

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Germany and its 'instead-of' elites

Elections in Hamburg and Munich highlight the deepening crisis of the nation's policymaking establishment.

Almost three years after Germany was reunified on Oct. 3, 1990, the functioning of the nation's politics proves daily that it is not yet a sovereign nation. So many violations of the national interest are being committed by senior politicians, and so many concessions made to other powers in the West and the East, that it is justified to have doubts whether this nation's elites are at all capable of running the country.

This ranges from the Bonn decision in late 1990 to bankroll George Bush's Persian Gulf war with a respectable 18 billion deutschemarks at a time when the economic recovery of eastern Germany needed that money urgently, to the government's inaction in the case of Bosnia, to the absurd worshipping of that "debt god" which has bequeathed the German government with a lethal heritage of DM 400 billion of accumulated debt from the books of the pre-1989 communist regime of East Germany.

Those who made these mistakes come from the established political parties that have shaped and also dominated western German society since 1945: the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU), the leftist Social Democrats (SPD), the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), and from the late 1970s on, the radical ecologist Greens.

The shallowness of these parties became strikingly obvious in the process of the German reunification, and then in the inability to halt the deepening economic depression. More and

more voters have lost their confidence in these parties. Close to 40% of the electorate stay away from the polls, and of those who do vote, some 20% vote for the Greens or other small parties. This means that the three "traditionalist" parties, CDU, SPD and FDP, have a joint share of only 50% of the electorate.

This also means that the next German chancellor, who is to be elected in October 1994, will be voted in with a percentage not much greater than the 25-26% that recent U.S. Presidents have commanded. In Germany's better times, in the 1960s and 1970s, and to some extent still in the early 1980s, fully 80% of the nation's electorate would come out to vote on election day.

The results of two municipal elections, in Munich on Sept. 12 and in Hamburg one week later, indicate where the country is heading if new elements are unwilling to enter the political system—or are prevented from doing so. Of all new parties in the German political landscape, associates of American economist Lyndon LaRouche, who are now campaigning as the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BBS), have been the only ones so far with a comprehensive programmatic approach going beyond the usual one- or two-issue platform of other "protest" parties.

In Munich, Germany's third-largest city with a population of 1.25 million, the BBS was on the ballot and had a remarkable programmatic impact that won grudging respect

even from its adversaries. In Hamburg, on the other hand, which is the second-largest city with 1.75 million, the BBS did not field candidates, and the scene was left to the usual "established" and "protest" parties.

The absence of program became evident when the two big parties, the SPD and the CSU (the quasi-autonomous Bavarian state section of the CDU), ran their Munich campaign with the slogans, "So that Munich stays in good hands" (SPD mayoral candidate Christian Ude) and "So that it gets better" (CSU candidate Peter Gauweiler).

The only aspect that distinguished the campaign in voters' memories, was BBS candidate Elke Fimmen's insistence that there is indeed a "patent recipe" for solving the crisis, on the condition that "production comes before speculation."

In Hamburg, scandal-mongering among the various candidates prevailed. One of the biggest scandals of all was that a group of mostly CDU dissidents was allowed to be on the ballot under the name of STATT—a play on words which means "instead of." The party has no program, and its leaders openly declared they didn't even want to have one, but that they were just there for the protest—and they entered the Hamburg municipal parliament with 5.6% of the vote. The CDU lost 10%, ending up with 25%, while the SPD lost 8%, keeping 40%. The FDP did not even reenter the parliament. Voter participation was 31%.

Instead of a program, the parties kept on fishing in their rival's scandals. STATT, which especially media people present as "something new," just brings to the extreme what the other "established" parties are anyway: "instead-of" parties; and as long as they dominate the scene, Germany won't be able to overcome the economic depression.