Left Party's breakthrough in western parliaments coincided with an unusually high amount of industrial unrest and protest. Against a background of ongoing protest against welfare reform, massive job cuts by large companies such as Nokia and BMW, and public sector cuts resulting from the financial crisis, a wave of strikes erupted across Germany. In 2008 and 2009, railway workers, members of the heavy industry union IG Metall, Deutsche Telekom workers, teaching staff and students/pupils and social workers all took industrial action over conditions, pay and job losses (*Focus*, 2011). Therefore, it is plausible that the established parties' approach of disassociation from and discrediting of the Left Party was motivated less by genuine doubts regarding *Koalitionsfähigkeit* (especially taking into account the performance of the party in the East), or alarm over allowing the 'former communists' a glimpse of power in the western parliaments, and more out of concern that, given the Left Party's strengthening ties to organised labour, cooperation even on an informal (toleration) basis could encourage and embolden trade unions and protesters to increase their demands. The example of Hessen illustrates this point particularly well: beyond the hysteria surrounding the PDS/SED heritage and despite the Left's willingness to compromise, the SPD actually prioritised the continuation of cuts, privatisation and the Hartz reforms over the very real opportunity to remove an unpopular conservative government and form a centre-left coalition with the assistance of the Left Party.

Elff and Rossteutscher's analysis of shifts in SPD and Left Party voter share was based on classifications of socio-economic class along the lines identified in Chapter Three. The findings showed a decline in SPD support most notably among the non-manual and manual working class in western states, while support for the PDS/Left Party rose among the same occupational groups; Nachtwey and Spier identified a similar pattern

among unemployed voters (see Chapter Three). When it entered western regional parliaments, the Left Party succeeded in gaining the support of those who were either directly affected by the Hartz reforms or at risk of falling into dependency on benefits, namely the unemployed and workers. Organised labour, especially workers, formed the third major source of electoral support for the Left. While the SPD remained the most popular party overall among these voters, the evidence from Bremen as well as subsequent western elections indeed indicated a partial realignment towards the Left Party among workers and the unemployed, and particularly in working-class SPD strongholds. Neu therefore describes the Left Party as the mobiliser of the 'unemployed, workers and trade unionists (...); in a word, the party of the 'Old Social Movements' (Neu, 2008, p.5).

However, the analysis has also highlighted the strong Left Party performance in Green-voting middle-class, inner-city residential areas, particularly in the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg, where antimilitarism was an additional policy focus in the campaign. In Bremen, support in these areas had built up over time, providing the PDS with its strongest source of support. Therefore, the party's strength in 'Green' districts is unlikely to be a mere anomaly. Yet neither does it necessarily contradict the findings of this research that class voting was the chief explanation of the Left Party's success. First, since the Left's strong result in 2007/8 represented a pronounced strengthening of the voter base that had already been gradually developing in these districts, it did not mark a clear qualitative change. Secondly, the new significant gains in the party's support were found in SPD-voting, working class residential areas, where the party managed to attract voters from the Social Democrats. In the Green districts too, rather than the Greens, whose voter base did not reflect the pattern of the Left support<sup>90</sup>), it was the SPD who lost voter share, allowing the Left Party to substantially improve its result, thus conforming to Efff and Rossteutscher's expectation of partial realignment. Consequently, whether in the Social Democrats' strongholds or in the middle-class Green districts, it was the ability to attract former SPD voters that allowed the Left Party to enter the *Bürgerschaft* and subsequently other western parliaments.

The SPD's first major change of political course was described as a transformation from 'consciousness-evoking factor of the working classes and instrument for the (...) transition to socialism, to that of conciliator between classes and the representative of the interests of "all the people" within the existing socio-economic context' (Graf,1977,

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<sup>90</sup> Solty (2007, p.21) concludes that the class base of the Greens is different to that of the Left Party.



p.190). With the implementation of the Agenda 2010, the SPD took steps to radically transform the socio-economic context by shifting from the de-commodification of labour to the pursuit of a flexible, supply-side orientated employment market based on the assumption that the established system of welfare benefits represented a barrier to work. According to Mochmann (2002, p.54), for parties, a 'loosening of ties actually more or less asks for an active individual political orientation and identification which is not based on tradition'. In other words, a party's endeavour to disassociate from its core values and voter base is a two-way process that also requires a change in behaviour among voter groups, for example in terms of class-based voting. At the time of the SPD-Green reforms, the electorate was not fundamentally hostile to reform — in fact, one of the main criticisms levelled at the government during its first term in office had centred on *Reformstau* (reform bottlenecks) in fulfilling the election pledge to halve unemployment. But neither was it a matter of reform at any price. Chapter Three has argued that demand for redistributive welfare proved resilient among the German population in general and particularly among workers and the unemployed. Despite the near-ubiquitous mantra of 'no alternative' and periods of austerity, as seen in Bremen's restructuring or, later on, as a result of the financial crash and introduction of the *Schuldenbremse*, it can therefore be concluded that these social groups were simply unwilling to abandon policies based on the state's responsibility for the provision of a decent livelihood for the sick, destitute, jobless and elderly, prompting a partial realignment to a party offering policies based on redistribution and social justice.

### 5.3. Outlook

Between 2007 and 2010 the Left Party entered parliaments in all but three western federal states<sup>91</sup>. However, since then, in subsequent elections the party failed to regain seats in North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. Although as a relatively new party it was not yet possible to speak of an established, regular electorate, the Left lost primarily to the SPD, but also to the newly emerged Pirate Party (which entered a series of western parliaments<sup>92</sup>) as well as to non-voters (Neu, 2012, p.10). In Bremen, the *Fraktion* was returned to the *Bürgerschaft* in 2011, but with five seats, rather than the seven gained in 2007. Bremen's Left continued to attract its greatest voter share among the unemployed, workers and trade union members (Neu,

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<sup>91</sup> The Left remains unrepresented in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Rhineland Palatinate.

<sup>92</sup> In the western states, the Pirates entered the parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saarland. The party also gained representation in the city-state of Berlin (Piraten Partei, 2014).

2011, p.9), but lost much of the support it had received from these groups in 2007<sup>93</sup>. The party lost ten per cent of the unemployed vote, while gains among this group were made by the SPD (+5%), Greens (+7%) and the right-wing populist Enraged Citizens (+5%) (*ibid.*).

A variety of factors contributed to the Left's weaker performance in its attempt to be returned to the western regional parliaments; what is more, these also differed from state to state. Broadly speaking, however, they included conflicting political approaches within the parliamentary groups, disputes surrounding individual members and deputies, as well as the continuing organisational weakness of the regional organisation in relation to the parliamentary group. Furthermore, the political and strategic dilemma concerning the toleration of minority Red-Green coalitions also remained unresolved (Hoff and Kahrs, 2011, p.2). As such, whereas a class-based Left Party vote was identifiable in the western states where the party first entered parliament, it was difficult to single out a satisfactory explanation to account for the party's subsequent losses. In addition, while the Pirate Party succeeded in attracting Left Party voters in some states, notably North Rhine-Westphalia, it failed to enter the Bremen Bürgerschaft<sup>94</sup>. Here, it was once again a small, Bremen-specific group, the right-wing populist Enraged Citizens, that attracted the support of unemployed voters, including those who voted Left in 2007.

Since the 2011/12 elections the Pirate Party has all but disappeared from national politics. In the next round of regional elections beginning in 2015, it will therefore be interesting to re-examine the Left Party vote in western states to see whether the party has been able to recover its voter share among the unemployed, workers and organised labour. Analysis should aim to establish whether the initially strong support for the Left was merely interrupted by short-term, specific protest votes in 2011/12 (for example, as a result of the chaotic impression created by the parliamentary group, or the sudden but novelty appeal of the Pirate Party). Alternatively, given the NRW Left's loss of some of previous PDS-WASG support to non-voters as early as 2010, a later study might discover that the strong Left Party vote was itself a short-lived expression of protest against the SPD. However, with the SPD currently in office at national level (as the junior partner in a Grand Coalition) and with cuts resulting from the *Schuldenbremse* still to fully bite, there could be a further spate of protests against the

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<sup>93</sup> Unemployed -10%; workers: -4%; blue-collar trade union members: -9% (Neu, 2011, p.9).

<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere, such as in Schleswig-Holstein, the Pirates were also able to make significant gains among middle class voters (Neu, 2012, p.10).

two main parties. Whether such protest could again be successfully framed in class terms by the Left Party, or whether it could be mobilised by the populist right remains to be seen. Therefore, to build a sustainable core electorate based on the class vote, the Left Party will need to be able to mobilise not only disillusioned SPD voters but also non-voters.

Secondly, particularly in the case of the western city-states (Bremen and Hamburg), consideration should also be given to the Left Party vote in the urban 'Green' areas and whether these continue to provide key locations of support. In this respect, it would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of the role of class voting in such areas, and the significance of the Left's key policy of antimilitarism. While this pattern of support has until now been concentrated in the city-states, a similar trend could also emerge in inner city districts in the western *Flächenländer*.

These potential research avenues are not only interesting questions concerning the future development of the Left Party; they are also relevant for the further investigation of the theoretical frameworks considered in this thesis. Our understanding of Cartel Theory in relation to the Left Party would benefit from a longer term reflection on the party organisation and leadership practices, as well as policy offerings and position on toleration and/or coalitions. In addition, extended analysis of the Left Party's role in class-based mobilisation and evidence of trends in class-based voting will contribute to any validation of (or indeed challenge to) Social Cleavage Theory as an explanation of the party's breakthrough and subsequent electoral success in Germany's western states.

# Appendices

# Appendix 1

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## Bremen Case Study: Questionnaire 1\*

(\*Note: The language of the questionnaire and all responses was German)

**Section A. This section focuses on the 2007 Bürgerschaft election.**

**Thinking about when you voted for the Left Party in the 2007 election:**

1. How strongly do you associate the Left Party with voicing the interests of working people?

Extremely strongly  
Very strongly  
Moderately strongly  
Not very strongly  
Not at all strongly

2. Of the parties listed below, which do you most closely associate with 'soziale Gerechtigkeit'? (social justice)

SPD  
Greens  
Left Party

Why? [ ]

3. When you decided to vote, how influential was the Left Party's representation of the interests of working people?

Extremely influential  
Very influential  
Moderately influential  
Not very influential  
Not at all influential

Why? [ ]

4. When you decided to vote, how influential was the Left Party's representation of the interests of unemployed people?

Extremely influential  
Very influential  
Moderately influential  
Not very influential  
Not at all influential

5. How important was the impact of the Hartz employment and welfare reforms when you decided how to vote?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

Please explain why. [ ]

***The Left Party formed from the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit (WASG). The PDS had participated in previous elections in Bremen.***

6. Comparing the Left Party and the PDS, was the Left Party politically closer to the SPD?

- Yes, the Left Party was closer to the SPD
- No, the Left Party was not closer to the SPD
- No, the Left Party was further from the SPD

In which way(s)? [ ]

7. To what extent would you have supported the Left Party entering into a coalition with the SPD?

- Strongly supported
- Moderately supported
- Neither supported nor opposed
- Moderately opposed
- Strongly opposed

On what grounds? [ ]

8. Which of these statements most closely reflects your main motivation for voting for the Left Party in 2007?

- The SPD had 'betrayed' ordinary working people and the unemployed
- The new Left Party was more radical than the old PDS
- The Trade Unions were linked with the WASG
- The Left Party was a clearly anti-capitalist party
- The Left Party was the only party that opposed Bundeswehr intervention abroad
- The new Left Party was less extreme than the olds PDS
- Other [ ]

**Section B. Thinking now about your personal situation seven years ago, in 2007:**

9. Please select your age group as of 2007

- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 59
- 60 or above

10. What was your occupational group in 2007?

Self-employed  
Public sector employee  
Routine/manual worker  
Apprentice  
Retired  
Unemployed  
Other [ ]

11. As best you can remember, what was your income group at that time?

€ 37,000 and more  
€ 33,381 up to € 36,999  
€ 30,000 up to € 33,380  
€ 27,000 up to € 29,999  
Under € 27,000  
Prefer not to say

12. Are you...

Male  
Female  
Prefer not to say

13. Were you a member of a trade union in 2007?

Yes  
No  
Don't know / prefer not to say

## Appendix 2

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### **Bremen Case Study: Questionnaire 2**

*(Note: These questions were initially intended as a series of prompts to help guide an interview (the respondent would not be required to answer every question, and would be free to focus on a particular area in depth). However, for the reasons explained in the Introduction to the Case Study, the questions were instead distributed as a self-administered questionnaire. The language of the questionnaire and all responses was German.)*

#### **1. Party activity**

Can you please describe your role/activity in Die Linke?

When did you join the party?

Were you previously a member of the PDS, WASG or another party?

What was your main reason for joining Die Linke?

Do you hold (or have you held) an official post within the party, e.g. at local or *Land* level?

Do you belong to a working group (AG) within the party?

Are you a member of any other movement or organisation (e.g. trade union, social movement) in Bremen?

#### **2. Policy**

What do you consider the main policy areas of the Left Party to be? How do these policies relate to Bremen specifically?

To what extent has there been a change in the *focus* of Left Party policy?

And when did you notice this change?

What do you think were the reasons for the change?

How was the decision made to implement this change in policy? (Who was involved in the decision?)

To what extent do you think that *Bürgerschaft* representation has influenced Left Party policy in Bremen?

To what extent has party policy on a particular issue been directly influenced by a separate social movement or evidence of strong public opinion?

Are there any policies (relating to Bremen) you strongly feel the Left Party should - or shouldn't - campaign on?



### **3. Influence within the party**

In your own experience, what influence does the (grassroots membership) have within the party? Can you give examples?

In your opinion, what is the most influential organisation/structure within the party? Can you explain your answer?

Would you say that social media has strengthened or weakened party democracy / the influence of ordinary members in relation to the party leadership? In which ways?

How does that affect you?

### **4. Cooperation and parliamentary work**

How closely does the Left Party cooperate with other political parties represented in the Bürgerschaft? In which matters/on which issues?

And at which level? (For example, leadership, *Fraktion*, basis)

With which extra-parliamentary groups does the Left Party cooperate in Bremen?

Again, at which level does this cooperation take place? (Informal, basis, parliamentary group, Beirat etc.)

To what extent has parliamentary representation influenced cooperation with other social movements and organisations?

What are the main advantages of parliamentary work? What about any drawbacks?

Thinking about the role of the party basis, would you say that activities have been orientated towards the interests of the parliamentary group (or candidates) or have they focused on extra-parliamentary work with the social movements you have mentioned?

How do you feel about that?

## Appendix 3

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### **DIE LINKE Bremen: Party structure.**

In accordance with §12 of its **federal** statute (DIE LINKE, 2014) (*Bundessatzung*), the Left Party is organised into sixteen *Landesverbände* (regional associations) at *Land* level, to reflect Germany's federal structure (*Bundessatzung der Partei Die Linke* §12.1). The role of the individual regional association, which is also governed by its own constitution (*Statut*), is to develop regional policies within the framework of the (federal) party programme (*Bundessatzung der Partei Die Linke* §12.4). It is also responsible for further structuring the party into district associations known as *Kreisverbände*. Within Bremen, therefore, as well as the *Landesverband Bremen*, the party consists of four *Kreisverbände*, namely Links der Weser, Mitte-Ost, Nord West and Bremerhaven. All members, regardless of their position within the party (e.g., regular member, office holder, mandate holder) automatically belong to the *Kreisverband* for the area in which they are officially registered as a resident. The *Kreisverband* is competent for the political and organisational activities within its respective district, insofar as these do not fall under the responsibility of the regional association, and constitute the most local level of the party structure with its own financial management and budget. Article 7 of the Political Parties Act permits these district associations to organise subdivisional local branches (*Ortsverbände*) within their respective area (*Bundessatzung der Partei Die Linke* §13. 6-8); however, these are usually features of the larger 'area states', rather than of city states such as Bremen.

The executive board (*Landesvorstand*) is described in Bremen's **regional** statute (*Landessatzung*) (DIE LINKE *Landesverband Bremen*, 2007) as the highest level political and organisational committee within the regional party association (*Landessatzung*, §13 *Aufgaben des Landesvorstands*). Its many responsibilities include formulating and coordinating political campaigns and policy positions on current political issues, control of party finance as well as electoral campaigns and candidate selection. It consists of an executive committee (*Geschäftsführender Vorstand*) of two speakers (one male, one female), a deputy speaker and a treasurer; seven regular board members complete the executive committee. Furthermore, Bremen's representatives of the Bundestag and European parliamentary groups and the leader

of the Bürgerschaft parliamentary group participate in an advisory role, as do the secretary of the regional association and a representative of the party's youth organisation (*Landessatzung, §13 Aufgaben des Landesvorstands, §14 Zusammensetzung und Wahl des Landesvorstands*). Each district association also consists of an executive (at least half of whom must be female), including a speaker and treasurer. The district is also required to hold a members' general meeting, at which members of the Landesrat (regional committee), a body with a consulting and monitoring function within the party structure, are elected. An additional role of the district association is the selection of candidates for the district council (Beirat) elections (*Landessatzung, §7 Kreisverbände*).

The most senior function overall within the Landesverband Bremen is the regional conference (Landesparteitag), responsible for political and organisational decisions. Conference is the body responsible for policy resolutions and content of election manifestoes. Furthermore, it adopts formal positions on the work of the parliamentary group in the Bürgerschaft and determines the party's stance on governing coalition participation or toleration (*Landessatzung, §10 Aufgaben des Landesparteitages*). Conference also elects, inter alia, members of the party's state executive and various committees, including the regional committee and the financial committee.

There are also several electoral mandate holders within the Bremen party. In addition to one member of the Bundestag, in 2007 these included seven Bürgerschaft deputies, two Stadtverordnetenversammlung (city council) deputies in Bremerhaven and twenty-two members in sixteen of the twenty-two district councils in Bremen City. Furthermore, the regional association integrates nineteen Arbeitsgruppen (working groups), which focus on specific policy areas (such as models of the basic citizens' income, precarious employment, gender, health and social issues) and/or represent the different political tendencies within the party (including the anti-capitalist left, trade unions, emancipated left, democratic socialism). To gain recognition, the group must demonstrate membership in at least two (i.e., at least half) of the district associations in the case of Bremen) and a minimum of 5% of the overall regional membership. The groups must be continuously active and report to the executive committee (*Landessatzung, §5 Landesweite Innerparteiliche Zusammenschlüsse*).

## Appendix 4

### Bremen Bürgerschaft election 2007

Results by gender, age and educational attainment

#### Left Party support according to gender and age group

	Share of vote 2007 (%)	Difference ( in % points) to 2003
<b>Women</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>18 - 24</b>	7	4
<b>25 - 34</b>	7	5
<b>35 - 44</b>	8	5
<b>45 - 59</b>	10	8
<b>60 +</b>	4	4
<b>Men</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>18 - 24</b>	8	5
<b>25 - 34</b>	8	5
<b>35 - 44</b>	10	8
<b>45 - 59</b>	15	13
<b>60 +</b>	8	7

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.50)

#### Voter share and relative increase/decrease (2007-2003) according to educational attainment

Educational attainment						
	SPD		Greens		Left Party	
	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003	2007 (%)	+/- 2003
<b>Education</b>						
<b>High</b>	27	-9	28	+ 5	9	+ 6
<b>Medium</b>	38	-3	12	+ 2	7	+ 6
<b>Low</b>	51	-2	4	0	8	+ 8

(Infratest dimap, 2007, p.53)

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