

Also by D. Hough; M. Koß; J. Olsen
THE LEFT PARTY IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN POLITICS

Left Parties in National Governments

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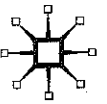
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Abbreviations

AG	Working group within the German Left Party	KESK	Centre Party (Finland)
ATTAC	Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens	KOK	National Coalition Party (Finland)
BWK	Association of West German Communists	L	Liberals (Denmark)
C	Conservatives (Denmark)	LP	Left Party (Germany)
CD	Centre Democrats (Denmark)	M	Moderates (Sweden)
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal (Netherlands)	MP	Green Party (Sweden)
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Germany)	MWP	Mecklenburg Western Pomerania
CESP	Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU	NKP	Norwegian Communist Party
CIU	Convergence and Union (Spain)	PASOC	Party of Socialist Action (Greece)
CMP	Comparative Manifesto Project	PCE	Communist Party of Spain
CNP	Communist Party of the Netherlands	PCF	Communist Party of France
CPP	Christian People's Party (Denmark)	PCI	Communist Party of Italy
CSU	Christian Social Union (Germany)	PD	Democratic Party (Italy)
CU	Christian Union Party (Netherlands)	PdCI	Party of Italian Communists
D66	Liberal Party (Netherlands)	PDS	Democratic Party of the Left (Italy)
DC	Christian Democratic Party (Italy)	PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism (Germany)
DKP	Communist Party of Denmark	PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism (Germany)
DKP	German Communist Party	PP	Popular Party (Spain)
DNA	Labour Party (Norway)	PPR	Party of Radicals (Netherlands)
DP	Proletarian Democracy (Italy)	PS	True Finnish Party
EEA	European Economic Area	PSI	Socialist Party of Italy
EFTA	European Free Trade Area	PSOE	Social Democratic Party of Spain
ELP	European Left Party	PSP	Pacifist Socialist Party (Netherlands)
ENPP	Effective number of parliamentary parties	PvDA	Social Democratic Party (Netherlands)
FDP	Free Democratic Party (Germany)	RC	Communist Refoundation (Italy)
FP	People's Party (Sweden)	RI	Italian Renewal Party
GDR	German Democratic Republic	RKP	Swedish People's Party (Finland)
GL	GroenLinks (Netherlands)	RV	Radical Liberal Party (Denmark)
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left	SA	Rainbow Left (Italy)
ICV	Initiative of Catalanian Greens (Spain)	SAK	Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions
IG	Interest group within the German Left Party	SAP	Social Democratic Workers Party (Sweden)
IMF	International Monetary Fund	SD	Democratic Left (Italy)
IU	United Left (Spain)	SD	Social Democratic Party (Denmark)
KD	Christian Democrats (Finland)	SDP	Social Democratic Party (Finland)
KD	Christian Democratic Party (Sweden)	SEA	Single European Act
		SED	Socialist Unity Party (Germany)
		SF	Socialist People's Party (Denmark)
		SF	Socialist People's Party (Norway)
		SKDL	People's Democratic League of Finland
		SKP	Finnish Communist Party
		SKP	Swedish Communist Party
		SP	Centre Party (Norway)

SP	Socialist Party (Netherlands)
SPD	Social Democratic Party (Germany)
SV	Socialist Left Party (Norway)
UL	Unity List (Denmark)
Ulivo	Olive Tree Coalition (Italy)
V	Left Party (Sweden)
VAS	Left Alliance of Finland
VIHR	Green Party (Finland)
VPK	Left Party Communists (Sweden)
VS	Left Socialist Party (Denmark)
VVD	Liberal Party (Netherlands)
WASG	Electoral Alliance for Labour and Social Justice (Germany)
WEU	Western European Union
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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1

From Pariahs to Players? Left Parties in National Governments

Jonathan Olsen, Dan Hough and Michael Koß

Over the last two decades western European party politics has undergone a number of far-reaching changes. One of these changes has been the rise in the number of new parties and also an increase in the political relevance of longer-lived, but hitherto largely marginalised, older ones. Broadly speaking, these parties fall into one of three distinct camps – Green parties, parties of the far right, and parties of the far left. One of the most interesting common features of these three types of party is their initial – and in some cases, still existing – disdainful attitude to striking bargains and entering government alongside other actors. The first of these three party types, Green parties, were initially considered non-coalitionable by their opponents, and for many years they themselves also deliberately rejected participating in national governments, making a virtue out of the necessity of their 'anti-partyness' (Frankland and Schoonmaker, 1992; Poguntke, 1993; Tiefenbach, 1998; Shull, 1999; Burchell, 2002). This changed slowly at first, but by the late 1990s most green parties had become 'coalitionable', even if many have not yet actually been part of a national government (Lees, 2000; Poguntke, 2002; Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007: chapter 4).

Far right parties, in their different guises, have also traditionally been considered beyond the coalitionable pale (Betz and Immerfall, 1998; Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007). However, in the last decade some of these parties – such as the Austrian Free Democrats and the Italian National Alliance – have begun to move into government. Their institutionalisation, to be sure, has been more uneven than that of Green parties. Although parties of the far right have also enjoyed a relatively long (if somewhat spotty) parliamentary presence at the statewide and sub-state level, their participation in coalitions has had varying results, with some governments enjoying a degree of stability while others

have been characterised by extreme instability and, indeed in a few cases, the effective death or slow decay of the far right parties involved (Minkenberg, 2001; Heinisch, 2003; Luther, 2003).

Finally, far left parties – or more simply 'left' parties, distinct from their social democratic, 'centre-left' cousins (more on the nature of this distinction below) – have also begun the transition from outsider to insider party. Surprisingly, however, the entrance of several of these actors into statewide governing coalitions, their increasing participation in sub-state governments, and, in general, their position as possible coalition partners across most of western Europe have received relatively little scholarly attention. This is particularly so when compared with that which Green parties or parties of the radical right have achieved (see Bale and Dunphy, 2006 for an analysis of the notable exceptions). To be sure, path-breaking studies on the European left after the fall of the Berlin Wall, such as that by Martin Bull and Paul Heywood (1994), remain in many ways the core texts from which analysis of left parties still begins; yet such studies are now inevitably out of date in addressing the new challenges and strategic choices that these parties face. A significant amount of often highly illuminating work has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been done on the rejuvenation of (former) communist parties in central and eastern Europe (see, for example, Waller, 1995; Ziblart, 1998; Ishiyama, 1999; Bozóki and Ishiyama, 2002; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Hough et al., 2006), but this has little direct relevance when analysing the hard choices that left parties are faced with (in terms of coalition politics at least) in western Europe. This is in spite of the fact that some of the newest and most innovative research has indeed looked to adapt these findings to the western European context (Keith, 2010). Some of the more recent studies of left parties in 'old Europe' have curiously sidestepped these questions, and they have tended to be either richly informative descriptions of left parties in particular countries (see, for example, Bosco, 2001; Botella and Ramiro, 2003; and, for a particularly good summary of all European left parties, see March, 2008), analyses of left party attitudes towards particular international institutions (Dunphy, 2004) or detailed analyses of intra-party conflicts and power tussles (see, for example, Hudson, 2000). While undoubtedly broadening our knowledge of how these actors have developed politically, organisationally and ideologically, this body of research still tends to more or less completely neglect issues of when and under what conditions contemporary left parties cross the Rubicon and become parties of government. In short, the vast majority of previous research on left parties after 1989 tells us precious little about why and how left parties

enter government, what they actually do when they get there, and what happens to them (and the party systems where they are active) subsequently.

The apparent dearth of comparative literature on left parties is all the more surprising when one considers that since 1990 left parties in eight European democracies (as well as, if one looks farther afield, New Zealand) have, at one time or other, either entered national governments as coalition partners or acted as support parties. They are therefore arguably as significant to executive government in the last decade as their Green brethren (see Table 1.1).

Of course, left parties *have not* seen masses of voters stream to support their cause. Many poll regularly vote shares between 5 and 10 per cent and very few indeed regularly compete eye-to-eye with the largest social democratic party. They have nonetheless found themselves in politically more opportune settings, as social democrats in particular have increasingly sought to bring left actors into the coalition equation. In some cases left parties are already enjoying ever greater opportunities to influence national policy from inside governing coalitions (see Table 1.1 above). Whether in government or out of it, however, it may be that for left parties their time in the spotlight has arrived: recent worldwide economic problems have shifted more attention to parties of the left, which, in many cases, offer substantial policy alternatives to the pro-market economic consensus that has dominated mainstream economic policy in advanced industrial democracies in recent times. Subsequently, those left parties not yet in government are finding themselves forced to consider the basic question of whether they should give up a traditional oppositional role with a view to actually shaping policy outcomes.

It is this basic question which we put under the analytical microscope in this book. Our intent here is to scrutinise the choices left parties make for entering or not entering coalition government (be it as formal coalition partners or as support parties) and the conditions that shape, affect and frame these strategic choices. As our various case studies demonstrate, although the precise nature of the debates within left parties differs across time and space, the basic question of whether to participate in government – and the factors that shape this choice – is pertinent in all countries where left parties exist. Once left parties join coalition government, moreover, further questions arise. Do these parties perform as well in government as they talk in opposition? Are parties of the left ready to practise politics as the 'art of the possible' and adjust their policies to the hard business of governing, despite inevitable

Table 1.1 Left parties' participation in statewide governments in western Europe since 1990 (selected countries)

Country	Party	Most recent national election result (per cent)	Period in government	Previous government experience before 1990?
Cyprus	Progressive Party of Working People	31.1 (2006)	2003–Present (Presidential system)	No
Denmark	Socialist People's Party	13 (2007)	1993–2001 (support party)	Yes (support party, 1966–8)
Finland	Left Alliance	8.8 (2007)	1995–2003 (coalition partner)	Yes (predecessor a coalition partner 1944–8, 1966–71, 1975–6 and 1977–82)
France	French Communist Party	4.29* (2007)	1997–2002 (semi-presidential system; coalition partner)	Yes (coalition partner 1981–4)
Germany	Left Party	11.9 (2009)	No	No
Italy	The Left – Rainbow (Communist Refoundation; Party of Italian Communists; the Democratic Left; and the Federation of the Greens)	3.1 (2008)	1996–1998**; 2006–2008 (coalition partner)	No
Netherlands	Socialist Party	16.6 (2006)	No	No
Norway	Socialist Left Party	6.2 (2009)	2005–present (coalition partner)	No
Sweden	Left Party	5.9 (2006)	1998–2006 (support party)	No
Spain	United Left	3.8 (2008)	2004–8 (support party)	No

* In first round of voting, legislative elections.

** Communist Refoundation only.

claims of ideological betrayal by some of their members (and, indeed, voters)? Or, on the contrary, do they promise much and deliver frustratingly little when actually given the opportunity to take part in national governments? It is these kinds of questions that this book also aims to analyse.

Defining and classifying left parties

The first place to begin, of course, is with an understanding of just what 'left' parties are – their ideological and programmatic distinctiveness from other party families – and to trace something of their family origins. This is not quite as straightforward as it might appear. In contrast to some other party families (with the possible exception of the far right), it is more challenging to classify left parties in their present guise as a clearly defined party family. Such classification was easier to do in the early post-war years, as (at least some of) these actors were Communist parties – with their classic themes of revolution and the eventual rule of the working class – which had split from social democracy sometime after 1917. However, things became much more complicated as the Cold War wore on. Some of the more traditional Communist parties – initially in places such as Denmark and Sweden, but soon in other parts of the continent – were beginning to move away from Moscow's dogmatic line towards more flexible, less doctrinaire ideological stances. Left-libertarian parties were also arising out of the new social movements of the 1960s in parts of Northern Europe. The 'Eurocommunist experiment' of the PCI in Italy and the PCF in France also further blurred the traditional line between communist and socialist/social democratic parties. Classification of these parties became even more difficult after 1989 when various parties on the left split, merged with other parties and groups, renamed themselves, and otherwise redefined their overarching political values and policy goals.

One illuminating approach to making sense of this rich mosaic is to classify left parties on the basis of their attitude to the prevailing economic and political system. This involves a basic split between those that want significant and deep-rooted change to the structures that underpin liberal democratic institutions as well as the market-based economic system ('radical left parties') and those that simply denounce capitalism and view liberal democracy as a sham, rejecting all forms of compromise and accommodation with actors in the prevailing system ('extreme left parties'). Whereas the 'extreme left' stresses its revolutionary identity and the importance of the extra-parliamentary struggle

(March, 2008: p. 3), the 'radical left' supports the notion of democracy (in theory at least), but rejects the global neoliberal consensus and the marketisation and liberalisation that have, thus far, inevitably appeared to come with it. The 'extreme left' sees the market as anathema to any notion of social justice and human equality, and views bourgeois democracy as nothing more than a tool that capitalists use to cement their own positions in society. The 'radical left', on the other hand, accepts that the market may have a small, limited and highly restricted role to play in wealth generation, but very much within the context of an economy that is driven, and organised, around issues of social justice and economic equality. The 'extreme left' is now much more marginal than the 'radical left', but such parties do still exist – albeit on the fringes – of party politics in places such as Portugal and Greece. What unites these parties, as Luke March observes, is an 'identification of economic inequality as the basis of existing political and social arrangements' and a common belief that achieving 'collective economic and social rights' is their key goal (March, 2008: p. 3).

March's framework cannot, and indeed does not, neglect the real-world diversity of these parties. However, in reality *all* party families possess shades of grey and areas of ideological inconsistency, and we subsequently feel justified in taking a 'big tent' approach to understanding what constitutes the left party family, and therefore which parties should be put under the analytical lens in this book. Left parties may be reformed communist parties such as Sweden's *Vänsterpartiet*, Denmark's *Socialistisk Folkeparti*, and, with a number of caveats, the Finnish *Vasemmistoliitto*. They can also be much more orthodox or traditionalist Communist parties such as the *Parti Communiste Français* or the *Partito della Riformazione Comunista* in Italy. Left-libertarian parties and parties with a distinct heritage in the tumultuous politics of the 1960s and 1970s (as the post-war social democratic left began to fragment) also exist, such as the Norwegian *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* and the Dutch *Socialistische Partij*. Finally, there are also parties that oscillate somewhere within this left ideological territory, such as Spain's *Izquierda Unida*, as well as parties that have emerged from a combination of origins, such as Germany's *Linke*, whose roots indeed lie in the old East German Communist Party but which has nevertheless evolved – especially after its merger with disaffected social democratic groups from western Germany – into something else entirely.

To recount these diverse origins and distinctive histories, however, is not to say that these parties do not have a clear and distinguishable ideological and programmatic core. They all reject the alleged

neoliberal consensus and they reject the processes of marketisation and globalisation that it has brought with it. They have major reservations about the EU project, because of both its democratic deficit and its alleged facilitator role in supporting capitalism in Europe. They still seek to achieve full employment as well as much more redistributive tax regimes. They largely reject market mechanisms as a fair way of allocating resources. They are all keen to stress their solidarity with oppressed peoples across the globe and they are vehement in their rejection of US-inspired 'imperialism'. Finally, most left parties incorporate Green perspectives (especially in those countries without strong Green parties and/or a high degree of environmental consciousness) and feminist themes (even if these many of these parties themselves are still largely male-dominated). Left parties – as defined here – subsequently have enough in common to be compared and contrasted with one another. What is particularly interesting and timely (if not unique) about these parties, however, is the way in which they are being increasingly confronted with some very basic choices concerning their respective roles in their party systems – choices which can fundamentally affect their identity as parties.

Understanding left parties' strategic choices: An analytical framework

To understand the choices and dilemmas facing left parties as they try to accommodate themselves to the business of governing, we can use a conceptual model of party behaviour given its fullest articulation by Kaare Strøm (1990a; Müller and Strøm, 1999), a model we fruitfully employed in our previous study of the German Left Party (Hough et al., 2007) and which Tim Bale and Richard Dunphy have highlighted elsewhere (Bale and Dunphy, 2006). This model's trichotomy of party goals as centring on 'policy, office, or votes' can certainly encompass left parties in addition to more mainstream parties.¹ Indeed, for our purposes here, we can think of the 'policy, office, or votes' framework as providing a helpful perspective on the question of how and under what conditions left parties enter national government.

Coalition theory has long posited that coalitions come into being because of both policy and office considerations on the part of parties. Put very simply, most scholars have come to the conclusion that parties seek to maximise their office gains and minimise their policy distances with coalition partners by seeking 'minimal connected winning' coalitions. Although this is generally true in explaining coalition behaviour

in the aggregate, in looking at how particular coalitions emerge in any one country at any one point in time, context and constraints of the political system play crucial roles. In terms of context, for example, the distances between parties in a multiparty system generally reflect differences across a variety of policy dimensions. Whether a party chooses to enter coalition government, in short, will depend upon which issues become salient for that party (and its coalition partners) at that point in time, and which issues do not (Narud, 1996). The policy salience question is difficult to capture with formal models. Furthermore, within any political system there are varying constraints on coalition formation that also affect actors' choices, among them institutional, cultural and historical, and situational constraints (see the discussion below). These constraints limit what is possible at any one time in any one national setting. If we want to understand exactly what conditions a party's choice to enter government in any country at any particular time, we therefore have to peer inside the 'black box' of party decision-making (Müller, 1997).

Overall, Strøm's heuristic provides us with a framework that can help us interpret what we find when we look inside this black box. At its most basic level, this framework suggests that all parties move within a triangle defined by three strategic choices: a 'policy' goal in which a party seeks to maximise its impact on public policy, implementing its policy agenda in the purest, most consistent way (pure and consistent, that is, with the party's identity and ultimate aims); an 'office-seeking' goal whereby parties attempt to attain political power and maximise the benefits of office by gaining significant ministerial portfolios or other governmental positions for their supporters; and a 'votes' goal whereby parties attempt to maximise their share of the vote in electoral competition with other parties, regardless of whether or not such vote maximisation leads to office. The strategic goals are quite obviously 'ideal types', inasmuch as no party can be completely described as seeking 'office' (or policy or votes) only. However, parties do appear to prioritise one party goal – to have a 'primary party goal' – over the other party goals at any one point in time (Harmel and Janda, 1993).

Thus, a party might prioritise an 'office' goal for a period of time, then later (in the event, say, of electoral loss) recalibrate its strategy to give more weight to policy implementation or vote maximisation. What is important here is that parties face inevitable opportunity costs when manoeuvring within these parameters: prioritising a 'policy' goal can (and often does) impact the ability of a party to maximise its share of the vote or to serve as coalition partner, since being uncompromising

in a policy area is unlikely to attract coalition partners or (in many cases) voters. In the perfect world of parties, of course, a party's policy commitments would be perfectly in line with its other goals, such that it could pursue its (purest) policy objectives while simultaneously gaining both votes and office. However, parties themselves are quite aware that achieving all three objectives in their maximum form is not possible. Cognisant of these conflicts between party goals, parties have to make 'hard choices' – de-emphasising one party goal or another so as to accommodate other party goals. This is clearly illustrated when parties move to reform or dilute their policy commitments so as to become electable (vote-seeking) or coalitionable (office-seeking).

So what kinds of things affect parties' choices? The literature on parties indicates that there are at least four clusters of factors that seem to be important in shaping parties' decisions within the parameters of policy, office, and votes:

1. *Institutional factors.* Institutions shape incentives. More specifically, they help parties frame choices when they do their own goal-setting. Such factors include the electoral system, institutional governing traditions, or parliamentary rules and procedures. Countries in which 'strong parliaments' or committee systems exist and subsequently grant the political opposition a significant policy impact may heighten the priority given to policy-seeking goals while dampening office-seeking ones. Similarly, institutional governing traditions that make minority government an accepted 'normal' condition may also dampen office-seeking goals. For left parties in countries with a tradition of minority government and/or strong parliament, for example, office-seeking goals may have traditionally been given a much lower priority than elsewhere. So recognition of the impact of the institutional framework is subsequently vital in understanding why left parties enter government, and what they are able to achieve (or not achieve) when they get there.
2. *The party system and the nature of electoral competition.* Parties' decisions to enter or not enter government will depend on the kind and degree of competitiveness in the party system. This could include the socio-political cleavages in society and the number of spatial dimensions of competition, the history of relationships between parties, and the kinds of issues that gain saliency. A country with a more fragmented party system will – all other things being equal – tend to produce parties that give more weight to office-seeking goals than countries with less fragmented party systems (Müller and Strøm, 1999). The history of relationships between parties can also obviously condition the 'policy,

office, votes' dynamic, since a strained relationship can effectively blackball theoretically attractive coalition options. For example, some left parties have (or have had) very difficult relationships with their social democratic brethren. This can make entering government an extremely difficult decision, regardless of electoral outcomes.

3. *Organisation and the internal dynamics of parties.* A change in leadership has long been seen as a crucial factor in explaining the evolution of parties' primary goals (Harmel and Janda, 1993; Harmel et al., 1995). However, the impact of organisation and the internal dynamics of parties goes beyond leadership issues and includes changes in the balance of power within a party (i.e. the ascendancy of one faction over another), the relationship between the leadership and the party rank and file, and the organisational rules of the party that might severely limit the manoeuvrability of the leadership. To take a very straightforward example, factions within a party opposed to the office-seeking strategy of the leadership can, given sufficient organisational strength, frustrate leaders' ability to carry out this strategy and/or stage a coup to install a different leadership. This fight between factions can be seen in various left parties over the last two decades, and it has significantly impacted their decision on whether or not to enter government.

4. *Situational factors, including 'external shocks'.* Situational factors include a wide variety of specific events, both exogenous and endogenous, that impact parties' hard choices. Situational factors could include things such as the personalities of leaders at the time of coalition discussion (where leaders do not get on well, deals are harder to seal); the state of the economy at the time of coalition discussions (leading some parties to reject the 'poison pill' of coalition government); or specific, often spectacular, events (for example political scandals) that trigger sudden elections or new coalition discussions. Undoubtedly the most significant of these situational factors, however, are 'external shocks' to a party. And the most recognisable of external shocks are electoral shocks. An unexpected electoral loss often prompts a party to re-evaluate its primary goal and replace it with another one as the party goes through much soul-searching about both party strategy and policy. Research on Green parties, for example, has shown that electoral losses while still in opposition are a key factor in moving these parties into government at the next election (Dumont and Bäck, 2006). However, external electoral shocks can also come from unexpected electoral success: this confronts a party with the prospect of entering coalition government that it previously did not have. Such 'electoral

success shocks' seem to be especially pertinent to parties that have traditionally been opposition parties, such as left parties.

Left parties' hard choices

The framework of policy, office, votes is one that can be used to analyse all political parties (Bale and Dunphy, 2006). Thus it should go without saying that left parties are basically no different from other parties in the hard choices and trade-offs they face. However, there are a number of things that make these trade-offs especially difficult for left parties. First of all, parties on the left have historically wrestled with the question of how to 'deal with' parliamentary democracy more than other types of parties. For most of their history, left-wing parties have pondered over whether to question or reject parliamentary democracy *per se*, in good Leninist style, as a capitalist charade that in reality represses the working class; or whether instead they should seek to change the system from within, fundamentally reshaping capitalist structures and democratic institutions. Although most of the contemporary left parties considered here have long since moved closer to the latter position, some of their members are nevertheless policy purists, giving priority to policy objectives and sacrificing office (and often votes too) on the altar of ideological purity. This is completely consistent with a core piece of these parties' identity: many of their followers are attracted to this type of party precisely because they perceive it to be a party that 'stands apart' from the other parties; that is, a party that pursues overarching, systemic change and is willing to articulate clear, radical and uncompromising policy prescriptions.

However, all parties in parliamentary democracies – at least once they decide they want to decisively influence political life rather than sit grumpily on the sidelines – must eventually give some priority to office-seeking goals as part of working 'within the system'. Expanding a party's goals to include office-seeking also leads to some emphasis on vote maximisation, since without a good electoral performance a party cannot hope to enter government (or, in the case of multiparty parliamentary systems, to enter into executive coalitions). Vote maximisation and office-seeking goals in turn lead almost invariably to the de-emphasising of policy objectives, at least in their ideologically purest form. Thus left parties tend to become more de-radicalised over time. Still, shifting the weight it gives to each goal or replacing one primary goal with another remains a very difficult choice for any party, most especially when it comes to giving office-seeking goals more priority.

The intersection of left parties' more purist ideological identity with new political opportunity structures and changing party system dynamics, which have thrust them into the role of possible coalition partner, is therefore bringing these parties' hard choices into sharp relief. Their challenge is to continue to articulate a distinguishable political vision and a set of clear policy principles; at the same time, they must be able to compromise them so as to get into a position where they actually have the power to implement their policies. Left parties are quite aware of this dilemma.

Second, left parties' hard choices are especially acute given that most of them (as Table 1.1 indicates) have had little experience of coalition government in comparison to more 'mainstream' parties. Entering coalition governments constitutes a fundamentally new phase or stage in their 'lifespan', a metaphor Pedersen (1982) uses to convey the evolution of political parties from their very beginning to their maturity (and, in some cases, death). Pedersen outlines four stages of a party's life – declaration (announcing the intent to become a party), authorisation (meeting the requirements necessary to be recognised as a party), representation (winning seats in parliament) and relevance. Deschouwer (2008) has taken Pedersen's model one step further in exploring the distinctive characteristics of 'newly governing parties'. Drawing on Giovanni Sartori's (1976) definition of a party's 'relevance' within a political system as consisting of either its 'blackmail potential' (a party's ability, via its electoral power, to impact other parties' coalition strategies) or its 'governing potential' (coalitionability, in other words), Deschouwer argues that 'governing' has to be added as a crucial, and qualitatively new, phase in a party's lifespan. Governing presents benefits to a party, undoubtedly, but also has severe impacts: it almost certainly results in the dilution of policy commitments (as the discussion above notes) and (very frequently) punishment at the next election.

Deciding to enter government is an especially hard choice for parties new to it because of at least four factors. First, as discussed above, being a coalition partner risks sacrificing an important part of a party's core identity, such as that of left parties which have conceived themselves as standing apart from or above the 'establishment'. Being a part of government thus involves a deep existential transformation for left parties. Second, in contrast to more mainstream (governing) parties, being new to government means that political 'normality' has been previously defined by party members and voters as *not* being in government. This 'abnormal' situation is thus likely to generate much more scrutiny and soul-searching on the part of activists and voters than

happens in established parties; it also inevitably provokes more media attention simply because it is unusual (Deschouwer, 2008). Third, being new in government also means operating without an established pattern or model for governing, as parties new to government often grope for answers to questions which they have never before faced. Along with this, being new in government means (most probably) negotiating with a more experienced coalition partner, where the risk is run of being taken advantage of. Together, this means that the experience of coalition government is likely to be a rockier one than is the case for more established parties. Yet, as Buelens and Hino (2008) have shown, being new in government is almost certain to bring electoral loss at the next election, especially if the party is less centrist and more ideologically extreme. Left parties, especially ones without any experience, thus face a difficult decision over whether to enter government in the first place and, as a direct result of crossing the Rubicon, they will also run significant electoral and political risks at a later date.

Plan of the book

All the contributors to this volume are subsequently seeking to identify common patterns in both the nature of the hard choices that left parties are faced with and also the outcomes that tend to be spawned. The frameworks introduced above shape these discussions accordingly. We proceed inductively, examining a number of the most prominent cases in advanced industrial democracies. Chapters 2–5 analyse cases where left parties have actually entered coalitions. We purposely ignore the somewhat anomalous case of Cyprus (for more on this case see Dunphy and Bale, 2007), choosing to look instead at Norway (Jonathan Olsen), France (David Bell), Italy (James Newell) and Finland (Richard Dunphy). The common experience of being in government has not translated into identical outcomes for parties in these countries. We seek to understand why that has been the case and which conditions were at work in bringing these parties into government in the first place. Chapters 6–8 analyse cases where left parties have not taken the 'final step' into a genuine coalition but have instead acted as support parties. Being a support party is something of a 'halfway house', and, although it has certain advantages, it also clearly has its limitations. The cases put under the microscope here are Spain (Tània Verge), Sweden (Michael Koß) and Denmark (Dag Arne Christensen). Finally, Chapters 9 and 10 look at cases where strong left parties exist, but they have not – as yet – entered national governments; namely Germany (Dan

Hough) and the Netherlands (Dan Keith). In the last statewide election in both Germany and the Netherlands, the left parties scored impressive electoral gains and were seen as among the clearest 'winners' of these elections. Nevertheless, left parties in both countries were shut out (or shut themselves out) of coalition government. Why? What factors conditioned these parties' choices? What factors will be at play in the future?

Throughout each case study, authors have employed a unified framework to understand why decisions were taken, as well as to understand the ramifications these choices have for the future. Along with this, authors have attempted to construct a narrative of each party's development that will help the reader understand the contextual field within which each moves, as well as the constraints (external and internal) under which each operates. Accordingly, each chapter considers four sets of questions.

First, each author gives a little background and explains the most important contextual factors that shape the strategic decisions that left parties have to make. More specifically, this will entail a discussion of the historical origins of the party and how (if at all) these origins impact on the party's attitudes/decisions towards entering government. Institutional and party systemic factors such as electoral rules, traditions of government and the nature of party competition will also be analysed in so far as they impinge on the party's (in)ability or (un)willingness to enter government. The initial section of each chapter will also briefly introduce any relevant situational factors – electoral shocks, prominent personalities and so forth – as well as party organisational features of note.

The second set of questions discusses ideological and programmatic issues. More specifically, the extent of the impact of government participation – or the prospect of it – on ideological and programmatic orientation will be put under the analytical microscope. If change has occurred, when did it do so (i.e. pre-, post- or during government) and what were the causes and consequences of both entering government and aiming (if indeed it was the aim) to become more coalitionable? Finally, what policy accomplishments can the party lay claim to, and how does this match up with original aims?

Third, each author will analyse the core policy stances of his or her respective left party. This will enable the editors to analyse in the concluding chapter what the core of the anti-capitalist agenda within left parties actually is, before assessing the limits, constraints and opportunities that exist in attempting to implement this policy package. Areas

such as the party's attitude to the European integration project will be analysed, as will attitudes towards the much maligned process of economic globalisation. Links to various non-parliamentary bodies (particularly in the context of anti-globalisation strategies) will also be touched upon. Authors will also analyse what this set of policy preferences means for relationships with the centre-left and with other left or Green parties in their own countries.

The respective case study chapters will conclude by looking at future electoral and political prospects. Authors will attempt to shed light on how the party has been impacted electorally by government participation or support. Given that we would expect some sort of de-radicalisation during a period in government, each chapter will say something on what happened after the party left government. Do we see a party maintaining the more moderate positions that it found itself taking in government, or does it return to the more radical positions of yesteryear? Do we see evidence of a comprehensive linear move towards the political centre or are the party's policy positions something much more ad hoc?

These case studies will be followed by a final substantive chapter (Olsen, Hough and Kolß) which draws the key strands from these case studies together. We try, in other words, to make sense of what we have learned from each of the case studies. Are there common patterns of decision-making on policy, office and votes that can be seen among left parties, or are such decisions completely context-dependent? Do left parties differ significantly not only from more mainstream parties but from other, more radical parties in the way in which they ultimately make their hard choices? Does the extent to which a left party de-radicalises depend on whether or not the party has participated in government; and, if so, does it depend upon it having been a full coalition partner rather than a support party? Do left parties radicalise once again in the opposition or is there 'no turning back' after participation in government? Although we may not be able to definitively answer these questions, we will be able to approach answers to them with some degree of confidence gained from our empirical data.

Note

1. Sometimes the literature on parties' strategic goals includes a fourth goal, that of 'internal party unity.' See Sjöblom (1968); Harmel and Janda (1993).

9

From Pariah to Prospective Partner? The German Left Party's Winding Path towards Government

Dan Hough

All parties have unique histories, but the history of the German Left Party (LP) is more unique than most. One of its predecessors, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), ruled the German Democratic Republic for all but the last few months of its inglorious history (1949–90) before giving up power and watching from the sidelines as German unification steamrolled past it. The new SED leadership quickly realised that unified Germany would have no place for a (post-)communist party that did not make at least some effort to recant for its past failings; hence the SED changed its name to, firstly, the SED/PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) in December 1989 and then simply to the PDS in February 1990 (Barker, 1998; Oswald, 2002). Through the early 1990s the PDS struggled gamely for its political life, and, had the process of German unification gone smoothly, there is a fair chance that it would have lost this struggle and vanished off the political map.

By the mid-1990s the PDS had metamorphosed into an eastern German regional party, articulating specific eastern German sentiment in a largely western German-dominated political process (Hough, 2000). Quirks of the electoral rules allowed the PDS to enter the federal parliament in both 1990 and 1994 (Bastian, 1995), but by 1998 it was preserving its status on the back of its strong performance in the eastern states, where it managed 21.6 per cent – just enough to see it over the 5 per cent hurdle nationally. Achieving 5.1 per cent of the vote nationwide in 1998 was to be the high point of PDS electoral success, enabling the party not just to form a fully-fledged parliamentary party (and with this to enjoy all the parliamentary rights that other parties had long since had), but also to receive state funding for such things as a political foundation (namely, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation). The PDS's Lazarus-like revival appeared complete.

Come the 2002 election, things looked a little different: the party had largely been ignored by its political rivals and there was a feeling of drift amongst party activists. Factional disputes prevented the party from agreeing on anything more than a rudimentary programmatic outline, and the PDS subsequently suffered at the polls, slipping out of parliament and – it was again presumed – towards oblivion (Bortfeldt, 2003). Yet, once more, the PDS – if in a different guise and in a way that very few could have predicted – bounced back again (Hough et al., 2007; Spier et al., 2007). The PDS became the *Linkspartei* (Left Party) in mid-2005 and by 2007 it had been renamed again, this time to *Die Linke* – again best translated as the Left Party. It did this as it sought to merge with another left-wing movement, the newly formed and predominantly western German Electoral Alliance for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) (Olsen, 2007). The successful candidature of former Finance Minister and SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine on a Left Party open list in 2005 enabled the party to poll 4.9 per cent of the vote in western Germany – by far and away its best performance in the 10 'old' *Länder* to date – and 25.3 per cent in the eastern states, surpassing the Greens as the fourth largest party in the *Bundestag*. This was followed by major successes in the five *Land* elections in western Germany between 2007 and 2009, in each of which the LP achieved parliamentary representation. Indeed, the LP in the Saarland not only managed 21.3 per cent of the vote in the 2009 poll; it also came seriously close to being a part of a western German *Land* government for the first time.

Although the LP has never been close to taking on governmental responsibility at the federal level, it is worth discussing within the context of this volume for three reasons. Firstly, it has now accumulated significant experience as a support party at the regional (*Land*) level (from 1994 in Saxony Anhalt) and later as a coalition partner of the Social Democrats in Mecklenburg Western Pomerania (from 1998 to 2006) and in Berlin (from 2001) to be taken seriously as a party of government. These ventures into power at the *Land* level are not likely to be its last, as the recent strong performances, and subsequent discussions about coalitions that they brought with them, in Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg and – most interestingly – the Saarland in 2009 have illustrated. Regardless of the respective policy successes and failures of the coalitions that the party has been involved in to date, the PDS/LP certainly did *not* prove to be an untrustworthy opponent of democracy that had no future as a party of government. In fact, the LP's dullness as a government actor was one of the more surprising criticisms that were voiced. The LP will take on more governmental responsibility, and this

is likely to be sooner rather than later. Secondly, the LP's programmatic profile is now much closer to that of the Social Democrats than it ever has been in the past. LP politicians can indeed still articulate biting criticisms of both the capitalist system and the Social Democrats, but there have also been constructive attempts to move the party towards stances that could prompt a coalition at the national level, at some point in the medium term, to be a viable option.

Finally, Germany's party system is broader and more diverse than at any time since World War II. Six parties are represented in parliament, and five of them – the LP being the exception – are unambiguously coalitionable. The LP has established itself as an anti-capitalist, pacifist, protest party to the left of the Social Democrats (SPD), who are stuck between the need to appeal to centrist voters who are repelled by the LP's radicalism and attempting to cling on to other supporters who have a degree of sympathy for the LP's agenda. The Greens further squeeze the SPD's vote, and since 2002 left-of-centre majorities have only rarely appeared mathematically viable without the LP. The maths, in other words, is forcing the SPD to take the LP seriously. The main party of the centre-right remains the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), supported in Bavaria by its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU). The 'Union', as it is known, would ideally like to govern with the Free Democrats, a libertarian party with a clear neoliberal economic profile. Again, however, the arithmetic does not always add up, and it is this that prevented the parties from governing in 2005. This has left the unloved Grand Coalition of the two biggest parties – SPD and CDU/CSU – as the most likely structural outcome; unless, of course, the SPD and Greens bring the LP into the coalition equation.

This chapter proceeds by initially mapping out the development of the LP and its predecessors in the period since German unification. It then carries on by outlining the ideological and programmatic stances that the party has developed over the recent past. The LP remains a diverse party, incorporating a rich mosaic of communists and Marxists (in the so-called 'Communist Platform' and 'Marxist Forum' respectively), modern socialists, western German trade unionists, anti-globalisation protestors and a bedrock of members who have remained true to the party since its GDR days. Finding a coherent programmatic narrative has therefore not been a straightforward task. The chapter then moves on to discuss how the LP has behaved in office in the two eastern German states where it has governed, before speculating on what this is likely to tell us about any prospective SPD–LP alliance at the national level. It concludes by analysing the party's likely future strategy.

Background

The Left Party as we now know it was officially founded on 16 June 2007 when its two predecessors – the PDS and WASG – merged. These parties had very different pre-2007 existences. The PDS, as noted above, was a largely eastern German protest party. Through the early to mid-1990s it was much maligned and in many ways much derided, but it nonetheless transformed itself from an undemocratic, authoritarian 'Staatspartei' into a broad church of leftward-leaning opinion. Although it regularly polled 20 per cent plus of the vote in eastern Germany, it was always very conscious that this was barely 5 per cent of the vote nationwide; the trapdoor out of parliament was therefore always too close for comfort, as the 2002 election illustrated starkly when all but two of the party's MPs left parliament and the PDS only registered 4.0 per cent of the vote.

The PDS's failure to expand westwards was not for want of trying (Weis, 2005). Yet in the minds of the vast majority of western Germans the party remained very much an eastern actor talking an eastern language, and prospects of this ever changing appeared, even for the most optimistic PDS activists, to be pretty slim. It kept its head above water because it began to mobilise support around issues of territorial difference. It did not seek to roll back the process of unification, but – crucially – it did begin to seek a better deal for eastern Germans in both economic and sociocultural terms in the newly unified state. Through the 1990s the PDS's voters saw something in the party's rhetoric and criticisms of other parties (and politicians) that rang true with their own dissatisfaction at post-unification German politics. The PDS was seen to speak for eastern Germans, who were (so they perceived) being largely ignored by everyone else. The PDS did not shirk from doing this; in the run-up to the 1998 election, for example, it published the 'Rostock Manifesto' (which aimed to present the party as an explicit defender of east German interests; see PDS Parteivorstand, 1998) as well as specific proposals aimed to revitalise the eastern German economy. These proposals ranged from decentralising power further in Germany so as to empower eastern Germans, to developing 'publicly funded employment programmes' that were specifically tailored to getting Easterners back to work (PDS Parteivorstand, 1998: p. 31).

The PDS's 5 per cent dilemma at the national level was not replicated at the regional level. In western Germany the PDS never got near entering any of the 10 *Landtage*, and its presence on the ground was thin at best. In some places (such as Hamburg), far-left activists – often with

their roots in the *Bund Westdeutscher Kommunisten* (Association of West German Communists, BWK) – took over individual *Land* branches, making the task of building any sort of serious party machine even more difficult (Meuche-Mäker, 2005: p. 63). Even in *Landesverbände* where extremists were not dominant membership numbers remained low and resources minimal, ensuring that the PDS was scarcely able to keep its organisational head above water (Olser, 2002). The situation in the East was very different. The party had no worries about maintaining a parliamentary presence – it did this everywhere, polling between 9 and 28 per cent of the vote (see Table 9.1) – and the question soon became whether, and if so under what conditions, the PDS should look to become a party of government.

The WASG, on the other hand, originated as an interest group in 2004, opposing many of the SPD's labour and welfare reforms (the so-called 'Hartz Reforms') implemented by Gerhard Schröder during his second term in office (2002–5). Its roots were very much in western Germany, and its supporter base was in the (disillusioned) trade union movement as well as former members of the SPD. It became a party, with a membership of around 5,000, in early 2005 and ran in the North-Rhine Westphalian *Land* election of May 2005. The WASG did not do enough to cross the 5 per cent barrier, but it did show intent to compete with the PDS on the left of the political system in the forthcoming national election. Although the two parties appealed to different clienteles and for very different reasons (westerners vs. easterners, and disillusioned social democrats/socialists vs. disillusioned 'unification losers'), and were sceptical of one another at the beginning, a general opposition to the government's alleged neoliberalism united them – and subsequently

Table 9.1 The PDS's electoral performance in eastern parliaments, 1990–2005

	Mecklenburg Western Pomerania	Brandenburg	Thuringia	Saxony	Saxony- Anhalt	Berlin
1990	15.7	13.4	9.7	10.2	12.0	9.2
1994	22.7	18.7	16.6	16.5	19.9	–
1995	–	–	–	–	–	14.6
1998	24.4	–	–	–	19.6	–
1999	–	23.3	21.3	22.2	–	17.7
2001	–	–	–	–	–	22.6
2002	16.4	–	–	–	20.4	–
2004	–	28.0	26.1	23.6	–	–

prompted talks of how they might work with rather than against each other in the 2005 poll.

Once former finance minister Oskar Lafontaine, the former chancellor candidate of the SPD and long-time Minister-President of the Saarland, signalled his interest in the idea of a unified force to the left of the Social Democrats, the project took on a whole new dimension. Lafontaine was the doyen of the SPD's left wing and therefore ideologically close to many in the WASG. He was also on very good terms with the PDS leadership (and especially parliamentary leader, Gregor Gysi) and as early as 2003 rumours surfaced that Lafontaine and Gysi were hatching plans for co-operation between anti-Schröder SPD rebels and the PDS – and even, perhaps, the founding of a new left-wing party (*Der Spiegel*, 29 September 2003).

By mid-2005, when it became clear that co-operation was indeed on the agenda, things moved quickly. At their initial meetings, the leaderships of the two parties were faced with having to sort out not only ideological and policy disagreements, but also legal and technical questions about what was (and was not) permissible if the two were to run together in the forthcoming federal election (September 2005) – and all of this in an extremely short period of time. In essence, co-operation in the election could assume three forms: the founding of a new party (and a disbanding of the two existing parties), a quick merger of the two parties, or the placement of WASG candidates on a PDS 'open list'. The first option was politically impossible, while there was not enough time for the second to have taken place. The WASG and PDS knew that discussions surrounding a merger would be complicated and detailed, and the best (indeed only) time to do this would be immediately following the federal election; this despite the fact that both parties saw a future merger as a realistic (if not uncontroversial) development. This left the third option. The end result of the negotiations was what Gysi termed a 'co-operation agreement with a perspective for a merger' signed on 10 June by Klaus Ernst, representing the WASG, and Lothar Bisky, representing the PDS (*Der Spiegel*, 30 May 2005: p. 57). According to the new agreement, discussions on a 'new project for the Left in Germany' would proceed further, the PDS executive board would examine the possibility of changing the party's name (which it would later do), neither party would put up candidates against the other, WASG members would submit themselves as candidates on the open lists of the PDS, and the PDS would strive to include them (leaving the actual decision-making process on this to the individual PDS state organisations). Although the final agreement and 'roadmap' for the merger met with much criticism from the membership of each party, WASG and PDS party conferences approved the agreement with decisive majorities.

Through the summer of 2005 the new 'Left Party' subsequently became one of the most intriguing stories of the federal election campaign. The party generated enormous interest – despite, or perhaps because of, its unknown potential – and rode high in the polls (recording as much as 12 per cent in pre-election opinion surveys). Despite legal challenges to the running of WASG candidates on the Left Party's open lists, as election day approached the 'new' party continued to gather momentum. And, even though enthusiasm for the party dampened somewhat in the early autumn as voters began to more carefully consider their choices, the Left Party nevertheless garnered 8.7 per cent of the vote on election day – far more than the PDS ever received, and undoubtedly far more than the WASG and PDS together would have managed had they run as separate parties. Furthermore, this success was repeated in 2009 when the Left Party increased its vote share to 11.9 per cent, enabling it to send 76 MPs to the federal parliament in Berlin and to further stabilise itself in the German party system.

The Left Party's ideological make-up

The 2005 and 2009 election successes should not deflect from the fact that the political project of the Left Party is a surprisingly difficult one to pin down. And, in truth, it has always been thus. Through the 1990s there were two broad groups fighting for the PDS's ideological heart and soul: traditional Marxists keen on programmatic purity, as well as adherents of radical but unorthodox ideologies on the one hand and less dogmatic reforming socialists on the other. To further complicate matters, the reformers were also internally split; 'pragmatists' were keen on enhancing the party's parliamentary base while 'modern socialists' were more occupied with strategic and programmatic questions. To produce an even more complex and confusing picture, these conflicts were overlapping (Brie, 1995: p. 28; Brie, 2000; Land and Possekel, 1995). The divide in the reform-orientated camp is significant, as, although both sides support government participation in principle, they do so for very different reasons. The pragmatic reformers tend to use their ideological base as nothing more than a compass to guide them in their everyday activity. They are predominantly to be found in the eastern branches of the party and see themselves primarily as practical problem-solvers. Their emphasis tends to be less on 'big picture' issues and more on the local, the practical and the doable. The modern socialists are more interested in proving the party's reliability and want to stress that the LP is a serious actor doing serious things. Their goals are more long-term than

those of the pragmatic reformers and their aim is to become a reliable part in left/centre-left coalitions.

Over and above ideological differences, a generational cleavage was (and to an extent still is in the Left Party) clearly evident within the PDS. Originally, those who created socialism in the GDR (the so-called 'Aubaugeneration') and the Perestroika generation faced each other down (Gerth, 2003: p. 184), the former dominating the party's rank and file, the latter its leadership. Recently, the advent of a third generation socialised almost exclusively in reunified Germany has added a further internal tension line to the existing variety of intra-party conflicts, the so called 'emancipated left' promoting a far more libertarian policy approach than elder generations of PDS/Left Party politicians. However, the basic conflict between reformists open to parliamentary politics and coalition-building on the one hand and fundamentalists who focus on extra-parliamentary politics on the other remains clearly evident, even within the new LP.

In terms of policy platforms, the PDS differed from the other German parties with regards to its anti-capitalist, overtly eastern German, political platform. The PDS attempted to develop socialist alternatives to what it described as the neoliberal hegemonic consensus, basing its agenda on a commitment to social justice (including a strong commitment to redistributive tax policies), a commitment to the international peace movement (including such things as the dissolution of NATO and forbidding German soldiers to be active overseas) and a strong defence of 'eastern German interests'. Despite its radical positions clearly challenging the mainstream consensus, the PDS entered a coalition with the SPD at the regional level in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in 1998 and three years later it did the same in the city state of Berlin. Indeed, it was returned to power in both of these states, in the elections of 2002 and 2006 respectively.

Yet the fact that the 'new' party (still) does not have a party programme is strong evidence that the merger of the WASG and PDS has done little to generate ideological and programmatic clarity. Indeed, finding *any* consensus on programmatic issues can be a tortuous process. Long-standing groups such as the Communist Platform, Anti-Capitalist Left and Marxist Forum have been strengthened by the merger, and they enjoy both a significant public profile and a considerable presence in the *Linke's* executive committee; former members of (other) communist groups (namely the German Communist Party, DKP) such as Wolfgang Gehucke and Harald Werner sit alongside radical leftists such as Christine Buchholz and Janine Wissler, while Sahra Wagenknecht

and Thies Gleiss of the prominent anti-capitalist *Antikapitalische Linke* are also members (Jesse and Lang, 2008: p. 188). These groups enjoy an institutionalised status that prevents the leadership from ignoring them, and ensures that neo-Marxist voices (in all their diversity) still get a hearing. The new LP continues to have a small but vociferous 'alternative' wing, which has, if anything, also been enriched during the merger process. This group is quite disparate in itself, with anti-globalisation protestors mixing with left-wing libertarians. They are not, however, without influence; six members of the 2008–10 executive have links, for example, with globalisation critical movement ATTAC.¹ Of all the groups, they, perhaps curiously, nonetheless tend to have the lowest profile in the party (Hough et al., 2007: pp. 19–21).

The WASG's legacy is also noticeable in that two other predominantly western German factions are evident within the party, and they exert considerable emphasis on the LP's programmatic direction. They also have a not inconsiderable presence in the party's executive committee (where 23 of the 44 members of the 2008–10 committee stem unambiguously from the western states).² The first is made up of experienced political activists who have spent many years working in the trade union movement and/or within the SPD. They support what were, in essence, social democratic themes of the 1970s, stressing protectionist policies based largely around Keynesian economics. Alongside them exists another group of predominantly western German activists that is ideologically diverse and, for the most part, politically inexperienced. Its members may well have been active in communist party groupings before they joined the Left Party, although many of them have had little or no experience of working within larger political entities. This group's political naivety has recently led the LP into embarrassing situations, as some of their members either articulate off-message policies or simply behave in politically inopportune ways. Examples include a member of the Lower Saxony state parliament claiming that Germany should introduce a secret service along the lines of East Germany's feared Stasi (*Der Spiegel*, 14 February 2008), while others have openly compared the behaviour of German soldiers in Afghanistan with those at the Berlin Wall (*Der Spiegel*, 23 August 2008). A text message scandal in Bremen also did little for the LP's standing there (*Der Spiegel*, 16 January 2008).

Alongside these strategically minded groupings, the LP is also home to a myriad of other voluntary organisations that all push slightly different agendas; some are officially sanctioned, while others continue to wait to hear whether they have met the LP's criteria for achieving

'official' status. They have the right to shape their own programmatic profile and to decide upon their own organisational structures and, provided that they do not contravene any of the core principles of the party's statute, they enjoy considerable autonomy. In August 2009 there were 24 officially sanctioned groups, including the reform-orientated Forum of Democratic Socialism (*Forum Demokratischer Sozialismus*), the Socialist Left (*Sozialistische Linke*) and the Communist Platform (*Kommunistische Plattform*). There were also 15 that had applied to be granted this status (including the *Marxistisches Forum*).³ There are also some groups who have not yet sought it at all (such as the Anti-Capitalist Left (*Antikapitalistische Linke*)) (see also Jesse and Lang, 2008: p. 176). Even the most cursory of glances through these groups' lists of demands, claims, wants and needs illustrates the ideological and programmatic diversity with which the party leadership is consequently confronted.

This disparate base is the principal reason behind the Left Party's lack of genuine programmatic substance. During the early 1990s the mosaic of AGs (working groups) and IGs (interest groups) used to work as programmatic think tanks, churning out ideas and proposals that the PDS's leadership would then take up and consider. But by as early as the mid-1990s parliamentarians and their staffs in the *Bundestag* and the eastern *Landtage* were taking on more prominent policy-drafting functions. The 'programmatic guidelines' published in 2007 – and this is the nearest document that the current LP has to a programme – nonetheless talk of a 'strategic triangle' of aims that the party should be pursuing (*Programmatische Eckpunkte*, 2007). The triangle is formed of societal protest on the one hand, ideas for developing alternatives within contemporary capitalism on the other and, finally, the creation of future socio-economic paths over and above current capitalist constraints.

Indeed, the LP's political project appears to be based on three sets of convictions. Firstly, there is a strong, consistent and rigid criticism of Germany's social market economy and, over and above this, of the rather nebulous concept of neoliberalism. Secondly, the LP stresses – much as the PDS did before it – a radical pacifist agenda, emphasising the importance of withdrawing German troops from conflict zones around the globe – no matter why they are there. Finally, the third core tenet of the LP's self-understanding is very clear denunciation of 'bad guys' (namely managers, economic elites, big businessmen) and 'good guys' (the labouring classes in Germany, the poor and downtrodden in the Third World and left-wing movements everywhere) (Hough and Köf, 2009). The 'Guidelines' are more anti-capitalist than the PDS's last

party programme (the so-called 'Chemnitzer Programm', published in 2003) and they are in many ways more radical in the demands that are made. Indeed, as Jesse and Lang point out, the programmatic demands in the 'Guidelines' are 'more social than the SPD, more green than the Greens and – in the area of inner-German security at least – more liberal than the FDP' (Jesse and Lang, 2008: p. 176). The list of demands made ranges from free education and nursery places to a guaranteed basic income for all; from national minimum wages to sweeping increases in tax rates for companies and high earners.

Marching through the institutions; The LP's governing experiences thus far

The radical and disparate nature of these programmatic claims did not prevent the PDS, and latterly the LP, from taking part in coalitions with Social Democrats at the regional level. Indeed, although it was the PDS that began this trend back in 1998, recent regional elections in Thuringia and Saarland (both in August 2009) have illustrated that the LP's lack of programmatic clarity has not prevented it from wanting – almost at any cost – to take over the reins of power. This was evident not just in Oskar Lafontaine's claim that he wanted to be the next Prime Minister of his home state of Saarland (something that was never likely because of his own complicated relationship with the SPD there) but, more tellingly, in the LP's keenness to form a government with the SPD in Thuringia. The LP's leader there, Bodo Ramelow, went as far as claiming that the LP was quite prepared to think out of the box in terms of how this co-operation might be engineered; the LP, for example, would not demand – even though it was the largest party in the prospective coalition – that Ramelow automatically become the next state PM, stressing that the project of red-red and removing the CDU from office was too important to fall on the basis of personalities (*Welt*, 3 September 2009). To say that the LP in 2009 was an office-seeker at the *Land* level would be truer than ever before.

Pro-government activists were nonetheless pushing for the pre-2005 PDS to at least consider the idea at the *Land* level by as early as the mid-1990s, even if it remained well and truly out of the equation in the federal arena. Germany's institutional framework clearly facilitated this too; many of the issues on which the PDS held its most dogmatic stances were in areas where the states had very few competencies. Although Article 74 of the Basic Law specifies a range of so-called 'concurrent' legislative competencies (including the regulation of the economy and

labour law) where the *Länder* are theoretically free to legislate, in practice these areas have seen a gradual encroachment of federal law over the past decades. By the beginning of the new millennium, the only significant areas of public policy to remain in the sole competence of the *Länder* are education, law enforcement and public broadcasting – not issues that are especially controversial for an LP looking to work with the SPD. To put it another way, *Land* administrations have no say over when and where German troops are sent abroad, for example, and other high-octane foreign policy issues need not affect governing arrangements in the sub-state arena. The *Länder* also do not set tax rates, and they have a constitutional obligation to implement federal laws, no matter how much the governing parties may dislike them (as was the case with the much maligned set of labour market and welfare reforms that the SPD pushed through in the early-2000s). The institutional barriers to SPD-LP co-operation were therefore not as significant as they might have appeared.

Indeed, both the Social Democrats and the Greens started to toy with the idea of bringing the PDS into positions of responsibility at the *Land* level during the mid-1990s. The personalisation of local politics meant that PDS politicians there had long since been brought into everyday political affairs, and PDS mayors – tacitly supported in some places by politicians from other parties – were not an uncommon sight across eastern Germany. Social Democrats in the eastern states had realised that ostracising the PDS was doing the SPD no good at all at the polls; the PDS could portray itself as the victim of western German bullies, and consistent claims that the PDS was either extremist or too linked to the GDR (or both) were not electoral trump cards. Rejecting the PDS outright also limited the Social Democrats' strategic options, and ensured that the CDU maintained the upper hand in issues of coalition formation. The exclusion strategy of the SPD and the Greens therefore needed overhauling.

The first fruits of this came in 1994, when the SPD in Saxony-Anhalt took the PDS up on its offer of acting as a support party to the SPD/Green coalition. Reinhard Höppner, the SPD's leader, had expressly ruled out such an option in the election campaign, but the closeness of the results – and the PDS's position as the third largest parliamentary party – prompted him to take the plunge. Höppner did insist that his government would, on occasion, seek support from the CDU in crafting majorities – in truth, more of his programme appealed to the pragmatists in the PDS than to the centre-right parties. Contrary to the dire warnings of the Christian and Free Democrats, Saxony-Anhalt did

not lurch into chaos. Political life continued on very much as normal. Whether the SPD/Green, PDS-tolerated government was successful in its aims is a moot point; what is beyond doubt is that political life continued much as it had done before.

These events were watched particularly keenly in Germany's north-east, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (MWP). The publication of the Erfurt Declaration in January 1997, calling for a working alliance of all parties to the left of the SPD, illustrated that the SPD had not ruled the PDS out as a prospective coalition partner (ZSPW, 1997). And, sure enough, post-1998 the coalition came into being. PDS activists in MWP did not take the decision to enter government because they felt it was sending any sort of signal out to the nation at large. It was much more a case of wanting to develop and implement specific policies that might help to solve the (many) socio-economic problems that exist in Germany's economically weakest state. The PDS in MWP subsequently entered the coalition with the SPD in 1998 with a clear set of programmatic aims and concrete proposals. It knew what it wanted to do and it had a pretty good idea of how it intended to do it. This was not replicated in Berlin when the PDS entered government there three years later. Naturally, the PDS had to revise a number of its original aims when it began negotiations with the SPD, but its clearly defined plan of attack left it in a much more advanced bargaining position than was the case in Berlin in 2001, illustrating the preponderance of pragmatic, practical thinkers in the party leadership (Hough and Olsen, 2004: p. 129).

Ultimately, and after eight years in power in MWP, it was the PDS's policy-seeking agenda that also saw it leave government. Although its vote actually increased from 16.4 per cent in 2002 (where it suffered a slump compared with 1998) to 16.8 per cent in 2006, and despite the fact that another red-red coalition was mathematically viable, too many members of both the parliamentary party and the rank and file were unhappy with the progress made during eight years in office. The LP (as it now was) needed to rethink its strategy and to work out new ways of meeting MWP's not inconsiderable challenges, and a spell in opposition seemed the best way to do this.

The PDS's experiences thus far in Berlin have been slightly different. For many in the PDS – and above all party talisman, and Berliner, Gregor Gysi – the importance of the party's long-term strategic vision came into play and there was a real stress on the importance of being reliable and serious in carrying out governmental tasks. Participating in government with the aim of establishing – however slowly – the PDS in

western Germany appeared to be the overriding long-term vision of the leadership in Berlin, and such thoughts prevailed within the party as a whole. The PDS skilfully managed to avoid being forced into any major consensus-threatening compromises (Reißig, 2005: p. 13). The same can also be said of the SPD, largely as the PDS was well aware of specific demands that were likely to prove untenable to the social-democratic rank and file. The lack of a coherent socialist programmatic profile was abundantly evident both to PDS insiders (Beikler, 2003: p. 14; Richter, 2003b: p. 20) and to those (both critical and sympathetic) looking in from the outside (Reißig, 2005: pp. 47–50), and it facilitated what has been a surprisingly smooth relationship.

Policy problems in the international arena

Alongside the differences alluded to above, the SPD is well aware that there are at least two more areas where national-level coalitions could run into problems in the way that *Land* level ones have not: attitudes to the European Union and, to a lesser extent, attitudes towards globalisation. This is not to say that everything else would be straightforward; battles over tax rates, levels of welfare spending, the introduction of minimum wages and attitudes to creating jobs would clearly be very fiercely fought. The pivotal position that office-seekers, the namely modern socialists, within the LP have manoeuvred themselves into nonetheless gives plenty of reason to believe that, ultimately, compromises could be found. The office-seekers in the LP may ultimately find common ground on issues of EU policy too, but this will take a lot of hard negotiation and will involve the LP in particular slaughtering some of its own holy cows.

The LP has always been vehemently critical of the EU's alleged neoliberalisation, and it has voted against (if not unanimously, then certainly with a convincing majority) such things as the Amsterdam and Lisbon treaties. The SPD has always supported ratification of these treaties. The 2009 programme for the election to the European Parliament also saw the LP demand an 'economic government' for Europe, illustrating how it sees the EU level as a vehicle through which it can inject more control and planning into the European economy (Die Linke, 2009a: p. 7). The different approaches of the LP and SPD to economic policy in the national arena are subsequently replicated, if in slightly different ways, at the EU level. The LP is, however, quick to stress its own commitment to the European idea and thus to the process of deeper European integration; it is the LP's understanding of what form this integration should take that is the problem (Die Linke, 2009a).

Over and above economic policy, the key differences between the LP's positions and those of the Social Democrats are primarily twofold. Firstly, the LP demands a fundamental change in European military and security policy. Indeed, the LP claimed that the economic interests that were seen as underpinning the development of the Lisbon Treaty went hand in hand with an aggressive foreign policy and Europe's militarisation (Die Linke, 2009a: p. 1). All military missions under the rubric of CISP should therefore be immediately stopped, and this alongside the abolition of NATO (Die Linke, 2009a: p. 23). Secondly, the LP rejected the EU's Constitutional Treaty, and is unlikely to agree to any future set of institutional reforms that do not encapsulate its own very particular (radical democratic) ideals. The Left Party made it clear that it wanted its MEPs to refrain from being drawn into these structures by effectively sacking two of its more consensual (and widely respected) MEPs (Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann and Andre Brie) in the run-up to the 2009 poll, largely on the basis of the less rejectionist positions that they took on integration issues. All further treaties, furthermore, should be passed by referendum in all 27 member states, another stance that the SPD refuses point blank to countenance. The one saving grace here is that the EU itself is likely to have little stomach for high-profile, institutional reform, and European issues – already of marginal significance to the average German voter – are likely to take an even less significant role than normal in the medium term.

The same can be said of the anti-globalisation movement. The LP does possess a vocal body of anti-globalisation protestors, and events such as the 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm were used by the LP to try to showcase its radical anti-capitalist character. The LP's rhetoric is unambiguous. It claims in its 2009 federal election programme that its parliamentary party 'will be open to the views of the anti-globalisation movement' (Die Linke, 2009b: p. 57) and in practice it had supported the blocking of roads and other forms of public disobedience around major international conventions (Die Linke, 2007). It clearly wants to be seen as a party that understands the criticisms of these protestors and is loath to criticise the movement in public. But this does not necessarily mean that the LP will balk at working with the SPD on account of this. The processes that underpin globalisation are deep-rooted and inherently difficult to rein in. If the ability to make compromises that has been shown by LP politicians elsewhere is anything to go by, then LP may well seek to maintain an anti-globalisation profile while stressing that it is making small steps – as they are the only steps it can make – towards alleviating some of its worst excesses. If, in other words,

LP politicians want to nod diplomatically to the anti-globalisation parts of its supporter base while trying to work alongside the SPD, this is more than likely to be possible.

Edging closer or treading water?

Despite the existence of various groups of recalitrants, the LP is closer to the corridors of power in Berlin than it ever has been before. Although its experiences of governing in the *Länder* have been mixed, they have certainly not been disastrous. Life has gone on in MWP and in the Reichstagsgebäude, and further SPD-LP coalitions in the eastern states would be unremarkable; the thought of LP-SPD coalitions, as was mathematically possible following the Thuringia election in August 2009, no longer scares significant portions of the German electorate, and it is only a matter of time before a Left Party *Ministerpräsident* is elected to office. It will take longer before the LP is taken as seriously in the western states, but the LP now polls more votes, and appears to generate less extreme reaction, in western Germany than was ever the case before. Again, a coalition – most likely between the SPD and the Greens – involving the *Linke* is a question of when rather than if.

The fact that pragmatists and traditionalists struggle to find any meaningful programmatic consensus – the LP knows what it does not like, but finds it virtually impossible to agree on what it does support – curiously assists the LP in moving towards government at the national level. Programmatic discussions in the future will undoubtedly be heated and controversial, but for as long as the modern socialists remain predominant it is likely that they will be able to keep the governing option open. This curious balance is nonetheless challenged in the national arena on account of two factors. Firstly, the very existence of current party leader Oskar Lafontaine is a barrier to closer SPD-LP links in Berlin. For many in the SPD, Lafontaine remains a traitor who cannot and should not be trusted; they do not dispute his talismanic status within the LP, but they are not prepared to work with someone who has done so much to undermine the work of the SPD since his resignation as Finance Minister and party leader in 1999. Secondly, there are clear and significant policy differences, and these are of an underlying nature. While the SPD and LP can agree on many competences that fall into the remit of the states, as well as the parameters of much socio-economic policy, there are problems in terms of EU policy, and the two parties are diametrically opposed in terms of foreign and security policy. Attitudes to sending German troops abroad, NATO, the USA (the SPD being much

more friendly than the LP) and various other security issues ensure that there is very little common ground between the two actors.

These policy discrepancies cannot, however, disguise the fact that the LP has become a more attractive, and acceptable, proposition for the SPD of late. Germany's party system is now more fluid than at any other time since the end of World War II. The left-right blocs have not become so porous that they have no relevance, but the notion of coalitions involving three parties (i.e. Christian Democrats, Liberals and Greens; Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens; Social Democrats, Greens and the LP) have become more than just dinner-party discussion topics. The electoral weaknesses of the catch-all parties are forcing them to be more promiscuous with their coalition choices – and this cannot help but bode well for the LP in the future.

Notes

1. For more details see http://die-link.de/partei/organe/parteivorstand/parteivorstand_20082010/mitglieder/ (accessed 15 November 2008).
2. Some members of the LP's Executive either have backgrounds that genuinely straddle the east/west divide or were born abroad and have only joined the LP in relatively recent times.
3. For more information on all of these groups, see <http://www.die-link.de/partei/zusammenschlusse/> (accessed 15 November 2008).

10

Ready to Get Their Hands Dirty: The Socialist Party and GroenLinks in the Netherlands

Dan Keith

The Netherlands is one of the few western European countries where a left party has not recently entered national government.¹ This last happened when the small Christian-environmentalist Political Party of the Radicals (PPR) played a junior role in a progressive coalition in the 1970s. The absence of left parties from government is not for want of trying. Indeed, two left parties – GroenLinks (GL) and the Socialistische Partij (SP) – have made hard choices with the aim of doing this, sacrificing policy commitments in pursuit of electoral and office goals, and the prospect of these parties entering government is no longer a flight of fancy. GroenLinks and the SP have increasing experience of local government and are now taken seriously in discussions on prospective coalitions. However, electoral successes such as that by the SP in 2006, when its representation in the Tweede Kamer grew from nine to 25 seats, have not, as yet, brought government participation with them.

Given their genuine wish to do so, it is therefore puzzling that neither the SP nor GroenLinks has been able to enter government. The recent upheavals in Dutch politics (most noticeably the 'de-pillarisation' of traditional social cleavages and increased electoral volatility) have also spawned further opportunities to do just this. The three largest parties – the Christian Democrats (CDA), Social Democrats (PvdA) and (right-wing) Liberals (VVD) – have seen their share of the vote fall, naturally benefiting the smaller parties in terms of both vote share and political influence (Lucardie, 1994). Nonetheless, it has been the left-wing liberals (D66), the right-wing populist List Pim Fortuyn and the conservative Christian Union party (CU) that were included as junior partners in governing coalitions.

to say so. The SP's leaders have also assured supporters that it will seek to enter government next time.

The leaders of the SP and Groenlinks envisage opportunities to ally with the PvdA when the current cabinet ends, but poll ratings in 2009 make a left-majority coalition seem unlikely. Groenlinks is more in favour of developing left-wing co-operation. The SP blocked its proposal of joint lists for the Senate in 2007. Participation in a broad coalition with the PvdA and CDA has not been ruled out. However, obstacles remain, including the parties' opposition to the Netherlands' support for the invasion of Iraq and calls for a parliamentary investigation. Groenlinks seems better placed to reach agreement with the mainstream parties. Nonetheless, the SP's astonishing adaptability persists. It has begun to soften hostility to the CDA, and Marjijnissen has signalled a willingness to talk with it about coalition formation. In recent years leading SP politicians have rediscovered Christianity – even though the SP was historically secular – providing room to attract CDA supporters and to converge with it (Voerman, 2007b). The differences between Groenlinks, the SP and their potential mainstream coalition partners are consequently no longer necessarily insurmountable.

Note

1. I would like to thank the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) for funding the research for this chapter, as well as the 25 interviewees from the SP, Groenlinks and affiliated organisations interviewed in 2007–9. A list of interviewees is available on request.

11

Conclusion: Left Parties in National Governments

Jonathan Olsen, Dan Hough and Michael Koß

Given their position as key players in their respective party systems – not to mention their growing importance in the coalition formation process – it is perhaps surprising that political science has only reluctantly given left parties serious scholarly attention or, as Bale and Dunphy (2006) have put it, brought these parties ‘in from the cold’. Doing just this has been the major purpose of this book. As is clear from our case studies, a considerable number of factors come into play in shaping the behaviour of these parties. Institutional factors, for example, have clearly impacted on left parties in Norway, Denmark and Sweden (owing to their traditions of minority government and negative parliamentarism), in Finland (with its special rules concerning the government *formatuur*) and in Spain (with an electoral law that works heavily against minority parties without heavy regional concentrations). Leadership and organisation issues, meanwhile, have also affected left parties’ strategic choices in most of the countries considered here (perhaps most especially in the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Finland), while situational factors (including ‘external shocks’) have forced left parties to reconsider their strategies in several cases (above all in Germany, Italy, Norway and the Netherlands). Finally, party system factors – analysed in considerable detail below – appear to play significant roles in shaping left parties’ behaviour across all our case studies. As a result, many of the left parties considered here find themselves in key bargaining positions, especially in those countries where social democratic parties have fewer coalition options and/or historically better relationships with their cousins on the left. Consequently, as the authors in this volume have made clear, left parties are not substantially different from other parties in terms of the ‘hard choices’ that they are forced to make.

In this final chapter we seek to deepen our understanding of the nature and behaviour of left parties towards participating in government through an explicit comparison of three salient points raised in the introductory chapter. Drawing on the empirical evidence from our cases, we first consider factors tied to the party system that have framed, shaped and influenced left parties' strategic choices. The main question we analyse here is whether, in spite of specific sets of conditions that prevail at any one given time, there are any common influences that can explain the behaviour of left parties in terms of whether they enter government or more generally give greater priority to office-seeking goals. Secondly, we consider the potential impact of government participation on parties that do take the proverbial plunge. This question can be divided into two different parts: the effects of government participation/office-seeking behaviour on the electoral fortunes of these parties, and the effects of government participation/office-seeking behaviour on their internal dynamics and their strategic choices.

It should go without saying that in looking for answers to these questions we are acutely aware that national narratives and particularities always make generalisable propositions difficult. It has always been thus. Context – and agency – does matter, and in some cases it matters quite a lot. Having said this, however, we would be remiss if we did not attempt to gain a large-lens picture of left parties in government through intra- and inter-case comparisons. Thus, although we try to account for any 'deviations' from the general patterns we find, this chapter's chief purpose is to make explicit just those patterns while attempting to interpret and explain why they exist.

Understanding left parties' movement towards government: Party system effects

The first question we consider is whether there might be any common variables that can explain when, and under what conditions, left parties seek to enter government or to give greater priority to office-seeking goals. Although the range of possible influences is large, we believe that there are several in particular that merit closer scrutiny, all of which are connected to the party system. First, given the fact that social democratic parties are the only realistic coalition partner for left parties (either alone, or in combination with another 'bridge' party, such as the Greens), the narrowing of ideological/policy differences between left parties and their social democratic partners is crucial for any coalition

between them to have a realistic chance of forming. We can throw some light on this by taking a policy-oriented approach based on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). This data helps us illustrate the ideological distance between the parties (Budge et al., 1987, 2001). The CMP's left-right index combines parties' positions on 26 socioeconomic, societal and foreign policy issues and enables us to place parties across the full breadth of the ideological spectrum (Budge and Klingemann, 2001: p. 21). The reliability of these data has, of course, often been disputed. According to the most exuberant of these criticisms, analyses of manifestos give us information about parties' willingness to ideologically move in the future rather than their real position at a given point of time (Janda et al., 1995: pp. 176–91; Pelizzo, 2003: pp. 83–6). These criticisms may well have some merit, but they do not stop the CMP approach from being methodologically consistent and therefore a reliable source of comparable data – and it is with such caveats in mind that we use the data here.

Furthermore, and specifically to help us avoid many of the conceptual problems associated with the original CMP data, we use the data in a modified form. On the one hand, we only refer to ideological distances, thus rendering the problem of the link between manifestos and parties' exact positions obsolete. On the other hand, we use the CMP data reanalysed by Simon Franzmann and André Kaiser (2006). They modified the original data in several respects: Franzmann and Kaiser differentiate not only left and right position issues, but also ideologically neutral valence issues. Additionally, they take into consideration that each issue can be both a valence and a position issue, as the character of an issue can vary, both over time and in different countries. Finally, Franzmann and Kaiser take into consideration the fact that manifestos represent signals rather than ideological positions. Accordingly, if a left party stresses the importance of the social-market economy as opposed to Marxism, this does not usually imply that this party is particularly 'right-wing'. Rather, it serves as a sign to potential voters that the party is not Marxist (any more). Franzmann and Kaiser take this into consideration by adapting a specific smoothing factor (2006: p. 173). Our expectation associated with this hypothesis is that distances between the two parties are narrower in government than in opposition. Table 11.1 below shows the results. The closer a score is to zero, the closer the parties are programmatically. The larger the score (the theoretical maximum being 10), the further apart parties are in programmatic terms. Bearing all aforementioned caveats in mind, the data reveal some interesting trends.

Table 11.1 Ideological distances between left parties and social democratic parties, 1990–2003

	DK	FI	FRA	GER	ITA ^a	NL ^b	NOR	ESP	SWE	All countries
1990/91	0.4	0.7	–	0.9	–	–	–	–	2.1	–
1992/93	–	–	0.8	–	0.4	–	0.2	2	–	–
1994/95	1	1	–	1.2	0.4	1.5	–	–	2.1	–
1996/97	–	–	1.2	–	1.5	–	0.4	2.1	–	–
1998/99	1.2	0.9	–	1.9	–	1.5	–	–	1.8	–
2000/01	0.8	–	–	–	n.a.	–	0.3	2	–	–
2002/03	–	–	1.5	2.5	–	1.4	–	–	1.3	–
Average	0.9	1	1.1	1.6	0.8	1.5	0.3	2	1.9	1.2
Average when in opposition	0.4	0.9	1	–	–	–	–	–	2	1.1
Average when a support party	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.3	1.2
Average when in government	–	1.1	1.5	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.3

* Average score of all parties defined as being left parties.

^a Unless otherwise stated, figures for Italy are for the PCI/PDS and not the RC. The centre-left reference point for the 1992 and 1994 elections is the socialist PSI. The PSI left national government before the 1998 election and so cannot be included as a governing party in this election. In 2002 it is the Italian Renewal (RI).

^b The Netherlands' score is the average of scores for SP and GL.

Source: Own calculations based on Franzmann and Kaiser (2006).

Table 11.1 tends to contradict our expectations; in those (admittedly limited) cases where a left party has entered into government as either a support party or a full coalition partner, the ideological distance between the left party and its social democratic partner does not appear to change significantly. This result may indicate that social democratic parties view left parties less as strategic partners in some future red–red 'project' and more as tactical partners to gain a parliamentary majority. As the cases of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark demonstrate, coalitions or support arrangements between social democratic parties and left parties have been premised largely

on reversing or ameliorating real or anticipated attacks on the traditional welfare state by parties of the right. This can hardly be said to constitute a 'project'.

Moreover, for social democratic parties, coalitions with left parties appear to us to indicate not so much some ideological evolution back towards the left (a kind of 'Blairism-in-reverse') as a search for new coalition options in a competitive party environment – an environment, it should be noted, that is no longer quite as conducive to social democratic parties' electoral success as it was in the (late) 1990s. For left parties, meanwhile, policy differences do not appear to represent an insurmountable barrier to government participation. Indeed, as we have seen in the case studies here, left parties enter government less because policy differences have narrowed and more because of the conviction that this represents the best way to weaken the power and influence of the centre-right. Participation also offers a way to prove left parties' importance in a rapidly changing electoral environment, a point brought home especially in the case studies in France, Italy and Finland. A move towards government represents the next – and, most probably, scarcely unavoidable – stage of their 'lifespan' if these parties wish to remain politically relevant.

This is not to say that the narrowing of policy differences is entirely unimportant, as several of our case studies have shown. Indeed, in Norway the perceived movement of the Labour Party back towards the left appears to have been one of the factors impacting the SV's evolution towards government. Even here, however, it is unclear whether the new priority given to office-seeking was really contingent upon this perception. This lack of an ideological barrier may also explain why, despite no significant lessening of policy divisions, coalitions with social democrats are still very much on the table for left parties in countries such as the Netherlands.

A second hypothesis we can examine is that the electoral strength of left parties and their coalition partners directly impacts these parties' decisions to enter coalitions. This hypothesis has two parts. First, it might be expected that, given competition on the left part of the political spectrum between Green parties and left parties, in those countries where Green parties are weak and/or nonexistent, the chances of left parties' participating in government rises. Second, it is reasonable to assume that these opportunities are reduced in those countries where their electoral strength vis-à-vis their possible social democratic partners is strong: where left parties are electorally strong, in other words, social democratic parties are loath to go into coalitions that lessen their

Table 11.2 The relative electoral strength of left parties and their coalition partners, 1990–2009

Status	Country	LP's share of the vote compared with the main SD party (%) (GOV/SUP)	LP's share of the vote compared with the main Green party (%) (GOV/SUP)	ENPP	Veto player index
Government	FI	42.9 (43.9)	137.8 (138.7)	5.1	4
	FRA ^a	24.9 (14.5)	126.8 (145.5)	3.1	7
	ITA ^b	23.7 (9.3)	271.4 (–)	5.1	7
	NOR	25.2 (17.5)	–	4.4	2
Support	DK	25.7 (21.3)	–	4.9	3
	ESP	17.2 (8.6)	–	2.5	6
	SWE	19 (19.2)	164.4 (146.9)	4.2	2
Opposition	GER	18	80.5	2.9	8
	NL ^c	26.3	–	5.3	7

^a French scores are for PCF only.

^b Italy's 2008 figures are for the Rainbow Left (Sinistra Arcobaleno, SA), all other elections RC.

^c Netherlands score is average of scores for SP and GL.

Sources: Own calculations based on www.parties-and-elections.de; veto player index derived from Schmidt (2006: p. 352).

own power and influence. An indicator of what the reality might be can be seen in Table 11.2.

The evidence for the two parts of this hypothesis is somewhat ambiguous. Firstly, there seems to be no set proportion of the vote at which left parties and social democrats co-operate: although in nearly all the cases left parties' proportion of the social democratic vote is around 20–25 per cent, the range here runs from 42.9 per cent in Finland to 17.2 per cent in Spain. However, whenever left parties enter coalitions with social democratic ones, they lose significantly at the polls vis-à-vis their bigger partners, the best examples of this being Italy and Spain. The only (very moderate) exceptions to this trend are Finland and Sweden. The relative ability of the left parties to electorally stand their ground may have much to do with the general decline of social democratic parties in these countries, although – from this data alone – we cannot be sure of this. What we can be surer about, and as our case study on Germany makes clear, is that at the sub-state (i.e. *Land*, Provincial, etc., etc.) level social democrats have historically been

wary of entering coalitions with *Die Linke* where the latter have been exceptionally strong electorally. Indeed, there seems to be some evidence that coalitions between social democratic parties and left parties are made considerably easier if the latter are not too strong vis-à-vis the former. Still, this part of the hypothesis cannot be confirmed in toto for left parties.

With regard to the second part of this hypothesis, the presence of a Green party is obviously no absolute barrier to government participation by left parties. Indeed, as we have seen, in Sweden, Finland, France and Italy left parties have participated as support parties or formal partners in coalitions that have included Green parties. On the other hand, the chances of left party participation in government appears to be greater where there is no electorally viable Green party (as in Norway and Denmark) to compete with it. Furthermore, left parties' chances of participation in government appear also to be greater in those countries (such as Finland, France and Italy) where left parties are more electorally successful than their Green brethren, making it harder for social democrats to cut deals with Green parties alone. Indeed, where Green parties do exist, the left parties' strategic environment undoubtedly becomes more complicated. Left parties and Greens often compete with the same themes for similar voter groups (despite voter demographics not being identical); they share (in part) the role of 'anti-establishment' or 'protest' parties, and relationships between the parties (as in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands) are quite often strained. Moreover, this relationship is further complicated by the fact that both social democrats and Greens have considerably more coalition options: they can co-operate with each other (often to the exclusion of the left party) as well as with parties of the centre-right. We discuss this point further below.

Whether left parties enter coalitions, gain support party status or remain outside government seems to be related neither to the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP)¹ nor to the number of veto players (cf. Table 11.2). Values for both ENPP and veto players vary as much between countries as they do between the groups of countries in different categories (i.e. countries in which left parties enter government, gain support party status or remain outside government). However, if we analyse the coalitionability of parties represented in parliament (i.e. the segmentation of party systems²) in relation to the government prospects of left parties, the picture changes slightly. We hypothesise that both block dynamics and party system segmentation have an impact on the chances of left party government participation. It is reasonable to

assume that in those cases where a block logic prevails – where, in other words, the party system is characterised by a block of parties on the right and a block of parties on the left, with no ‘crossing’ of blocks by the major parties in their coalition calculations – left parties stand a better chance of coming into government, as social democratic parties have need of them in putting together coalitions. We thought it also reasonable to assume that the greater the number of parties (making the putting together of larger coalitions a necessity), the greater the chances of left parties coming into government – this despite the complicated relationship (discussed above) that Greens and left parties enjoy. As Table 11.3 demonstrates, there is plenty of evidence to support this.

We begin Table 11.3 by including the average number of parties in the party system. This illustrates that, while some party systems have relatively few parties (e.g. Germany) and coalition negotiations are normally quite straightforward, others (e.g. Italy and Spain) can have many more, making – sometimes, although not always – coalition negotiations rather more complex. We also include (column three) the number of different coalition partners that the main centre-left party has actually had between 1990 and 2009, as well as the number of potential coalition partners to the right (as understood through CMP data) of the main social

Table 11.3 Segmentation and block dynamics, 1990–2009

Status	Country	Average number of parties in Parliament	Number of SD coalition partners	Number of coalition partners to SD's right	Electoral distance between biggest parties on left and right
Government	FI	8.8	6	3	-1
	FRA	7	2	-	13.4
	ITA	12	7 ^a	- ^a	6
	NOR	7.6	2	-	-13.2
Support	DK	8.2	3	3	-6.4
	ESP	11	-	-	-0.3
	SWE	7	-	-	-17.3
	GER ^b	5	2	2	0.3
Opposition	NL	9.2	2	2	2.5

^a These results refer to the period after the 1994 party system transformation.

^b Although strictly speaking separate parties, the CDU and CSU are treated as one party here.

Sources: Own calculations based on www.parties-and-elections.de.

democratic party. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, we include a column illustrating the distance between the single biggest party on the left of the party system (no matter what sort of left party it is) and the single biggest party on the right. A minus score indicates that the biggest left party (usually a social democrat one) has been stronger, while a positive number indicates that the right party has performed better at the polls. The larger the number, the greater the extent of this dominance (e.g. -17.3 in Sweden illustrates that the social democrats regularly outscored their single biggest competitor to the right, while 6 in Italy shows that the right has tended to do better there).

This data indicates that the greater the number of prospective coalition partners for social democrats in the ‘left block’, the greater the chance of left party participation in government. Similarly, the smaller the number of possible coalition partners on the right for social democratic parties, the greater also the chance that a left party will be in government. Furthermore, in the cases where this hypothesis concerning segmentation and block logic does not hold (in Denmark, for example), there is either a strong asymmetry (last column of Table 11.3) between the left and right – that is, the entire political spectrum is shifted towards the left, making participation by a left party more likely – or special circumstances governing coalition formation (as in Finland) take precedence. Conversely, when there is no strong block logic and/or where segmentation is low, left parties have less chance of coming into government (the Netherlands and Germany) because social democratic parties simply have more coalition options on the right of the political spectrum. Here, again, the importance of party system dynamics is fully illustrated; a left party's entrance into government depends upon the willingness of social democratic parties to countenance such coalitions (and the ability – read electoral strength – to do so, of course); and social democrats' calculations are in turn impacted by their relationship with the main party of the centre-right, other parties on the left, and parties in the centre that might bridge the gap between themselves and left parties.

The electoral impact of government participation on left parties

The next question we examine is the electoral impact of government participation on the parties themselves. As discussed in the introductory chapter, left parties face a serious dilemma in participating in government given both their historical legacies and their traditionally critical

attitude towards governments in market economies. The effect, and indeed sometimes the trauma, of taking over the reins of power is sometimes not just politically chastening; it can also cause serious divisions and divides that have the power to develop into existential crises. Here we concentrate on the direct electoral impact of government participation on left parties. While parties that leave government will, almost by definition, have performed worse at the polls than they did before coming to power, it is still not unreasonable to assume – given what has been said above – that left parties will suffer more, and for longer, than most other parties in this position. Table 11.4 shows electoral results for left parties since 1990, dividing parties' results into those falling under 'parties in government' (or 'support') or 'in opposition'.

Not surprisingly, we can see that left parties' participation in government has led more or less across the board to election losses: where they have participated in government, left parties on average have lost about 25 per cent of their vote, declining from an average of 8.7 per cent before entering government to 6.8 per cent after participation in government.

Two things, of course, should be noted here. First, election losses range in each country from relatively small losses (and even a holding pattern, as in Denmark) to much more dramatic ones. Electoral loss appears to be especially pronounced in those countries where there are numerous 'outsider' parties (of the left or right) to which voters wishing to exercise a 'protest' vote can turn (France and Italy) and/or where the electoral system has traditionally discriminated against small parties (Spain). However, it is far from clear that participation in government is the only – or even the most important – reason for electoral decline, a point brought home in several of the case studies (for example in France, Italy, Finland and Sweden). Secondly, it remains to be seen whether these losses can be considered a permanent effect of participation – as these parties have disillusioned their core voters and been 'demystified' for voters – or whether these election losses are simply a 'normal' part of the electoral life cycle of any party. If the latter is true, then we can expect left parties to bounce back in the way that other parties might do.

Whether they do bounce back, however, depends on the 'lessons' they draw from their experience in government. As the case studies demonstrate, for some parties (e.g. the PCF in France) the lesson to be learned from participating in government is that such participation is simply too costly: it brings few benefits and a great deal of harm. For others, participation is still seen as a positive good, even if it has

Table 11.4 Election results of left parties, 1990–2009

	DK	FI	FRA ^a	GER	ITA ^b	NL ^c	NOR	ESP	SWE	Average
1990/91	8.3	10.1	–	2.4	–	–	–	–	4.5	–
1992/93	–	–	9.2	–	5.6	–	7.9	9.5	–	–
1994/95	7.3	11.2	–	4.4	6	2.4	–	–	6.2	–
1996/97	–	–	9.9	–	8.6	–	6	10.5	–	–
1998/99	7.5	10.9	–	5.1	–	5.4	–	–	12	–
2000/01	6.4	–	–	–	5	–	12.5	5.4	–	–
2002/03	–	9.9	4.8	4	–	6.6	–	–	8.4	–
2004/05	6	–	–	8.7	–	–	8.8	4.9	–	–
2006/07	13	8.8	4.3	–	5.8	10.6	–	–	5.9	–
2008/09	–	–	–	11.9	3.1	–	6.2	3.8	–	–
Average	8.1	10.2	7.1	6	5.7	6.3	8.3	6.8	7.4	7.3
Average in opposition ^d	9.1	10	7.8	–	6.2	–	8.8	7.6	7.6	8.2
Average as a support party	7.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.8	7.2	6
Average whilst in government	–	10.4	4.8	–	3.1	–	6.2	–	–	6.1
Average before governing/supporting	8.3	10.7	9.6	–	6.2	–	(8.8) ^e	(7.7) ^e	(7.6) ^e	8.7
Average after governing/supporting	8.5	8.8	4.3	–	5.4	–	–	–	–	6.8

^a French scores are for PCF only.

^b Italy's 2008 figures are for the Rainbow Left (*Sinistra Arcobaleno*, SA), all other elections RC.

^c Netherlands score is average of scores for SP and GL.

^d Averages in opposition have only been calculated for countries where left parties also entered government or gained support party status.

^e Results for Norway, Spain and Sweden are not included in the average score because no data for periods after government participation / support status are available.

Source: www.parties-and-elections.de.

brought with it some inevitable disappointments or, at the very least, a sobering appraisal of what is possible as a formal coalition partner or support party (Denmark and Norway). For most of the parties, however, government participation remains a mixed bag. On the one hand, participation brings with it the benefits of experience and credibility, since a party that refuses on principle to assume power will either remain a pure protest party or simply fade into electoral irrelevance. Consequently, there simply seems to be no viable alternative to at least considering the prospect of entering coalition government. On the other hand, entering government comes with electoral costs, especially if a party (as happened in Finland, France and Italy) is viewed by its core voters as having not been able to draw firm lines in the sand regarding what policy objectives it is willing to compromise on with its coalition partners.

Consequently, as the case studies here suggest, left parties often come to believe that electoral loss can likely be ameliorated only through a reaffirmation of core policy positions. Not surprisingly, then, left parties that have gone back into the opposition will tend to 're-ideologise', stressing once more their opposition credentials and policy purity (as has been the case in Sweden, Italy and Finland). No matter whether government participation has been seen as largely negative or positive, the evidence from the case studies here suggests that left parties return after government participation to their more traditional role as (primarily) policy-seekers, something reflected in the fact that arguments and disputes (never far from the surface) over basic policy planks re-emerge after their time in government. As most left parties have, at the very least, factions within them that demand maximalist (rather than incremental) policy achievements, inner-party disputes over questions of policy remain stronger within left parties than in most other party families. In other words, because of their emphasis on policy-seeking, 'successful' participation in government – that is, the implementation of large parts of their policy agenda – becomes even more important for left parties than for other actors. The perception by many left parties that government participation has been 'unsuccessful' is therefore almost preprogrammed in light of both left parties' decidedly inferior power position as a minority party within coalitions and the invariable compromises that coalition government demands.

The discussion above illustrates that there is still plenty of scope for further analysing the role, impact and consequences for left parties when they (think about) entering national governments. To us, four things in particular seem to be particularly noteworthy. Firstly, most left

parties were policy-orientated when they entered national government and remained so when they returned to opposition. Naturally the nature and extent of this policy-orientated political strategy differs across time and space, but it nonetheless remains at the heart of left party activity. Secondly, there does not appear to have been any noticeable de-mystification of left parties during their time in government. Left parties have indeed frequently found governing hard going, but they are by no means alone in this. Governing complex western democracies is indeed difficult, and pleasing both demanding electorates and partisan activists will never be easy. And yet left parties have generally not rendered themselves 'uncoalitionable' and they certainly have not fallen apart on account of internal contradictions. In short, they have dealt with governing in much the same ways as other parties have and do.

Thirdly, and linked in with the second point, left parties have consistently left government on the back of chastening sets of election results. This has generally prompted processes of consolidation, particularly in a policy sense, where parties instinctively look to retrench around core principles. But left parties have also – given time – been able to bounce back and again become candidates for office. In short, they do what all parties do when booted out of office: they reassess their strategy, analyse previous behaviour and try to learn from their mistakes, so, most importantly, that they can do a better job next time. Fourthly, and finally, we have seen that the key relationship in explaining the genesis of left-left coalitions is – not unsurprisingly – that between the left party and its main social democratic rival. This became evident in all of our case studies and gives further credence to the importance of agency in understanding political outcomes. If social democrats and left party politicians can find a working *modus vivendi*, then coalitions become both possible and practical.

Notes

1. The ENPP is defined as the reciprocal of the sum of all parties' squared seat numbers (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). The less equally seats are distributed among parties, the bigger the difference between the effective and the actual number of parliamentary parties. If only one party is dominant, the ENPP's score approaches the value 1.
2. Segmentation refers to the number of coalition options parties in a party system have. In completely segmented party systems no coalition governments are possible, whereas in unsegmented party systems all parties are prepared to enter coalitions with each other (Niedermayer, 2003: p. 13).

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