

WEST GERMANY TODAY

Edited by
Karl Koch

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Preface

This book is based on a series of symposia, which took place between 1981 and 1986, organized by the German sections of Portsmouth Polytechnic and the University of Surrey. Their principal feature was that they addressed themselves to undergraduates and concerned themselves with contemporary German issues, which ranged from political and economic problems confronting the German Democratic Republic to the economic, social, and political issues of interest in the Federal Republic of Germany. Academics and scholars who participated in the symposia were leading experts in the fields in which they made their contributions; the volume is drawn from a number of these.

The present work concentrates on some of the major developments in West Germany between the election of Helmut Kohl in March 1983 and his re-election in January 1987. This period, laying the foundation for the political, social, and economic framework of the late eighties, clearly marks a distinctive period for West Germany. Each contributor has focused on his specialism, and has identified the changes and the patterns which have emerged from this period, but also the underlying structures and the stability these have given to the West German societal framework. The chapters, therefore, converge on the change and stability of West German society and analyse and discuss the consequences of the *Wende*, that is the change in West German politics after 1982 and the remarkable continuity in many policy areas.

Karl Koch
Guildford, 1988

One

West German politics today – a historical introduction

William Paterson

The political history of Germany since unification in 1870 has been one of marked instability and dramatic change. Imperial Germany collapsed as a result of military defeat in 1918. The Weimar Republic which succeeded it never enjoyed the unreserved support of all its citizens and was finally brought down by the effects of the 1929 Depression. From 1930 on, government on the basis of a parliamentary democracy was impossible and it finally succumbed to the sustained onslaught of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Movement in 1933.

The Third Reich of Adolf Hitler based on the principles of *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle) and *Gleichschaltung* (i.e. the abolition of all independent institutions) ended with the military defeat of Germany and Hitler's own death in May 1945.

Initial Allied intentions involved four-power control of Germany and the introduction of profound changes in German society. What was initially envisaged amounted to an 'artificial revolution' intended to bring about a profound democratization of German institutions and society. Growing suspicion and hostility between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies brought about the abandonment of both elements in Allied policy. Four-power control began to break down in 1946. At the same time, and largely as a consequence of deteriorating East-West relations, American attempts at profound social change faltered. The new accent was on stabilization of the Western zones and Germans living in the Western zones began to be perceived as potential allies. This change of attitude was most noticeable in relation to the United States who increasingly dominated the formulation of Allied policy in the Western

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zones of Germany. American policy after 1946–7 was conducted on the basis of a new assumption. The existing German elites were largely to remain in place but they must accept the principles of liberal capitalism and representative democracy. Given the scale of German defeat, the absence of alternatives, and fear of the Soviet Union, this was an offer which it was very easy for members of the German elite to accept.

The major concern of West German politicians in responding to Allied requests to set up a West German state was an understandable reluctance to accept German division. For that reason the constitution was called a Basic Law rather than Constitution, it was not subject to popular ratification and the preamble and a number of articles stressed the commitment to reunification.

The institutional structure which emerged out of the interplay of Allied preconditions and the West German democratic politicians who drafted and debated the Basic Law is an attempt to learn from the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the experience of the Third Reich. The executive institutions and the absence of plebiscitary devices testify to a desire to achieve stability occasioned by the fall of Weimar whilst the enshrinement of human rights, the federal principle, and a commitment to decentralization are calculated to avoid a repetition of the Third Reich.

Within the executive the position of President is reduced from the substitute monarch of the Weimar Republic to a largely ceremonial role. The Chancellor was now clearly the dominant figure in the executive and was given the right 'to determine the guidelines of policy' (Article 65). Moreover, he can normally only be removed from office when a majority is agreed on his successor (Article 67). Individual ministers were also given a powerful position. The notion of the Cabinet as a collective body is much weaker than in the British tradition.

There is a dual legislature of a directly elected *Bundestag* and a *Bundesrat* or federal council which represents the states. The *Bundestag* has 518 representatives of whom half are elected directly in constituencies and the remaining 259 are selected by proportional representation from *Land* lists. (In all elections before 1987 the D'hondt method was employed. It was replaced for the 1987 election by the Niedermeyer method.) There is a 5

per cent threshold for representation in order to discourage multipartyism.

The *Bundesrat* has a unique composition in that it is not elected directly but consists of government delegations from the individual *Länder* which act on instructions from those governments. *Land* representation varies roughly according to the size of the population. Thus Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony, and North Rhine-Westphalia each have five seats; Hesse, the Rhineland Palatinate, and Schleswig-Holstein each have four; and the smallest *Länder* – Bremen, Hamburg, and the Saarland – have three each. In addition, West Berlin has four seats, but with voting rights only in committee. The size of the *Bundesrat* is thus forty-one seats, plus the four from West Berlin.

Over the years the *Bundesrat* has grown in importance. In the Basic Law a distinction is made between legislation which requires the approval of the *Bundesrat* and legislation on which it can only raise objections. The percentage which is deemed to require approval has risen from 10 per cent in 1949 to between 60 per cent and 70 per cent in the late seventies.¹

The West German federal system, sometimes called co-operative federalism, stresses the interdependence of the two levels of government rather than the classical federal insistence on the independence of the two levels. Put very simply, policy is formulated at the federal level and applied at the *Land* level.

After the collapse of the Hitler regime in May 1945, all German political activity was banned, but from the summer of 1945 democratic parties were gradually 'licensed' by Allied authorities. On the left, the two historic parties, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD), were simply refounded. On the right, the liberals were able to overcome division and create a united Free Democratic Party (FDP). The most novel creation however, was that of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian affiliate, the Christian Social Union (CSU), which were the first mass biconfessional parties in Germany.

The emergence and consolidation of the *CDU-Staat*

The key themes in the early years of the Federal Republic were recovery and security. Recovery had a dual aspect of economic

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recovery (*Wiederaufbau*) and reacceptance by other states. There had been some disagreement on the means to recovery in the early post-war years: whether to adopt a collectivist solution based on planning and state control of key industries as the German Social Democratic Party proposed, or to go for recovery on market principles. By 1948 market-based ideas were in the ascendant, a process symbolized and strengthened by the appointment of Ludwig Erhard as Economics Director of Bizonia in summer 1948.

The two key developments followed quickly. The currency was reformed by the introduction of the DM on 20 June 1948. The currency reform marked the start of the economic miracle as it brought a large supply of goods on to the market which had already been produced, but which producers had not thought it worthwhile to bring on to the market in the absence of currency reform. The introduction of the DM was almost immediately followed by the introduction of the law on liberalization of markets and the removal of central planning. This law in effect introduced the social market economy which has been described by Horn as:

the highest possible economic welfare through competition, steady economic growth, full employment, and free international economic relations;
an efficient monetary framework – and in particular a stable average price level achieved through an independent central bank – stable budgets, and balanced foreign accounts;
social security and progress through maximization of the national product, effective competition and adequate redistribution of income and wealth.²

The basic decisions on economic recovery thus predated the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany. The SPD continued for some time to oppose the concept at a rhetorical level but in practice disagreement was minimal.

In the first *Bundestag* of 1949–53 the SPD only opposed 7.4 per cent of bills on economics (a lower score than on any other category) while continuing to oppose at a rhetorical level.³

After 1953 the SPD ceased to oppose even at a rhetorical level and accepted the social market economy. 'In matters of

economic policy, then, the SPD simply yielded to the overwhelming success of the German economy of the 1950s.¹⁴

The genius of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor, was to incorporate the quarter of the population who were refugees into this recovery through the so-called *Lastenausgleich* (equalization of burdens) law which went a considerable way towards recompensing refugees for the financial losses they had suffered. The *Lastenausgleich* gave the refugees the relatively modest capital that they needed in order to be able to participate in the recovery.

The question of the strategy West Germany should pursue to gain reacceptance by other states provoked more disagreement. Adenauer's solution of complete and unequivocal identification with the West was very successful but was opposed by the SPD who were fearful of the effect this would have on the chances of German reunification. This opposition was abandoned by the SPD in a famous speech by Herbert Wehner on 30 June 1960.

At that time there was a pervasive fear of the Soviet Union in the Federal Republic, symbolized by the frequent use of the expression, '*Wenn die Russen kommen*'. Security could only realistically be provided by the United States and Adenauer was prepared for West German rearmament in order to ensure a continued American commitment. This was initially opposed by the SPD but finally accepted in the speech by Herbert Wehner already referred to.

Previous German politics had been notable for their extremely fragmented party systems. This was also true of the first *Bundestag* but thereafter the Bonn party system emerged as concentrated and bipolar. The CDU/CSU and its allies on the right faced the SPD almost without allies on the left. Gradually the CDU/CSU pushed out all other parties on the right save for the FDP. The CDU/CSU dominated the party system and in 1957 Adenauer and the CDU/CSU secured the only absolute majority attained by a party in the history of the Federal Republic. This dominance led to the use of the expression *CDU-Staat*.

The decline of the *CDU-Staat*

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the *CDU-Staat* came to an end but 1966 is perhaps the least worst date. It was always

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something of an exaggeration since the SPD held power in a number of *Länder* but in any case it contained the seeds of its own transcendence. First, it had been based upon the enormous popularity of Adenauer to whom the CDU was electorally mortgaged. His decline and eventual unwilling retirement left the CDU/CSU dangerously exposed and unleashed a gruelling war of succession, since few of the major CDU/CSU figures accepted Erhard as Chancellor. The other dimension of the CDU/CSU success had been its decision to become a *Volkspar-tei* (catch-all party) which, in contrast to past democratic parties in Germany, made a serious attempt to appeal to a wide spectrum of voters from different classes and religious confessions.

The subsequent electoral success of the CDU/CSU was so overwhelming that it encouraged the SPD to emulate it. In its conference at Bad Godesberg in 1959 the SPD abandoned its traditional ideological baggage and de-emphasized its class appeal. This not only attracted new voters to the SPD but undermined the bipolar nature of the party system by making the SPD for the first time a potential coalition partner for the bourgeois parties in a federal government. From 1959 the SPD was a *Regierungspartei im Wartesaal*, actively seeking a coalition role.

The CDU/CSU/FDP government broke up in 1966 and the CDU/CSU governed together with the SPD in the so-called Grand Coalition from 1966–69. The creation of the Grand Coalition led to the first sustained questioning of the legitimacy of the political institutions of the Federal Republic. At both the extreme right and extreme left end of the political spectrum the existence of the Grand Coalition bred disaffection. The emergence of the student movement and a movement of extra-parliamentary opposition on the left was more important for the long-term development of the Federal Republic since it both reintroduced Marxist ideas on the German left and introduced in a novel way a concern with participatory values and quality-of-life issues which had been notably lacking in the political life of the Federal Republic.

It was also during this period that the move away from the *CDU-Staat* was completed. The change of FDP leader from Erich Mende to Walter Scheel facilitated a readiness to coalesce with the SPD and in early 1969 a proto-coalition emerged to

support the election of Gustav Heinemann as President. After the election of October 1969 the SPD and FDP formed a coalition that was to last for the next thirteen years and Willy Brandt became the first Social Democratic Federal Chancellor.

The Social/Liberal coalition

This was a very distinctive period in West German political development. In internal politics it is associated with a series of liberal reforms in the area of education, abortion, law and order, and environmental policy. The reforms in domestic policy were, however, limited and largely dried up after 1974.

The major changes were in the field of foreign policy where there was a new and immeasurably stronger commitment to détente. This commitment to détente, encapsulated in the *Ostpolitik*, was the buckle of the coalition holding together two parties which often had sharply contending views on domestic policy. *Ostpolitik* was associated with the violation of a number of deeply entrenched taboos in relation to the recognition of Germany's post-war Eastern borders with Poland and the USSR. It also involved a recognition of the German Democratic Republic which stopped just short of full international recognition. The recognition of the GDR implicit in the *Ostpolitik* of the social/liberal coalition also strengthened the Federal Republic by emphasizing the permanency of the two German states and playing down the aspiration that they would be rapidly transcended by a unified German state.

Modell Deutschland

The steep rise in oil prices in 1973–4 imposed considerable pressures on the West German economy since it is highly dependent on imported sources of energy. The political fall-out from the rise included a weakening of Brandt's position as Chancellor which meant that when his assistant, Günther Guillaume, was exposed as an East German spy in May 1974, Brandt had little option but to resign and make way for the more forceful Helmut Schmidt. Under Schmidt the German economy weathered the years after 1974 very well by comparison with its main neighbours and competitors. This success was so

impressive that it was presented self-consciously as a model for other policies to emulate – the *Modell Deutschland* (the West Germany model).

The essential elements of the West German model can be characterized in the following terms:

Underpinning all else is a massively prosperous economy, insulated from direct politicisation by its rational framework for economic policy-making, and by its continued success. This sustained performance led in turn to the development of a supportive political culture, now no longer exclusively dependent on a high level of economic growth, but closely related to the political institutions as well. This effect is strengthened by factors which together encourage the successful functioning of these institutions: the absence of deeply divisive social cleavages, the orientation of the major political parties towards the winning and exercise of governmental power, and the resources provided in the office of Federal Chancellor for the exercise of political leadership. The internal stability is buttressed by a network of international relationships which guarantee security, assure the freedom of West Berlin, and provide outlets for an export-oriented economy.⁵

The central core of the *Modell Deutschland* was in the treatment of the economy, particularly in the widespread consensus on the so-called magic quadrilateral of stable prices, economic growth, full employment, and balance of payments equilibrium.

Under Schmidt some modifications were made in the emphasis laid on some of the elements in the West German model. The more difficult economic conditions put some sectors of the economy under considerable pressure. Hitherto state subsidies for threatened sectors were permissible if the subsidy was exceptional, regarded as compatible with long-term adjustment, and of a temporary nature. In the Schmidt period the first and last conditions were relaxed considerably and aid, particularly to the steel and shipbuilding industries, was provided on a sizeable and continual basis.

The second major change had to do with the maintenance of social partnership; with the pattern of co-operation between

capital and labour. The system of *Konzertierte Aktion* of tripartite consultation broke down in 1977 when the trades union withdrew as a protest against the employer's action in taking the very modest Codetermination Act of 1976 to the Federal Constitutional Court. Hence forward Schmidt took upon himself the responsibility for maintaining the tripartite dialogue (government/industry/labour) and he organized regular informal dialogues between himself and the leaders of industry and labour. However, once unemployment began to rise after 1979, it became more and more difficult to convince labour leaders of the benefits of such meetings and in 1981 Franz Steinkühler, the leader of IG Metall in Baden-Württemberg, managed to mobilize over 70,000 demonstrators against proposed budgetary cuts.

The break-up of the SPD/FDP coalition

Despite a very impressive victory over the CDU/CSU in the 1980 election by the coalition, doubts about its permanence grew steadily. There were three main reasons for these doubts. First, the gap between Helmut Schmidt and many in his own party grew perceptibly over a range of economic and security policy issues. Second, the FDP had become increasingly concerned about the volume of budget deficits. Last, the declining electoral performance of the SPD as the Greens grew in strength, convinced the FDP leadership that the FDP should detach itself from a sinking ship. The collapse occurred in September 1982, when Helmut Schmidt, anticipating FDP desertion, sacked his FDP ministers and a fortnight later, on 1 October 1982, the FDP supported Kohl in a constructive vote of no confidence.

The Federal Republic has been governed since 1 October 1982 by a coalition of CDU/CSU/FDP. This coalition has displayed considerable internal tensions. This tension is especially noticeable between the CSU and the FDP and arises principally from the marked hostility expressed by the CSU towards the FDP. This hostility is based on three principal grounds. Franz Josef Strauss had a long-held grievance against the FDP because of its role in the Spiegel affair, when it had called for his resignation. Second, there is a clash of policy positions on law and order and social issues such as the proposed law on