

The PDS in the Berlin Red-Red Coalition: Experience and Strategic Implications

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Glossary

ABM/SAM	subsidised work places for people in lands or branches with structural economic difficulties
ALG II	Unemployment Money II, the reduced benefits unemployed get in Germany once their claims to Unemployment Aid have run out, starting January 1, 2005, only to be paid at the level of the social aid (345€ in Western; 331€ in Eastern Germany)
Black	nickname for the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU)
BSF	Berlin Social Forum
BSR	Berlin Street Cleaning Service, which the Red-Red Senate seeks to maintain in the public sector
BVG	Berlin Transport Society (the corporatised Berlin short-distance transport enterprise)
CDU	Christian Democratic Party of Germany
FDP	Free Democratic Party
GEW	Trade Union for Education and Science, the trade union of the teachers and academic workers
GdP	Trade Union of the Police
GSW	Apartment Construction Society, the West Berlin real estate giant kept up by graft, which the Red-Red Senate has sold, while trying to maintain rents steady
Hartz laws	A series of laws on a massive dismantling of the German welfare state, named after its initiator Peter Hartz, personnel director of the Volkswagen Group
IHK/CIC	Chamber of Industry and Commerce
<i>land</i>	Federal state in Germany, for instance, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania , Saxony-Anhalt or megalopolis (Berlin, Hamburg), plural in German: <i>lander</i>
PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism
Red-Red	nickname for SPD-PDS coalitions
Rasterfahndung	Computerized search on the basis of specific parameters, largely used after September 11 – criticized for the large involvement of data of innocent people
Residential area centres	Places promoted by the PDS, where the citizens and small businessmen of an area handle their affairs in an autonomous, democratic way a project opposed to the SPD concept of Quarters management, based on payed public service officers
Schleierfahndung	Method of search, where the police by massive controls of everybody on streets and highways hopes to catch criminals – criticized for its low effect and high degree of control of innocent citizens

SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
Yellow	nickname for the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP)
Ver.Di	United Services Trade Union, the largest German trade union
WASG	Electoral Initiative "Work and Social Justice"

Preface

Left socialist parties in government responsibility are a new phenomenon for the Federal Republic of Germany and a unique social experiment. Therefore, they attract public attention and criticism to a high degree. The problems and experience of a SPD-PDS coalition government (called Red-Red in German) in general and the PDS government participation in particular also set new tasks to scientific study and research. In contrast to the PDS as such, the functioning of Red-Red coalition governments at the *lander* level and the actions of the PDS in them has not been systematically investigated so far. However, the present work drew some inspiration from the accompanying study to the SPD-PDS coalition in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania by Frank Berg and Thomas Koch published in 2000/2001.

The subject of the present study is an analysis of the *problems raised by the experience* of the PDS as a governing party in Berlin.

In the course of the work it turned out that this required a brief *reconstruction of the way of the PDS into the coalition* (Chapter 1) and especially *an analysis of its action within it* (chapter 2). That could not be an adequate evaluation of the different policy fields, or a sort of special policy analyses. These observations rather focussed on the question, what specific policy goals the PDS formulates, what space for action it has or creates within the coalition and what kind of effects its political action is producing. Such an approach is justified, because the Berlin PDS started with the claim not just to change government, but also to change the course of politics.

However, a social science analysis should not stop at the observation of the PDS' action in government responsibility and its immediate consequences. It rather has to consider the *intended and non-intended consequences of government participation* (chapter 3). The question was how these can be objectively measured. To do so, four levels – consequences for the land, for society, for the Red-Red coalition, and for the PDS – with specific indicators in each case were introduced.

This observation and analysis of the Berlin PDS' action in government responsibility made it possible – with consideration of the former toleration model in Saxony-Anhalt, but also the government participation of left socialist parties in Western and Northern Europe – to derive experience, to reveal problems and to draw a number of strategic conclusions. This specific experience and these suggestions are put up for discussion as *basic experience of "Left socialist politics in government responsibility"* (chapter 4).

The study is, therefore, not to be understood as a traditional party research, but rather as a political science analysis of action, actors and experience with reference to the PDS in the Berlin government coalition.

The study consists of four parts:

- document analysis and critical examination of existing texts, information, publications on the policy of the PDS and on the SPD-PDS government (the Berlin Senate) since 2001;
- expert interviews with actors of the PDS, the SPD, representatives of social movements and associations as well as independent observers;
- author's observations;
- systematization, theoretical and conceptual processing of the investigation results.

In view of the limited resources, the limited time frame etc., a number of relevant questions emerging during the investigation, could not be dealt with.

Let me thank here all the interview partners, who – by their readiness for cooperation, their openness, their interest in this endeavour – have made this study possible. I can only hope to be able, by the results presented here, to somewhat improve the quality of the controversial debate on

this political project, which is breaking new ground, which is at the same time a project of strategic learning as well as a critical self-reflection by the different political actors, both on the regional and national levels.

1. The way into government responsibility. The starting position

A brief reconstruction of the way of the PDS into the Berlin government coalition in 2001 gives us answers to questions, which are of fundamental significance for any government participation and are being controversially discussed:

Was there, upon formation of the Red-Red coalition the chance for a new political start in Berlin? How was the PDS prepared for this government participation conceptually and practically? Were the chances and risks of this endeavour discussed within the PDS? And last but not least – was this entry into coalition with the Berlin SPD desired by the majority of the PDS, its environment and its voters, and were the procedures democratically legitimated?

1.1. The way into the government coalition

The formation of the SPD-PDS coalition in Berlin in the year 2001 came as a surprise, but it had its past history.

Since 1991, the Grand Coalition of CDU and SPD had dominated politics and parliament of Berlin. Although its fragility became ever more evident at the end of the 90s, other government constellations seemed out of reach. The experiment of a Red-Green coalition had failed after a short period. Red-Green could not hope for its own majority. The PDS did not seem fit for a coalition or government to any of the “established” parties. The Berlin CDU in this respect persevered in its confrontation course still marked by the “frontline city” experience. The Berlin organisations of SPD and Greens over the years behaved more than reservedly in view of a cooperation with the PDS. Still in 1999, the SPD strictly defended its former “incompatibility resolution”. Walter Momper as its top candidate expressed himself unambiguously in the electoral campaign: “There will be no coalition, no toleration of, no collaboration with the PDS.”¹ Yet, already a full two years later, the SPD and the PDS formed the first Red-Red Senate of Berlin.

How did this come about? What kind of changes in society and party politics were at the basis of this development?

The Grand Coalition had led the land of Berlin into a deep crisis. Graft and corruption were rampant. The unique mixture of megalomania and provinciality characteristic of Berlin politics was blocking development. The debt mountain of the city grew on and on. All that caused incomprehension and anger in the rest of Germany. The decisive question, how the city was supposed to be placed on its feet again, remained unclear. A public debate on the future of the capital did not take place. In the light of these circumstances, a few politicians of the Berlin PDS in the second half of the 90s noticed first shifts of the SPD away from the policy model of the Grand Coalition.

Since the middle of the 90s a debate on concepts and pragmatic politics was going on in the Berlin PDS, which may be described as the “long march to the Red-Red coalition”, but can not be retraced here. Its strategic guiding motive was the question how the “hegemony of the conservatives” could be broken, how “the PDS could be profiled as a part of social protest” and how a “new social alliance” could be formed.² In this context, a collaboration with the SPD and the Greens was contemplated, however the question of a government participation not explicitly

¹ Quoted in: Thomas 2003: 81.

² See Pau 1996: 5 and Lang 2003: 115/116.

formulated. Yet, a toleration model was considered.³ The PDS defined itself as a “corrective on the left to a possible pink-green alliance, designed to push at a change in politics along with the change in government.”⁴ In parallel to that, the PDS worked on electoral programmes oriented towards the specific problems of the capital.⁵

The Working Paper “Before the free-skate come the compulsories”⁶, written by Carola Freundl and Harald Wolf at the turn of the year 2000/01, described the political tasks of the PDS until 2004. For the first time since the formation of the Grand Coalition – thus the conviction of the writers – its replacement seemed to be a realistic political perspective. The main obstacle to a change of government in Berlin – the exclusion of the PDS by the other parties – was not overcome; it was in the process of crumbling apart, however. The acceptance of the PDS in Berlin was visibly growing. There was an obvious tendency towards normalisation of the political attitude of the other parties to the PDS (apparent, among other things, in the election of a constitutional judge, a woman, upon nomination by the PDS, with votes from all parties; in multi-party motions including the PDS; in the election of a PDS borough mayoress in the East-West borough Friedrichshain/Kreuzberg; in agreements between SPD and PDS in the newly formed big borough Pankow). “The chances for forming a government majority to the left of the CDU and including the PDS thus are better than ever.”⁷ In this connection the question of the political content, the political project of such a government alternative became more significant. According to the authors the Berlin PDS had been presenting reform proposals on many individual topics of government policies, however, had not yet formulated a sustainable overall reform concept for the whole city. The three years until the next elections (2004) should, therefore, be used to work out the political substance of change. The authors were absolutely right, when they wrote: “The trick will consist in developing, despite extremely bad objective economic and financial conditions, projects for political change and not just – as the present coalition is doing – administering the city’s misery. We must start with this now, not only in 2004. The PDS is challenged to elaborate in a rather short time a relevant contribution to a reform concept for Berlin.”⁸

A reform policy for Berlin had to give answers to the fundamental problems of the city: social justice; economic perspectives; development of its potential in science, culture and education; liberties and civil rights; the transition from the split in East and West to a united urban society. From the oppositional view back then, consolidation of the budget was also formulated as an important task. But it should be, for the PDS, “an instrument for the realisation of political goals, not a goal in itself.”⁹

The problems of a possible government cooperation with the SPD were not tabooed. The risk to lose in political profile as a socialist party by participating in government was called real. But: “We do not seriously have the possibility to refuse bringing about a change of government by referring to dangers and problems.”¹⁰

Within a year, the political situation in Berlin changed thoroughly. The “free skate” – a possible government participation in the year 2004 – suddenly became real; but the “compulsories” – overcoming the conceptual and political deficits that was required for that – had not been done yet. This too was part of the PDS’ starting position in 2001/02. In 2001 it came thick and fast. Instead of a long way into a coalition, quick decisions were now demanded.

In February 2001, a bank scandal, unprecedented by its dimensions in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, broke out. It was linked with a donation scandal of the Berlin CDU. Klaus-

³ See Lang 2003: 116.

⁴ Ibid: 116.

⁵ See Landesvorstand der PDS Berlin (Hrsg.), 1995, 1997, 1999.

⁶ Freundl/Wolf 2001.

⁷ Ibid: 3.

⁸ Ibid: 4.

⁹ Ibid: 6.

¹⁰ Ibid: 7.

Rüdiger Landowsky, head of its group in the Berlin City Council (parliament), had to resign. Ever new revelations provoked their own dynamism. Harald Wolf, the head of the PDS group, proposed new elections. The disenchantment within the population grew constantly and produced a petition for new elections, initiated by the PDS and organised together with Alliance 90/The Greens and the FDP. The SPD, itself deeply involved in the bank scandal, wavered until the end, before distancing itself from the CDU. The Berlin City Council dissolved the CDU-SPD coalition government in June 2001. Following a successful vote of confidence against the Ruling Mayor, Eberhard Diepgen, a transitional government of SPD and Greens (a "Red-Green" senate) took over the current affairs.

The Berlin PDS opened its electoral campaign on June 15, 2001. A party congress had passed a resolution "For a new political start in Berlin!" To that end, there was a need for new political constellations and other priorities in the politics of the land. The PDS wooed for a governing mandate in the capital, and Gregor Gysi declared his readiness to become Mayor of Berlin.

In its programme for the elections in October 2001 and in the electoral campaign the PDS produced messages, by which it wanted to be measured after the elections:¹¹

- Berlin – a social city. Politics for social justice and a social balance.
- New priorities: special promotion of education, science and culture.
- A strengthening of freedoms and civil rights, new forms of democratic participation.
- Unfolding the economic potential of Berlin; promotion of branches with a promising future; drastic reduction of unemployment.
- Fighting graft and corruption, doing away with the outmoded policy model of West Berlin.
- "Building bridges" (Gregor Gysi) in the East-West city; opening ways to an unified urban society.

All this required a policy change, and for that the PDS offered itself as a partner. These were ambitious political goals. Yet, the budget situation was not bracketed in the electoral programme either. That was made clear in the preamble: "Who wants to make use of the strengths of Berlin, has to overcome its weaknesses. A city with a debt of more than 70 Billion DM cannot live the high life. It has to re-conquer political and financial scope for action first. Therefore, there is no alternative to the consolidation of the budget."¹² However, at that time there was no question of a budget *emergency* situation. This had only been diagnosed in a PDS background material.¹³ Thus the electoral campaign stressed the political goals and less the consequences of the budget consolidation for the city and its citizens. This could not remain without repercussions in case of a government participation.

The polls showed growing support for the PDS. However, after September 11th, 2001 in the USA , growing insecurity overshadowed the mood for change, which had prevailed until then, especially in the Western part of the city. The support of the PDS seemed to fade again.

Yet, the election result of October 22 signalled a political change. The CDU shrank from almost 40% at the preceding elections to below 24%. The SPD with roughly 30% gained a little, but stayed below its expectations. The PDS got 22.6%, thus significantly improving its result. In the East Berlin boroughs it received an average of 47.6%, in West Berlin 6.9% of the vote. Nation-wide, the election result was commented as a "breakthrough for the PDS".

In November 2001, SPD, Greens and FDP, on the one hand, as well as SPD and PDS on the other sounded out their political intersections. The SPD started negotiations with Alliance 90/The Greens and the FDP on a government coalition. That was also done upon pressure by the federal party, in particular chancellor and SPD chairman Gerhard Schröder, who after September 11 did

¹¹ See Miteinander für Berlin (Together for Berlin), Programme of the Berlin PDS for the elections on October 21, 2001.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See: Background Material of the PDS on the budget emergency of the land of Berlin, March 2001.

not want the PDS as a government partner in Berlin. But soon the negotiations showed that the differences between FDP and Greens were too significant. They failed, even if they were – as insiders reported – also brought to the breaking point by the Berlin SPD leaders Strieder and Wowereit. The offer of the SPD to the PDS to take up negotiations on a government coalition met with approval. Because the re-edition of a Grand Coalition, thus the reflection of the PDS, could not be seriously taken into consideration. The chance for a possible change of politics was to be seized. Official negotiations started in December 2001. Already in the beginning of January 2002 the coalition agreement of 84 pages (without appendices) was ready.

The speedy and apparently smooth way by which SPD and PDS reached a coalition agreement formed a strange contrast to the difficulties of the SPD-Greens-FDP negotiations. Suspicions, that the PDS, when so close to power, had bit the bullet and renounced its own political goals and positions, are not justified. This holds neither for the official negotiations on the coalition, nor for the sounding out talks, led by Peter Strieder, Klaus Wowereit and Michael Müller for the SPD as well as Stefan Liebich, Harald Wolf and Gregor Gysi for the PDS.¹⁴

The coalition agreement is a negotiated compromise of two different parties, which created – so the responsible actors – an acceptable foundation for common government action.

Common ground in the assessment of the fragile state of Berlin as well as the necessity of a change in politics and mentality had steadily increased when both sides turned to the questions of the present and the future of the city. A prerequisite for that – particularly in Berlin – was to find on key questions of the common and divided past a historically sound position, politically acceptable to both sides. That should come as a surprise only to those, who deny or suppress the complicated history of this divided city and its reflection in the minds of the West Berliners and the West Germans. This does not mean, however, that a coalition agreement can replace a balanced, scientifically distanced analysis of the two German states' history.

The intermediate stage of the coalition negotiations was discussed at a PDS grass-roots conference in December. Objections and resistance to a coalition agreement within the PDS were, despite controversial discussions, rather minor. They related mainly to the preamble and the theses concerning the unification of the communist and social democratic parties in the East of Germany, the building of the wall and its consequences as well as the character of the GDR. The passages in the coalition agreement, which were decisive for the future government action of the PDS – i. e. those relating to budget consolidation and the “deep cuts” going along with that – were barely debated within the party.

The Extraordinary Session of the 8th Congress of the Berlin PDS in January, 2002 gave the coalition agreement with the SPD its approval by 83.3% of the vote. The federal PDS, which was permanently informed about the negotiations, had also agreed.

The party congress of the Berlin SPD also approved the government agreement with the PDS by a large majority. Soon afterwards, the Berlin City Council, not without turbulences, elected the Red-Red government. Three PDS candidates became senators (ministers): Heidi Knake-Werner (for health, social affairs and consumer protection), Thomas Flierl (for science, research and culture) and Gregor Gysi (Mayor and Senator for economic, labour and women's affairs).

1.2. Actors' potentials and deficits

The new coalition government had a clear majority in parliament. The coalition agreement was, generally speaking, a foundation for the government to start with new politics. The crisis of the city and the necessary new beginning marked the attitude of *both* coalition partners. The PDS had formulated a number of clear messages and standards for a change. Although conceptually hardly

¹⁴ See Gysi 2003: 56 ff. and interviews with participants of the coalition negotiations.

prepared for its new role as a governing party, the Berlin PDS entered the coalition with self-confidence.

All this created *favourable conditions* for the SPD-PDS coalition in the beginning of its activity. On the other hand – thus my thesis – the new coalition began its work with considerable *actors' deficits*. It was to be expected that they would either have to be reduced by tiresome work and learning processes or become the source of multiple tensions and conflicts:

- The majority in parliament was not yet grounded on a long-term political, structural and cultural majority in the Berlin population. In particular the West Berliners had still considerable prejudices against a SPD-PDS coalition. The city continued to be culturally and mentally divided.
- Both coalition partners, while they had agreed to the Red-Red Senate, continued to have opponents and sceptics about this coalition in their ranks. In addition, the pros and cons of such a coalition and its possible consequences had been discussed only in the narrow top echelons of SPD and PDS, not sufficiently in both parties and their grass-roots organisations.
- The preparation for taking over government was, despite all efforts, inadequate in both content and personnel. For over a decade and practically until the bitter end, the SPD had been in a coalition with the CDU. It bore its share of responsibility for the Berlin crisis. The PDS had no government experience at all, and the reform concept for the year 2004 had not yet been worked out. The experience with the toleration of a SPD minority government made by the PDS of Saxony-Anhalt and that of the PDS of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in a government coalition with the SPD had barely been studied by the Berlin PDS.
- The coalition treaty showed some evident weaknesses. It was lacking a guiding idea for senate policies as well as a clear leading motive for the capital; good individual proposals (e.g. urban development, social affairs, education, administrative modernisation, citizens' involvement) were not joined to a coherent reform project for the whole city; there was no word about fundamental structural reforms; "the new start" was defined as merely a "change of direction".

1.3. A summary: Four theses

1) The entry of the PDS into government was the answer to a specific conflict and crisis situation in Berlin. In such a situation, there exists, as always, not only one possibility, but a choice of various alternatives. But at the end of 2001, the situation finally produced one alternative: either a re-edition of the run-down Grand Coalition that had plunged the land into a deep crisis, or a Red-Red coalition. The PDS took up the challenge, although it had originally envisaged a government participation only for 2004. For the Berlin SPD, this meant a revision of its incompatibility resolution, which excluded cooperation and coalitions with the PDS.

2) The first motive for the PDS entering the coalition was not its good election result, but the chance to bring about a change of government and of politics as well. Following the experience of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania the PDS government participation in Berlin was no longer "a value in itself", but could become a step forward to the establishment of a left socialist project in Germany with a lasting effect on the political culture of the country.

3) The take-over of government responsibility and the coalition agreement with the SPD were met with approval by a majority of the PDS. The federal party signalled explicit support. The objections within the party were rather weak. The debates concerned almost exclusively the preamble, barely the contents of the coalition treaty as the basis of future coalition policies.

4) Government participation offered the PDS new chances, but also contained new risks. It had to break new ground without corresponding conceptual preparation and without having the necessary social and political instruments. There was no guarantee of success; short-term results were excluded. On the other hand, the expectations to the Red-Red government were high, also

because the discussion of the difficult situation of the capital (first of all the budget emergency) had played too little a role in the election campaigns of all parties.

Only the willingness of both partners to act together and to look for a new beginning could possibly enable them to use the chances and to gradually compensate the deficits. They should know from the very beginning that complex learning processes would be necessary to enable the coalition partners to action, before positive effects for the city could unfold.

2. The the PDS in the Berlin government coalition: goals, approaches and effects

2.1. Policy chances and blockages

The new government coalition in Berlin and namely the PDS entered office with the claim to dare a new political start, a change of politics. This is more than merely a change of government. Whoever raises such a claim, expresses the political *will* to shape things in a new way as well as the confidence of a considerable ability to do so.

How real this ability may be is a disputed question in the scientific debate. For a long time sociology and political science have been discussing the question to what extent societies of a Western type can be steered at all, where the limits are, and what kind of relationship there is between political steering capability and social self-regulation. The “control optimism” of the 60s and 70s, was followed by a gradual revision of the assumptions underlying it and a rather more sceptical view. Perspectives spread, which pointed at the non-linearity, non-determinedness of social processes, to the simultaneity, parallel nature and reflexivity of policy formulation and implementation.¹⁵ The political process was seen more in dependence on changing objective (national, European, global) conditions, actors’ networks and coalitions. In this view policy was shaped in a much more complex way, via horizontal political networks and exchange relationships¹⁶, rather than steered by a hierarchical centralized state. Action and interaction of the actors, endogenous development tendencies of social partial systems with their own momentum became more and more the focus of research in sociology and political science. This was a search for the “key” supposed to open a way out of the dilemma of the “non-controllability of social partial systems with their own momentum and their mutual blockages”. The discourse on the chances and limits of steering was continued and specified in debates on the action scope of the national state¹⁷, on the development and perspectives of German federalism and the chances of subnational units to shape their own policies¹⁸ in a “Europe of the regions”.

How multifaceted the debated positions may be, three overall insights can be identified, which show the possibilities for a change of politics at the level of a land: “The hope to construct the ‘good society’ all at once and out of one cast, is thoroughly destroyed. To delegate all tasks to steering by the state as a general mechanism for solving problems is neither thinkable nor desirable. This means that taking over state power as a way to a thorough change of society has also become an illusion.”¹⁹

Scientists and politicians are well advised, if they see the possibilities for shaping politics in a realistic way. The population tends to rate the scope for this more highly than it is in reality. Disappointment or disillusionment may follow, if things one expects do not happen.

¹⁵ See Windhoff-Héritier 1993.

¹⁶ Benz 1997.

¹⁷ Bahr 1998.

¹⁸ Kleger 1996.

¹⁹ Ibid. 33.

It is not to be overlooked that in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the autonomous capacities for action of the Länder have been seriously curtailed and that the position of the federal government and the cooperation among the Länder have become more important. Moreover, Länder policies today are more than ever integrated into the legal and financial framework of the European Union. And given the dominant neoliberal orientation on the national level, the chances for a change of politics by the Länder are limited.

Nevertheless, parties at the Länder level have a certain space for choosing alternatives, i. e. possibilities for “shaping different politics”. The Länder, first of all, are able to choose different coalition models and thus different policy options. “Red-Red” or “Black” or “Black-Yellow” should after all make a difference. The concrete scope for shaping policies refers to the following areas:²⁰

- the Länder have a relatively autonomous scope for action in certain policy areas – in matters of schools, colleges and universities, municipalities, employment in the public sector, inner security, the media;
- they are in a position to produce political and social innovations or to take over those of others;
- they organise and control public administration;
- they participate in policy shaping on the national level by way of the Federal Council (the Länder chamber);
- they are asked to fill with content and to complete EU directives, framework laws of the Federation and common tasks;
- they represent Länder interests vis-à-vis the European Union or abroad.

The claim to shape politics is, therefore, in no way unfounded. The real options, however, are rather limited, the demands to the actors have become more complex. Steering today can no longer mean state control alone or in the first place. It demands more than ever horizontal policy networks and the involvement of civil society actors. The concrete answer to the question, what scope for shaping politics parties and governments on the Länder level still have today, is setting a *theoretical framework for analysis*, without which the empirical findings can neither be analyzed, nor interpreted or objectified. We have explained, why we are following this particular framework of theoretical analysis.

2.2. The Red-Red government – a change of politics?

The claim to introduce, with the replacement of the Grand Coalition, a change of politics, was emphatically raised. But what does a change of politics in a Land mean? Two *levels of comparison* have to be distinguished:

There can only be question of a “new political start”, of a “change of politics”, when political actors in government responsibility in comparison to the preceding period and government coalition in a number of typical fields of politics are following considerably different orientations and using different methods.²¹ For the PDS – measured by its own standards – this should mean different policies in the sense of “more social”, “more democratic”, “more civil” and “more participative” ones. If they should not stay mere slogans or beautiful promises, they must be converted into concrete steps of government action, that people can see and understand. Today, this means a more dynamic economic development and more jobs, more equal chances in society, special measures in favour of the socially weak and excluded, better education, the promotion of scientific research and culture as assets for the future, more democratic rights for the citizens – women and men. In face of the dominant neo-liberal project and the continuous dismantling of the material, social, and cultural living conditions of the dependently employed, guaranteeing the present social and cultural standards is an essential part of a change of politics already. Given the widespread feeling of social insecurity in the population, a policy of social security gains new importance. The majority of

²⁰ See also Schieder 1997.

²¹ See Berg/Koch 2000: 25.

the citizens is measuring a change of politics precisely by this standard. But such a change of direction alone demands new answers to new questions. It would stay in general on the present path of development but would nevertheless be of principal importance, because it would contradict the presently dominant model of society.

But a real change of politics demands more: to formulate alternatives, initial projects, opening the way for an U-turn towards new development logics, a new development path. Its key concepts are “a socially more just society”, “sustainable development”, “orientation to the future”. The question is to find new answers to the new challenges. The level of comparison is not the previous government, but the situation of social upheaval with its new challenges and the search for a new development path. Left socialist answers, therefore, must bear the mark of modern, alternative reform politics, which, however are still to be designed.

Political steering and reform politics today face a number of new conditions, criteria and challenges:

- Reform politics as a change of politics can no longer amount to distribution only, but has above all to address the problems of growth, employment, social justice and participation. This requires practical alternatives to meet the crisis of the Fordist system of the capitalist economy.
- Reform politics demand the creation of a *new democratic public opinion*: public debate of political projects, promotion of a mentality and value change, support for new forms of democracy and civil society.
- Reform politics as a change of politics today *find in the lander* maybe the decisive, because more open space for introducing and testing reforms. This requires development coalitions, which often emerge across the traditional institutions.
- Reform politics as a change of politics last but not least require a *new style of policy-making*, accepted by the public.

When Red-Red coalitions and particularly the PDS in government talk about a change of politics, each case has to be clearly defined and the two levels of comparison distinguished. In view of the concrete starting position in society and land, the hegemony of the neo-liberal model and the structural weakness of the Left, today it can only be question of a change of politics at the first level. However, the transitions between “defence”, “improvement” and “opening the way” for new social development logics in situations of upheaval have become more flexible. This holds for neo-liberal as well as for modern progressive approaches. Left socialist politics should distinguish itself precisely by conceiving new policies of transitions, of transformational social and political change. Government participation in this respect can be an important level for action and a room for strategic learning.

Let us investigate from this point of view the acting of the PDS in the Berlin government coalition.

2.3. Policy goals and effects

Following our specific, action and actor-oriented approach, the decisive question for a first assessment of the PDS government participation is: To what extent did the PDS in the Berlin coalition government formulate its own policy goals, develop alternative approaches and utilise its space for action?²²

Here it has to be taken into account that the PDS is a partner in a coalition government, whose basis is the coalition agreement. But above all, one has to consider the fact, that policy-making in Berlin takes place under the conditions of an extreme budget emergency.

²² This study shall investigate policy fields, which were important to the PDS already before entering government and for which it directly bears responsibility in the Berlin Senate. These policy fields are among those decisive for success or failure of the coalition.

2.3.1. Shaping and consolidating the budget

A change of politics and reform policies, without any doubt, have to do with finances. The Berlin PDS has already been dealing with this topic since the middle of the 90s, when still in opposition. In its election programme of 2001 it emphasized that “resorting to higher debts was anti-social”, since it only helped the banks and “undermined the land’s ability to act”. And: “Painful cuts will be unavoidable, many things will change.”²³

Without budget consolidation, a change of politics and reform policies will be impossible to carry out in the long run. All the more so in a land with a budget emergency. The Berlin budget for the year 2004 was about 20 billion €, the debt mountain of the city is about 58 billion €. The interest alone to be paid annually amounts to 2.4 billion €. In the year 2005, the senate will probably incur around 4 billion € in additional debt. To the *financial* limits of action there came *legal* limits set by a verdict of the Berlin Constitutional Court, prescribing to the senate a budget rehabilitation plan and a plan of its “own efforts”.

The tense situation of Berlin could serve as a pretext to push through neo-liberal politics. This has, despite all public criticism of the senate’s consolidation policy, until now not happened in Berlin. This is also a credit to the PDS. A financial and legal budget situation like this should not reduce policy-making to saving efforts alone. On the other hand, without budget consolidation there will be no ability for political action and no change of politics. Policy-making under these conditions becomes very complicated and requires difficult decisions. A mere criticism of budget consolidation policies, therefore, means overlooking the realities. The decisive question is, *how* to carry out reform policies in these circumstances and what approaches, alternative to mere technocratic saving measures, will be found.

In its financial and budget policies the SPD-PDS coalition has taken a few specific *steps* and set *structural changes* going:

- When the government of CDU and SPD came to an end, a thorough *finance check*, as demanded by the PDS since 1995, was finally done:

Berlin’s mountain of debts proved to be even higher than expected. The reasons are manifold:

Before unification the two parts of the city had been heavily subsidised – East Berlin as the capital of the GDR and West Berlin as a showcase of the West. 50% of the West Berlin budget were financed by the federal government. This special treatment of Berlin, however, was radically curtailed after unification. In the beginning of the 90s the subsidies for the Berlin economy were cut without replacement, the budget allowances reduced by more than half. In comparison with other lander, the economic structure of Berlin is precarious with low tax incomes and high social spending. When the two parts of the city merged, it inherited numerous double structures and an oversized administration. Necessary structural reforms were blocked after unification by CDU and SPD. Moreover, graft and corruption were maintained and extended. The construction of a unique network of banks, the Berliner Bankgesellschaft (bank company) and its criminal doings caused new, gigantic losses, for which the land had taken over liability by contract. Finally, Berlin also suffers from the tax policy of the federal government. The last tax reform alone, cost Berlin around 400 million €, while the introduction of the wealth tax would bring Berlin 300 million € in additional earnings. Even without the budget emergency, Berlin needs far reaching structural reforms to get rid of past times’ burdens and start a modernisation drive. At the same time there can be no doubt, that the capital is a rehabilitation case and cannot clean up the budget by its own force. Urged by the PDS, the Senate has as a first step declared an extreme “budget emergency” and filed a suit at the Federal Constitutional Court. As in the cases of the lander Bremen and Saarland, Berlin demands an aid to debt discharge of 35 billion €. If only for that reason, declares the senate, the

²³ Together for Berlin (Election Programme) 2001.

land must start consolidation by itself and submit a rehabilitation plan. In the biannual budget for the years 2004/05, the savings sum amounted to 2.5 billion €. Without its own efforts, Berlin cannot wage upon the help of the federal and the lander governments. All the more so, as the other lander point to real or alleged advantages of Berlin in social and cultural spending.

- The Berlin government has adopted a number of disputed *structural decisions and reforms*.

With the painful, but necessary *risk protection of the Bankgesellschaft*, the prerequisites for its rehabilitation were created and thus the consequences for the land and its people kept under control. According to the PDS, the question had not been, whether Berlin and the Berliners should be made liable for the losses of the bank or not. Because as the guarantor the land is liable for all contracts in question anyway. "The question rather was: What is cheaper for the *land*, a bankruptcy of the Bankgesellschaft or the protection of its risks?"²⁴ As a result of a full 30 sessions of the parliamentary group, of working circles, committees and hearings, the PDS decided in favour of the risk protection. With hindsight as well, most of the PDS actors in parliament and senate held that it had been a difficult decision, but still the "only rational" one. The consequences of the risk protection were high – around 300 million € annually over 21 years with estimated overall costs of 3-6 billion € – but less than a bankruptcy. This would have made the land immediately liable to an amount of more than 20 billion €, would have endangered the jobs of the 16,000 employees of the bank and ended in drawing the clients of the bank (about 50% of the enterprises of the Berlin region, the Berlin hospital company Vivantes, numerous private customers) into the downward spiral.

- In the beginning of 2003, the government decided *to end the follow-up financing of the social housing programme*.

Billions of subsidies from the budget had been invested since the 60s in order to finance the credit costs and yield expectations of the West Berlin real estate owners, who as builders guaranteed to keep rents relatively low. After the 15-year term of these contracts ran out, the land in the past had concluded follow-up contracts over another 15 years. This follow-up financing has now been ended by the Red-Red government, leading to annual savings of about 1 billion € and of up to 25 Billion € in the next 15-20 years. Senate and PDS emphasise, that measures for the protection and promotion of the tenants have been taken. The real estate business in the meantime has started legal action against the land of Berlin.

- In Summer 2003, after several months of negotiations, the senate and the tariff community of the trade unions of the public sector concluded a *new wage agreement for the public service* in Berlin.

The land of Berlin took over the nation-wide wage agreement for the public service backdated to January 1, 2003. Simultaneously, working time of 38.5 hours (West) or respectively 40 hours (East) was reduced to 37 hours (kindergarten and after school care: 38 hours) and with it the gross wages, with social scaling, by 8-12%. Lowering of the income, means a lower Christmas allowance. Not cut were holiday allowances, anniversary benefits, changing shift and shift payments, bonuses for night work, savings allowances, hourly rates etc. The protection against wrongful dismissal for the employed was extended until December 31, 2009. 388 nursery teachers, as well as 500 trainees will be newly hired in both 2004 and 2005.

The PDS welcomed the wage agreement because it encompassed essential elements of the solidarity pact it had earlier demanded. The latter seemed necessary to the PDS in view of the fact that Berlin of its 8 billion € in tax revenue is spending 7 billion on personnel costs in the public service. Since neither the envisaged solidarity pact nor a so-called enabling clause, allowing special regulations for a land in difficulties – were achieved, the senate in January 2003 withdrew from the nation-wide wage agreement system. This action has earned it a lot of criticism from the

²⁴ Landesvorstand der PDS Berlin 2004: In der Mitte, nicht über den Berg (Half-term report of the PDS Berlin executive, 2004: On the way, not out of the woods): 10.

trade unions. In the meantime, even they see the Berlin wage agreement with all its problems,²⁵ in a different light: a socially scaled wage cut has been linked to the reduction of working hours, employment guarantees and new employment.

With the wage agreement signed on June 30, 2003, the land of Berlin has after all a territorial agreement, but did not return to the nation-wide employers association. The savings reached by this agreement amount to around 500 million € annually.

- The new steps in budget policies also include a few *initiatives on the national level*:

The Red-Red coalition government has decided to demand the reintroduction of the wealth tax and an amended death tax. The income for the land could amount to about 300 million €. The land of Berlin has refused its approval for the tax reform of the federal government (with among other things a lowering of the tax rate for the highest incomes). The PDS in Berlin has, moreover, stood up for improving the finances of the municipalities. To this end it proposed to extend the trade tax to all self-employed in the sense of § 18 of the Income Tax Law and to broaden its base. In order not to burden small traders, a corresponding tax-free allowance of 25,000 € is to be introduced.

- To reduce the gap between income and expenditure, the senate has, always with the approval of the PDS, made *deep cuts* into the *consumptive expenditures*.

This resulted among other things in an increase of kindergarten fees, of the price of special traffic tickets for the socially weak, a reduction of subsidies for the blind, a charge for school books as well as the reduction of means for science, research, and culture.

The maintenance of a “social balance” in the budget emergency remained nevertheless a concern of the PDS. Although with varying success, the party was able to untie the savings package presented to it during the budget debates (see below). However, the decisions of the senate and the PDS parliamentary group do not meet the majority mood in the city. Particularly the spending cuts have aroused protests of the concerned and much criticism in the public. There was and still is opposition against the risk protection of the Bankgesellschaft. A citizens’ action group initiated a petition for a referendum, which also met with approval in parts of the PDS grassroots. The displeasure rose, when the senate did not accept the petition for legal grounds.

For the PDS in government responsibility it is a new experience, that as part of those in the “top” it is being exposed to criticism from “below”. The party has still to learn that being in government responsibility, one has sometimes to take decisions which do not find the approval of important social actors. To take criticism and protest seriously, to consider and seriously discuss them in dialogue, is all the more necessary. In this respect, there has been some neglect in the first half of the parliamentary term.

The alternative to a technocratic savings concept is not “Not Saving” and further raising the debt mountain. The decisive strategic mistake rather was, that the government could not present a clearly structured concept for budget consolidation *and* policy-making. So it appeared primarily as a “savings and cuts coalition” (minister of the economy Harald Wolf), which makes painful cuts one day here and another day there, and – as far as the PDS is concerned – in areas such as education and culture even goes against its campaign promises (“to increase spending”). This resulted in growing criticism.²⁶

In the meantime, within the Berlin PDS, its parliamentary group and among the senators (government ministers) the view is spreading, that budget consolidation is not the “key to success”²⁷, and does not mean for itself a change of politics. Budget consolidation is a *prerequisite*

²⁵ See Neues Deutschland, 26 August, 2004.

²⁶ See: On the way, not out of the woods, 2004: 4.

²⁷ Together for Berlin.

for the change of politics. The latter requires setting new social, democratic and ecological goals, implementing structural reforms. This connection was, in the first years of government, not always fully understood and convincingly communicated. The focal points and new priorities in budget consolidation became rarely apparent, choices and alternatives were barely discussed, and the public too little drawn into the discussion. On the other hand, an alternative to the technocratic savings approach demanded finding new income resources, for instance the reduction of bureaucracy and the modernisation of administration, and carrying out a restructuring of the expenditures, to open space for policy-making and innovation.

The city cannot come out of the crisis by saving alone. Berlin is not only a rehabilitation case, but above all a city with a future, that must be developed into this direction. A government of the Left in particular cannot be the executor of dysfunctional economic and financial policies of the federal cabinet. In this respect the actors of all parties are still beginners. For the PDS this is a difficult policy field, but one, which it will increasingly have to face and where it will have to make its own points. In this respect Berlin is today offering an important new field of experience .

2.3.2. Economic development and employment

The goals of the new coalition in economic and employment policies are ambitious. Already in its election programme, the PDS demanded a strengthening of the economic potential of Berlin, in particular the “construction and extension of a knowledge-based economy” as the “city’s path to the future”. However, the first priority for Berlin is the “drastic reduction of unemployment”.²⁸ The SPD-PDS coalition agreement says: “The key role of economic policy in Berlin is to win back space for a budget policy by strengthening self-supporting growth potentials... The mobilisation of growth potentials for securing the existing and for the creation of new future-oriented jobs must have top priority.”²⁹

The new government had to tackle its goals in a very tense economic situation: Politically and culturally Berlin is a metropolis, but its economy remains on a rather provincial level. Its economic performance has long been below the nation-wide average. Especially, activity in the producing sector is low. The opening of innovative fields in the knowledge-based branches has only begun. When the Red-Red coalition took office in 2001, 272,000 people were jobless – around 16% of the gainfully employed persons, 18% of the dependently employed persons. These realities considerably limit space for policy change the government and the PDS-led economic ministry have. Nevertheless, a space for action is given and “in some respects bigger than expected”, notes the Senator for economic, labour and women’s affairs , Harald Wolf (PDS).

Under adverse political conditions both at the federal level and in Berlin, in the past three years some *new accents in economic promotion policies* were set and *structural reforms* for reviving the economy started:

- A *central office for contact and coordination of businesses* (German abbr. ZAK) was established – a measure deemed impossible for more than 10 years.

By this, parallel and double competencies for economic advice and promotion in the land of Berlin were removed; the administrative procedures became less bureaucratic and more effective. As a result, investors can be better supported, since they now from the very beginning have one competent contact partner in the economic Administration. ZAK has in the meantime managed 370 investment endeavours, in 90% of the cases successfully.

- The next step, taken in February 2004, was the creation of a powerful economic promotion organisation by *merging the existing institutions* “Berlin International” and “Partner for Berlin”.

²⁸ Coalition Agreement 2001-2006: 70.

²⁹ Speech of the Mayor and Senator for economic, labour and women’s affairs, Harald Wolf, in the Berlin City Council on March 18, 2004.

The new body is – both in size and character as a public-private partnership – unique in Germany and has got a good international reputation.³⁰

Other institutions, which so far have dealt with marketing the location at the international level, were also re-structured, merged and incorporated into the economic promotion and marketing policy of Berlin.

- In Autumn 2004, the *Investment Bank of Berlin* (IBB) was finally hived off the Landesbank of Berlin and established as *the central promoting agency* of the land.

In this endeavour, not the (old West Berlin) real estate and apartment building promotion, but economic sponsoring shall be the main priority. Until now, the means spent by Berlin for economic promotion still were below the national average. This is now supposed to change gradually. At the same time the IBB shall become the house bank of the small and medium-sized businesses in Berlin. The means for refinancing will be provided by the land. This sum is to be increased from currently 143 million to 500 million € a year.

- Initiated by the PDS parliamentarians and senators, after long years of standstill and mismanagement, a process of complex restructuring of the *public enterprises* (Berlin Fair, BSR, BVG, Vivantes, apartment building societies) started.

Their competence and capacity for innovation are important for the economic location of Berlin. The measures taken are aimed at securing their survival and competitiveness under the conditions of European competition law.³¹

Important steps were taken to increase the transparency of the enterprises, in which the land holds shares and to improve control. In this area, the senate is also relying, as said in the coalition agreement, on “private economic engagement”. The results of the privatisations are in the view of the PDS ambivalent. In face of the budget emergency of the land the sale of the municipal apartment building society GSW for 2 billion € at a debt level of 1.6 billion is considered as justified. All the more so, as the buyer of GSW has allegedly been obliged to pursue a socially oriented business policy in its management of the apartment stock.³²

- With its demand to create *city boroughs’ and productive cooperatives* the PDS is setting a new accent for Berlin.

The issue was the most disputed one in the topic “Labour” of the coalition negotiations. After long discussions, it was integrated as a separate point into the coalition agreement. Since then various efforts have been made and the senate Administration responsible is to start a project.

- Berlin’s concept for EU enlargement towards the East was thoroughly overhauled³³. Instead of an exclusive orientation of the former CDU-SPD Senate at city partnerships with the metropolises of the East, today’s orientation is aimed at redesigning the historic economic and cultural region on both sides of the river Oder between Berlin, Szczecin, Poznan and Wroclaw. To this end a number of cross-border EU projects were won in Brussels. The goal is to create a cross-border association, which will develop into a competitive *Euroregion*.

- A whole number of initiatives by the PDS senators were devoted to the *reduction of unemployment*.

³⁰ See PDS in Chamber of Deputies. Newsletter of June 15, 2004.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Harald Wolf 2004 in: 926 x *Für Berlin*: 41.

³³ See Berlin 2004-2014: Eine Wachstumsinitiative (Berlin: 2004-2014: A growth initiative).

In 2003 the social ministry succeeded in providing regular jobs to over 8,000 social aid recipients. This is an increase of 32% compared with 2002. 30,000 more were able to use different projects of the "Help to Work" programme. Already when stepping into office, the senate Administration for economic and labour affairs had promised in an agreement with the land's employment exchange that it would provide the necessary co-financing of all job creation measures granted by the federal government. These amounted in 2003 to around 15,000 jobs. Qualification measures were also financed by the land's budget. The Berlin government reached a consensus with business on professional training. At the same time 5,200 additional training positions are paid for by the land.

After all is said and done, what *effects* on the economy and the labour market did the new accents and structural reforms initiated by the Red-Red government and in particular by the PDS-led economic Administration have?

An answer to this question must be ambiguous.

When the PDS in 2002 took over an economic portfolio for the first time (initially by Gregor Gysi), conservative politicians and media predicted that business would flee the city, foreign investors stay away, that a general "investment boycott" and ultimately the "speedy decline of the Berlin economy" were to be expected. In fact, none of all of this has happened. The fact that the economic Administration is managed by a PDS politician is by nobody seen any more as a risk for Berlin's economy. On the contrary. The *economic climate* in Berlin has improved by a close cooperation of the senate economic Administration, CIC and the business associations. This is to a high degree due to the Senator for economic and labour affairs. The most recent example is the project "Berlin 2004-2014. A Growth Initiative", launched by the senator, CIC, the Chamber of Commerce and the business associations of Berlin and Brandenburg.³⁴

As a result in the last years a number of new businesses settled in Berlin, among them technology-oriented and transport companies. The borough Berlin-Buch became an important location for bio-technology, Berlin-Adlershof one for information and communication technologies. In 2003 41 new businesses settled there. With Universal and MTV, Popcom and further businesses of the branch arriving, Berlin became *the* music city of Germany. The move of Coca-Cola, the publisher Ullstein and the decision of the Springer concern to open its headquarters in Berlin are positive signals for the location, too.

But as a whole, a sustainable improvement of the economic performance and economic structure of the land has so far not yet been reached by the Red-Red government. The shrinking of the economy has continued. Berlin's GDP sank in 2001 by 0.8%, in 2002 by 0.1%, and in 2003 by 0.6%. These rates are even below the weak level in the whole of Germany (2001: +0.6%, 2002: +0.2%, 2003: -0.1%). For the first time since three years, the Berlin economy grew by 0.8% in the first half of 2004 and looks now more optimistically into the future. Despite the low economic growth, exports have risen due to a higher demand from abroad. Thus the producing sectors could register an increase of 3.0%.³⁵ Also important is that Berlin notes a dynamic economic and employment evolution in such nation-wide service activities as advertising, IT consulting, business organisation, film, TV, media, culture and tourism.³⁶

The main goal of economic policies, to reduce unemployment by mobilising the forces of growth, has been reached only to a limited degree. Yet, in Berlin – contrary to the nation-wide trend – the unemployment rate for the first time went down a little from 17.7% in August 2003 to 17.4% in September 2004, and to 16.7% in October 2004. In East Germany as a whole it stands at 17.7% of all gainful employed. That means that 282,647 women and men are registered as unemployed in the capital – 5,400 less than at the end of October, and 8,200 less than a year ago. Maybe for this reason the PDS group in the Berlin City Council at a closed session in Szczecin in September

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Statistisches Landesamt Berlin (Berlin Statistics Office) 2004.

³⁶ Der Tagesspiegel, 31 August, 2003: 22.

2004 adopted “Outlines” of employment policy with the main thrust to find regular jobs especially for long-term unemployed – so-called recipients of ALG II. To that end, the employment policy of the land and the municipalities shall be planned in a new way.³⁷

Berlin proves, that a land can influence the development in the economy and particularly on the labour market by its own policies only to a limited extent. Here, the main influence comes from the national and European levels. Economic effects can be reached by political regulation at the level of the land only over long periods of time. That such a connection exists, however, is shown last but not least by a comparison of all federal states of Germany with their different key dates and development trends.³⁸ An additional difficulty for Berlin is that due to the budget emergency expenditures in the investment and consumption sectors were reduced and as a result the demand further constrained.

An economic and labour market policy should under the given conditions make use of the existing advantages of Berlin, develop the potential for the future and at least in some places test new instruments of economic and labour market promotion outside the neoliberal mainstream. These are new challenges for the economic and labour market policy of the Senate. Here, the three portfolios managed by the PDS - economics, science, culture and social affairs - should take common initiatives. After all, new chances for the city lie above all in a closer interaction of science and economy. While Berlin, when comparing the economic power of the German lander, has one of the last places, it is one of the top ranked in terms of science and technology. When comparing the innovation capability of more than 70 regions of the European Union, Berlin comes in behind Baden-Württemberg on 2nd Place, even before Bavaria, Sweden or Paris. In Berlin, 47% of all employed are working in scientific and technical professions (nation-wide 37%, in the EU 31%). Berlin spends 4.2% of its GDP on science and technology (EU 1.9%) and has an above-average number of patent registrations (annually 199 per 1 million inhabitants, EU 134).³⁹

Organizing value creation chains from research to production should be an important task. The formation of new businesses out of the universities needs more varied incentives and forceful support. The development and strengthening of a modern health and cultural sector, where Berlin has good chances nationally and internationally, deserves special promotion.

This survey shows that there is room for action in economic and labour market policies. The Red-Red government has intensely looked for it and used it for a number of new initiatives. In particular, a reform of the promotion institutions for economic activities has started.

But it has become clear that especially in economic and employment policies it is difficult to reverse the dominating national and European trends. As other investigations prove, the economic effects of lander politics can be noted only over a longer period of time.

2.3.3. Berlin – a social city

When formulating in its election programme the idea of Berlin as a “social city”, the PDS set a relevant guideline for its action and raised high expectations. The coalition agreement also says right at the beginning of the section “Social Matters”: “Berlin is committed to the ideal of social justice.”⁴⁰ In the new coalition government, the PDS took over the significant portfolio of social affairs.

³⁷ PDS-Fraktion 2004: Eckpunkte kommunaler Beschäftigungspolitik (PDS parliamentary group 2004: Outlines of employment policy)

³⁸ See the key dates on GDP per inhabitant for 2003 in Euro in comparison with other lander (e.g. Berlin 23,000 €, Hamburg 44,500 €, Lower Saxony 22,900 €, Saxony 17,800 €, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania 7,100 €), Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (Statistics Office of Baden-Württemberg), 2004.

³⁹ Ibid. See also Berliner Zeitung, 25/26 September, 2004.

⁴⁰ See Together for Berlin: 40.

Such areas as social matters as well as health care have three typical problems : *First*, they are more than others determined by federal law, so that the chances to influence them by lander policies are rather limited. *Second*, these are areas with a particularly complex structure of interests and associations, all of whom raise their own ideas and claims. This creates particular conflicts and requires comprehensive negotiations. *Third*, the expectations of the citizens, the voters, especially those of the PDS, in this field are particularly high; especially in Berlin, where for historical reasons there is a rather highly developed social infrastructure.

However, 95% of the social budget are means tied up to “compulsory tasks” of the state and only 5% are ready for “free disposal”. The scope for policies of the land is therefore rather small and can only be partially extended by restructuring the administration and the budget, as the Senator for health, social affairs and consumer protection Heidi Knake-Werner (PDS) argues. On the other hand, in the social sphere new ideas are especially needed. Berlin has a highly complicated social structure: more than 16-17% unemployed, an above-average number of social aid recipients (2004: 260,535; i. e. 7.7%) and a high share of migrants. 500,000 people in Berlin are considered poor, that means that they dispose of less than 50% of the average income of the land (606 €). The poverty quota is above the national average and is rising further. Even between the city boroughs the social gap is opening wider and wider. This tendency to social polarisation and exclusion has especially grown during the rule of the CDU-SPD Grand Coalition government.

In times of a budget emergency the Senator of finances puts everything in this field as in all the others to the test of his rigorous savings policy. Nevertheless, it was possible to set a few *new accents*:

- This meant, first, to examine thoroughly, where savings were possible, without causing serious danger to the social infrastructure of the city. The guideline was to *keep the social balance*.

All in all, the Administration for social affairs succeeded in limiting the deep cuts planned by the financial Administration. A good 95% of the social benefits for the needy, the poor and the weak were saved of the covetousness of the budget technocrats. By agreement with the Mutual Welfare Association, all residential area centres (see Glossary) in the city could be financially secured until the year 2007.

- The PDS and the Senator of social affairs succeeded in putting the *social question* on the government’s agenda again.

An important step to implement the concept of the “social city” was the Social Structure Atlas, edited in spring 2004. It contains a wealth of detailed data on the social situation in the city boroughs, showing the dynamic changes in the social structure and allowing a better social planning. The increasingly explosive degree of social inequality, the Social Structure Atlas is revealing, demands, according to the social Administration, abandoning the egalitarian approach and a much more targeted allocation of means to the social focal points.⁴¹ Part of the new approach is cooperation of the different administrations via a Committee of State Secretaries, founded for the project of the “social city”.

The concept of the “social city” also means to turn schools into social meeting centres again, to allow a more active involvement of the citizens.

The Poverty Report initiated by the social Administration is to be developed into a broader “Report on Life Situations”.

Following the concept of the “social city”, the social Administration has developed a *new style of politics*. Since 2002, associations, organisations and the people concerned have much more than

⁴¹ Speech of the Senator for health, social affairs and consumer protection, Dr. Heidi Knake-Werner, during the 50th session of the Berlin City Council of 29 April, 2004.

before been involved into the discussion and decision-making processes: welfare associations those of handicapped people, a whole range of social initiatives, representatives of health associations, health insurance companies as well as the associations of the medical profession.

- With the PDS in government, the land of Berlin is showing a *stronger social engagement on the national level*.

Berlin took a critical position to the reforms of the federal government in the social and health areas (the pension and health reforms as well as the Hartz IV laws). Even if these laws in the end have to be implemented by the Berlin social Administration, Berlin's critical voice on these reforms of the federal government, which make the "social balance" shake, has been noticed and recorded according to the respective political positions.

Nevertheless, the cuts in the social field, especially the temporary abolition of the social traffic ticket and the reduction of the money for the blind aroused strong protests of the people concerned and sharp criticism in the public. When the senate reduced its annual subsidies to the BVG of 500 million € by 17.4 million , the company reacted by eliminating the social ticket and other discounted special offers. The assumption of the PDS that the mobility aid granted to the social aid recipients could compensate for that, has in the meantime been recognised as a mistake. The same is to be said on the failure to negotiate consistently and till the end with the BVG, so as to find an acceptable solution for the concerned people.

To limit the damage, negotiations are going on for a new traffic offer to all needy persons. Since January 1, 2005, the new social ticket for public short-distance traffic is available again at a price of 32 €. The number of those entitled has been extended, including all recipients of ALGII.

Although the money for the blind has been painfully reduced in Berlin, it continues to be above the nation-wide average. Yet, for the concerned, what counts, is not the average, but the fact that something is taken from them and that their personal situation is getting worse.

Practical social policies in Berlin confirm the assumption that the chances to influence this area by actions of a land are particularly limited. If the PDS wants to realise its chance as a governing party, then above all as "the party of the social question". For this, it has to combine a just distribution with the shaping of social policies in a new way. By restructuring the social field it was able to enlarge and make a better use of the scope and potential for its own social policies.

The "social city" is a promising idea. But it can only be realized, if it is concretised as a political project and better communicated to the public. Especially in the social field the PDS has to present to the coalition government its own interdepartmental development projects. For instance, a well-performing health economy is for Berlin a growth branch. Berlin as the "health capital" of Germany is now proposed as an ambitious goal. The senate has formed a steering group, in which those politically responsible for the economy, health, the social sphere, and science are supposed to work together. These are all portfolios held by the PDS.

Till the year 2010, in hospitals, in the research and care fields, additionally to the already existing 180,000 jobs further 50,000 shall be created. However necessary it is to fully realise the commercial potential of the health capital project, it must improve the state of health of all segments of the population. The latter demands investing in new social forms of health care and prevention. Adopting the document "Health for Berlin" at its closed session of September 2004, the PDS parliamentary group has put up new guidelines, fields of action and approaches for discussion.

In November 2004, the first health conference of the capital took place, a platform, on which insurance companies, physicians' representatives, welfare associations, scientists and further actors can consult with one another regularly on problems of health policies. Health promotion shall be at the centre of this endeavour.

2.3.4. Science, research and culture as potential for the future

Here, too, we are primarily interested in the question, whether the PDS has in this area apart from budget consolidation, formulated its own political goals, and if yes, to what effect the space for action is been used. In the election manifesto of the party from 2001 culture and science were given a central place. This is shown by their ranging after the first section "Eliminate graft. Rehabilitate the budget: Give the city a future". The section "Berlin – a city of culture and knowledge" is rightly introduced by the words: "Culture and knowledge belong to the strategic potential of Berlin." Berlin, as all big cities, will only have a chance, if it is able "to organise a lead in knowledge." The task of the coming years will be to keep up the level of education, culture and science in Berlin, to strengthen their effectiveness by structural changes. All citizens, men and women must get the chance to participate in education and culture. Therefore, the election manifesto demanded: "In the new legislative period, there should be no further spending cuts in the cultural field." To guarantee this, the federal government had to contribute more.⁴²

In the coalition agreement of SPD and PDS there are a few important reform proposals and numerous individual demands on science, research and culture, but no strategic concept for the development in these important areas. Among those demands are the continuation of the agreements with the universities, the modernisation of the university law, the continuation of cost-free university studies, the restructuring of medical teaching and research at the universities, the extension of specialised colleges, the strengthening of the cultural metropolis Berlin. The cultural budget would remain at the same level, reduced by 8 million € in structural savings.⁴³

The starting position for new policies in science, research and culture was contradictory. The *land* of Berlin has three universities, seven specialised colleges, three art colleges and 100 extra-university research institutions, where more than 50,000 people are employed. For 85,000 fully financed places at the universities, on average 130,000 students are registered. Berlin has three operas, numerous theatres, a whole range of concert stages, a diverse museum culture and a historically grown off-culture. Culture and knowledge are making the city attractive. The previous coalition government of CDU and SPD did not have a coherent concept, as to how these potentials in science and culture are to be further developed, how Berlin can become a centre of culture and knowledge in Germany and in Europe, but above all, how it can be placed on a more solid and more future-oriented basis. The budget kept being cut. The senators for culture changed once and again.

No question: dealing with this enormous potential for development and with the highly sensitive, financially deficient area of culture and science is a complicated endeavour and is a great challenge to the political capabilities of the respective actors.

In the debate of the Berlin City Council on the biannual budget for the years 2004/05, the Senator for science, research and culture, Thomas Flierl, said about his concept: "Science and culture are and remain the most important potential for the future of Berlin. As before, I do not see my task as being the lobbyist for the status quo. To maintain the substance, to modernise the institutions and at the same time make room for designing new things, these remain the goals of my policy, even or precisely in times of the budget emergency."⁴⁴ However, in the area of science, research and culture, too, there was no way past budget consolidation.

The Berlin universities have to make, in 2004/05 a one-time consolidation contribution of 54 million € and are supposed to accept the agreed reduction of their budget for 2006/09 by 75 million € (The finance Senator Sarrazin proposed even 200 million €). The specialised colleges are not

⁴² See: Together for Berlin.

⁴³ Coalition Agreement 2001-2006: 83.

⁴⁴ Speech of the Senator for science, research, and culture, Dr Thomas Flierl, in the 48th session of the Berlin City Council on March 18, 2004.

concerned by the cuts. The only new investment in the budget is the extension of the specialised college for Technology and Economy (FHTW) in Berlin-Oberschönweide with a planned 5 million€ in the years 2004/05. All in all Berlin spends on science and research around 1.2 billion € - more than most of the other German lander. Not a small amount for a city in a budget emergency. But for a city of knowledge, which sees in this its most important potential for the future, this is in no way too much.

It is in the areas of science, research and culture, where important *structural changes and reforms* have been carried out, which show the will to shape policies and first results:

- The *agreements* with all three universities were prolonged, which did not seem guaranteed from the very beginning.

For the first time, the three art colleges in the Eastern part of the city, originally threatened of being closed, were integrated into the agreement. The universities and colleges in this way received long-term planning security. All three universities had to accept painful cuts.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the three universities were stimulated, for the first time, to agree in common what to do about their historically grown structures in the East-West city divided for decades. This had been long overdue – even without savings pressure. It was important that the universities got the chance to conduct this structural process independently, with the science senator “only” playing a mediating role.

Concentration, profiling, research in fields important for the future and a better promotion of the next generation of scientists are the way out and the chance for the Berlin universities. The need for reform is as enormous as before. This is not only a question of the universities as important factors of the economic location of Berlin, but also of their role as institutions, in which society, free of any utilisation constraints, “is reflecting on itself” (Thomas Flierl).

The model of study accounts for cost-free first studies, preferred by the Senator of science and supported by a slim majority of the PDS parliamentary group, was rejected, after vehement debates, at a party congress of the Berlin PDS. Until 2006, the stipulation of the coalition agreement on cost-free studies will remain in force in Berlin. The discussion on study fees in Germany is meanwhile continuing unabated.

- The *reform of medical teaching and research at the Berlin universities*, having been for years neglected by the Grand Coalition of CDU and SPD, has finally started .

The different locations were merged under the historic name of Charité, without giving up even one of them. As a result of the reform, an efficient and modern clinic complex is supposed to emerge.

- After long and difficult debates on the future of the three opera houses, the *Foundation “Opera in Berlin”* was negotiated by the Senator of culture of Berlin and the Federal State Minister of Culture.

The opera foundation is a genuine contribution of the PDS’ cultural policy aiming at the maintenance and modernisation of the Berlin *opera scene*. All previous governments had failed in this endeavour. The PDS senator of culture in this case, too, while keeping the interests of the whole city in mind, fought for innovative solutions.

- The *Treaty on Culture in the Capital*, negotiated with the Federal government and securing its co-financing of important cultural endeavours, is considered by quite a few insiders as a success of the cultural policy of Berlin.

Despite the reduction of funds, the unique and rich multitude of the Berlin stages was secured. The national level was taken into more financial responsibility for the culture of the capital. Berlin

⁴⁵ The structural concept worked out in common by the universities, for instance, envisages the elimination of 230 professorial posts until 2009.

did not, by closing an opera or a theatre, set a fateful example in cultural policy for the whole of Germany. "The promotion of the private theatres as well as of the free scene could be kept up to the highest extent possible. Berlin as museum and exhibition city was further developed."⁴⁶

But as with other policy fields, the public discussed in first place the cuts foreseen by the senate: the planned "winding up" of the Benjamin-Franklin clinic in Berlin-Steglitz, the savings in the universities, the cessation of the subsidies for the Berlin Symphonic Orchestra. Against all of this protest and resistance stirred, as Berlin had not known for a long time. It included the concerned bodies, but also large parts of the public. Especially the strike of the Berlin students in Autumn and Winter 2003 and 2004, their occupation of public spaces, among them the offices of the Senator of science and the PDS headquarters attracted considerable attention and approval in the city. The discussion, which opera or theatre should be closed, if at all, has rocked the city for more than two years.

Despite the pressure of the finance Senator, the resistance by the coalition partner SPD, conceptual omissions in the start phase, the Senator of culture has after all, "achieved more for culture and science in Berlin than his predecessors", writes the cultural editor of the Berliner Zeitung in a comment on the half-term balance of the senate.⁴⁷

The "promise" of the Senator of science, research and culture in the Berlin City Council, to make room for designing new things even in times of a budget emergency, can be clearly felt. A number of results can be pointed out, which find recognition even among those, who as a rule are eying the Red-Red government coalition rather critically.⁴⁸

But what is required now, are clearly defined and progressive projects for the future, for instance, an integrated project of "science and economy" or the project of an innovative cultural sector to be developed in the long term. As interviews with the PDS senators revealed, they will develop in the second half-term new initiatives in this regard. Thomas Flierl (culture) and Harald Wolf (economy), for instance, have submitted proposals for the further advancement of the cultural economy of the city. In a Cultural Economy Report, the structure of the branch is supposed to be analysed. Here, culture is no longer to be considered merely as a problem of expenditures and costs, but as an important field of investment, a chance for the city's future.⁴⁹

A change of politics demands the definition of guidelines. They are still lacking. All the more significant is the fact that the Senator of culture on August 13, 2004 was the first to present to the public a discussion paper with cultural guidelines for Berlin.⁵⁰ Culture has to be thought from the bottom to the top of society, in a way, it had not been thought of in Berlin before. There was a need to strengthen the civil society element in the cultural field, not a metropolis euphoria. De-étatisation and socialisation in the sense of a "self-empowerment" of the citizens should become an important guiding motive, wrote the senator. Against this conceptual background, Flierl formulated proposals for the development of the "urban side of metropolitan culture".

At this point, guidelines for science are being elaborated in Berlin. Thus PDS politicians are become the generators of ideas in these fields, so important for the future of Berlin. While this does not always find due recognition within the senate, it remains indispensable for politics not aimed exclusively at muddling through. If only gradually, it shows that the shaping of new policies is the alternative to (mere) administration. It results, thus the Senator of science, in new room and opportunities for changed development logics: de-étatisation as socialisation in the sense of participation and self-empowerment of the citizens.

⁴⁶ Mid-way, not out of the woods, 2004.

⁴⁷ Walther 2004.

⁴⁸ Berg 2004, Harmsen 2004, Walther 2004.

⁴⁹ After all, already today the 21,000 entities of the Berlin cultural sector have a turnover of roughly 10 Billion €, amounting to 13.6% of the net product of the whole Berlin economy.

⁵⁰ Thomas Flierl: Berlin: Perspektiven durch Kultur (Berlin: Perspectives through culture), 2000.

2.3.5. Tolerance, democracy and civil rights

A new political start and a change of politics require above all a new political climate in the land, a democratic public, more chances for the citizens to take part in policy-making, meaning more democracy, more civil rights, more civil society. This is true in particular for Berlin, where domestic policies were for a long time marked by rabble-rousing and repression.⁵¹ Instead of strengthening the boroughs and municipal self-administration, centralism was tightened, new hierarchies built up. Civil society activities in the city continued to decrease.

That is why the PDS pleaded in its election manifesto for “democratising democracy” and “modernising the administration”⁵² It demanded more direct democracy for Berlin, a fundamental administration reform, a police close to the people and an open confrontation with right-wing extremism and racism. The coalition negotiations between SPD and PDS took place in the end of 2001/beginning of 2002, after the attacks of September 11 in New York. Conservative politicians, but also the Federal Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily (SPD) surpassed each other in proposals how to tighten security. Insisting on the rule of law and on citizens’ basic rights meant little at that time.

Nevertheless, both coalition partners in Berlin succeeded in passing a coalition agreement, which did not let itself get infected by this mood and relied upon the rule of law and civil rights. The conservatives called the Red-Red government a “security risk”. The coalition agreement laid down the common goal to “maintain and strengthen Berlin as a liberal and secure metropolis open to the world.”⁵³

Since then, steps were taken and *reforms* brought on the way, which hint at a *change of direction*:

Domestic security

The “Schleierfahndung” (search by massive street controls – see Glossary), against whose introduction the PDS and the Greens had stood up in the end of the 90s, was now abolished in Berlin. The “Rasterfahndung” (computer search – see Glossary) was limited to very special cases. In contrast to most other lander, the Authority for the Defence of the Constitution (political police) could not extend its activities to large new areas. Those extensions prescribed by federal law were, by introducing the prerequisite of a “direct threat to human lives”, realised only in a limited way.

Police

The civil rights perspective of the coalition partners became also apparent, when defining the tasks of the police.

There is no video surveillance of public spaces in Berlin, only (as a compromise) the possibility for special surveillance of highly endangered objects such as synagogues or Jewish cemeteries in narrowly drawn bounds.

A structural police reform was started that is supposed to bring about a significant reduction of hierarchical levels and the decentralisation of tasks in the sense of closeness to the citizens. The latently extreme right-wing Voluntary Police Reserve, a sort of armed militia which had been criticised for years, was finally dissolved; the mounted guard “transferred” to the Federal Border Protection Service and the financing of the police orchestra ceased. Since 2003, policemen on a voluntary basis go on duty with nameplates. The de-escalation strategy demanded for a long time by the PDS is taking shape and shows its effect on the often violent demonstration marches on 1st May in Berlin-Kreuzberg.

⁵¹ See: Mid-way, not out of the woods, 2004: 15.

⁵² See Together for Berlin.

⁵³ Coalition agreement 2001-2006: 11.

Democracy and citizens' engagement

The long-time demand of the PDS to abolish the 5% barrier for the City Council elections and the 3% hurdle for the elections to the Borough Assemblies was rejected during the coalition negotiations by the SPD and therefore not included into the coalition agreement.

The improvement of the democratic co-determination rights of the citizens at the level of the land nevertheless plays an important part in the coalition agreement: the formal prerequisites for popular initiative, popular petition and popular referendum have been simplified; an examination of the idea of lowering the quorum for popular petitions and of extending the possibilities for popular petitions is promised. The implementation of these promises, however, is still unsatisfactory. But the draft laws for the introduction of borough citizens' referenda (necessary participation: 10% of those eligible to vote) have been completed and transferred to the opposition for consultation (because for changes of the constitution a two-third majority is required). Berlin up to now was the only *land* that did not know citizens' referenda at the local level.

Until now 60 citizens' offices have been established, as demanded in the PDS election manifesto. After introducing a "Mobile Citizens' Office", the "office can now come to the citizens". A new approach for Berlin is the concept of the "participative budget" developed upon urging by the PDS. In boroughs – Lichtenberg and Marzahn/Hellersdorf – beginning in 2006, the budget will be designed, carried out and controlled with close involvement of the people.

If the concept "The Borough as a Citizens' municipality" is concretised and realised in the second half-term, a reference project could emerge which would influence things in the land of Berlin and beyond.

At the universities the political mandate was qualified. The Student Assemblies received more rights to articulate themselves on general political topics.

The senate took a number of measures to fight right-wing extremism and racism and mobilise the counter-forces of the civil society. In the boroughs, analyses of the potential of right-wing extremists and racists were sponsored. A number of anti-fascist and anti-racist initiatives as well as associations get financial support. For the first time, mobile advisory teams are promoted by means of the land.

In April 2003, the senate has established an independent advisory board on integration and migration. It is understood by the PDS as a step against a repressive migration policy and in favour of a concept of integration, in which all social forces can participate. However, the example of Berlin also shows that due to the restrictive regulations in federal law the space of the land for its own migration and refugee policies are rather limited. The successes are modest, although a number of new measures were taken (see above).

Since the formation of the Red-Red government, the political goal of equality of the sexes is pursued in a contemporary form.

Administrative reform

Democratisation and modernisation of administration are an important goal of the SPD-PDS coalition agreement. In May 2002, the senate has committed itself to administrative reform as a common cross-sectional task and formed a committee of state secretaries charged with preparing the necessary decisions. A steering committee, including apart from the senate also trade unions and representatives of the personnel, advises it on issues of principle and accompanies the process. In May 2003, a reform agenda titled "Administrative Reform" with concretising and supporting measures and tasks was passed. The points were set into the right direction, the realisation, however, is still inadequate, the effects small.

In the areas of "Domestic Affairs", "Democracy and Civil Rights", all in all a change of direction has started. Alle the more so in comparison with the limitation and restriction of civil rights in Germany

as a consequence of the laws proposed by the Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily, after September 11, 2001. Despite security panic and terror fright, in Berlin politics, a certain mentality change is taking effect. This change of direction occurred not least upon pressure and initiative of the PDS. However, the party can barely draw profit from this, since the hallmarks “Domestic Security”, “Liberality”, or “Civil Rights” are, to a large extent, not yet associated with it by the public. A big part in this change of direction belongs to domestic policy Senator Körting of the SPD, who, for the first time since ages, is a Liberal on this post in Berlin. His cooperation with the PDS parliamentary group and the PDS senators is obviously functioning well. Changing the police president at the beginning of the legislative period has also had a positive effect on the political atmosphere.

Under the Red-Red government, the political climate in Berlin and the image foreign countries have of it, has changed noticeably. Yet, the fundamentally new challenges on the way to a “cooperative state”, a strong “civil society” and a “democratic citizens’ municipality” until now have been met in a very limited manner. Here as well, the decisive tasks of the senate are still ahead.

2.4. On balance: results and strategic conclusions for the second half-term

Our analysis has confirmed the assumption that the scope for a land to shape its own policies is nowadays further limited, yet still existing.

Over the years it became clear that the PDS is taking efforts in this field even under the complicated conditions of a budget emergency:

First, The PDS succeeded in putting the *social question* on the government’s agenda again (by editing the Social Structure Atlas, the Poverty Report, by the creation of the “Social City” committee). Despite the cuts into the social infrastructure, the effort to maintain some kind of *social balance* must be noted. Where the approval of the electorate can no longer be “bought” by material means, politics of social balance, of social justice are all the more significant. Against the radical savings proposals of the financial Administration, it has been possible:

- to secure 95% of the social allowances for the needy;
- to prevent the planned lowering of the regular payments rate for social aid recipients to the much lower level current in the neighbouring land of Brandenburg;
- to maintain the Berlin law on care money for the handicapped with a level above the nation-wide average;
- to increase the kindergarten fees, which hitherto are covering 11.7% of the costs, not as was demanded, for everybody, but scaled according to social criteria (for 50% of the families, with a gross income of up to 26,339 € until the end of 2006 no increase; for well and better earners partly quite significant increases) and to maintain the good quality of the facilities;
- to offer asylum seekers cash money instead of a smart card, and accomodation in apartments instead of homes.

The social, cultural, and academic infrastructure could all in all be preserved and secured in the long term.

The wage agreement in the public service sector, which caused wide-spread debates, appears, with hindsight, in a slightly different light even with trade unionists: it contains a reduction of working hours, an employment guarantee, a hiring corridor for young employees in selected areas with socially scaled renunciations to income. The senate is working on outlines of an employment policy for the municipalities.

Second, the PDS as a governing party is acting against the *neo-liberal privatisation euphoria and strategy*. It speaks up in favour of maintaining public enterprises, which are of special significance for maintaining social security. Among others, this concerns Vivantes, the largest hospital concern of Europe, the BSR, the BVG, the Berlin Fair. Since these are mostly loss-making enterprises, their

rehabilitation is a key question. To maintain them against the will of the opposition, to increase transparency, to strengthen the influence of the land, is important for its regulating social function. However, a coherent strategy is hard to recognise (e.g. sale of the GSW, securing high yield for the stockholders of the Berlin Water Works).

The PDS initiative to organize “city boroughs’ and productive cooperatives” is also to be mentioned.

Third, first *structural reforms* in order to strengthen the *potential* of the city *for the future* were introduced in the PDS-conducted branches:

- a reform of the institutions of business promotion;
- structural changes and reforms in the area of culture, science and research: university agreements, including the survival of the three East Berlin art colleges threatened of being closed; reform of medical teaching and research at the universities, without giving up a sole location; Foundation “Opera in Berlin”; Treaty on Culture in the Capital.

Fourth, Berlin has succeeded in stopping the trend, typical for Germany as a whole, to curtail *democracy and civil rights*, and even extended certain civil rights: the search by massive controls was abolished in Berlin; the computer search based on specific parameters restricted; a structural police reform and a de-escalation strategy have been started. Even more important seems the fact, that in the coalition agreement the prerequisites for popular petitions and popular referenda have been improved and the model of a “participative budget” is being used in two Berlin boroughs.

With the PDS entering government, Berlin of course has not become a “socialist island”, not even a social lighthouse within an otherwise dominating neo-liberal offensive. Yet, the PDS opposition to the neo-liberal trend is having a marked effect on the policy of the land. The PDS has made mistakes, it had to accept defeats, often only alleviated deteriorations and not been able to cut short the nation-wide trend in such important areas as economic, labour market and social policies. But it has shown different approaches and set some alternative accents in Berlin politics.

The first half-term, nevertheless, has been characterised more by “cleaning up” work and defence against the impositions by the financial Administration. It was not yet carried by a well-tempered overall concept, cooperative strategies and endeavours in several areas. Therefore, the government in the public barely appeared as a body shaping new politics. The senate and the PDS itself lost – especially in the beginning – the competence to explain its own politics.

The public could not be sufficiently convinced that a PDS government participation “pays off” for the city and its citizens, what its use was for the party’s voters, its old and new milieus. Since, however, in this extremely difficult first half-term the ground was prepared for further-going reform policies, now the transition to a more developed strategy for the second half-term seems possible:

1. A *guiding idea* as a basis of the policy of the government coalition and that of the PDS is required, which would offer a *sound perspective* to the city and its citizens.

For this, the PDS needs future-oriented symbols and paradigms of its own identity, which it could communicate to the public such as “Policies with a social touch”, “Social cohesion of the city”, “Berlin – a city oriented to the future”, “A tolerant urban society”, or “Participation and citizens’ involvement”.

2. Being the smaller coalition partner, the PDS has to *define its own main political projects*.

Only by “preventing the worse” or struggling with varying success for corrections of senate policies in the various fields (which is quite important), the PDS will hardly convince the people, especially the voters and its own clientele, that its participation in government is reasonable and necessary.

Aiming at a second term, the PDS has to set about a few presentable, communicable and accountable projects. Projects, proving that they would not exist without the PDS in government or would have fallen victim to the general savings constraints. Projects, by which the PDS would be identified in the public and with the voters. Projects on themes like "Berlin as a social city", "Berlin as a cultural city", or a closer intertwining of science and economy to create new production chains. A better cooperation among the portfolios in PDS hands would be indispensable to that end. With its three key posts the PDS has the chance to do visible "construction work" on the basis of the existing potential and to present it in an effective way. This could even boost the individual emancipation of the three PDS senators within the government coalition, which has visibly started of late.

3. *A new style of politics*, in fact a *new policy model* is required. The reaction to uncertainty, criticism and protest in the population must not be the thought how to communicate the decisions of the "top" more convincingly to the "bottom". Instead, the PDS needs a democratic, transparent model which understands and handles politics from the stage of finding ideas, the discussion of alternatives, the taking of decisions until the implementation as a dialogue-based and self-reflexive project close to the citizens. Involving the people concerned, the PDS could introduce a new style and at the same time mobilise more social and intellectual potential to increase competence in government work.

There can be no doubt, that the PDS must make the positive sides of its government participation more visible. However, this should not be a justification of its action in the face of criticism from the public and within the party, but as a demonstration of how the PDS acts as a creative force, what has been achieved by its actions (projects, priorities), what has not, and for what reasons. It is important to show the relationship between its goals and intentions on the one hand and the conditions, the limits and its own deficits on the other, the contradictory results of acting in government responsibility.

3. The consequences of government participation

An analysis in social science cannot stop at observing the action of the actors and their immediate results. It has above all to look at the **consequences** of government participation.

3.1. The question of "measurability"

The intended and non-intended consequences of the PDS' government participation in Berlin are disputed, especially in the PDS and its environment. The respective perceptions are based on different standards and patterns. Often asked questions are: How does the PDS in government contribute to overcoming the neo-liberal dominance in Germany? Does it help a change of politics in the country? Does it take us closer to democratic socialism? What benefits does the PDS draw from government participation? And what about its acceptance with members and voters?

The question is, whether the consequences of government participation can be "objectivized". Are there indicators to "measure" them? To find such "criteria of success" is by no means simple, because parties act in a complex environment, which is subject to constant change. This is what the party researcher Wiesendahl thinks on this problem: Parties are successful, if they reach a maximum of "votes", "offices" and "political influence".⁵⁴ With respect to our topic these criteria are not sufficient. In order to "measure" the success or failure of a left socialist party's government participation, I propose to start with four levels and criteria, which are then to be supported by more specific indicators.

⁵⁴ See Wiesendahl 2002: 194 f.

First level: The consequences for the *land* and its people with the criterion: To what extent a *change of politics* has materialized?

Second level: The consequences for *society* with the criterion: Does a new political *public opinion* evolve, are *citizens' participation* and *civil society* being strengthened?

Third level: The consequences for the *Red-Red government coalition* with the criterion: How does its *acceptance* in the land and nation-wide develop and does it bring about new political and social actors' constellations?

Fourth level: The consequences for the *PDS* with the criterion: How does the PDS' government participation affect its *acting ability*, its *profile*, its political *influence*, its *social basis* and not least its membership and electorate?

The long-term consequences and effects of such a new political coalition can of course only be verified over a longer period of time. Nevertheless the four indicators should make it possible to shed a light on the main tendencies.

3.2. The consequences for the land and its people

These consequences are measured and evaluated by the *indicator "change of politics"*.

The formation of a SPD-PDS government in the land of Berlin in 2001 was a *change of paradigms* as to coalition variants in the German capital. In fact, there was the toleration model (the PDS supporting selectively a SPD minority government) in Saxony-Anhalt in 1994-02, and of course, since 1998 a Red-Red coalition existed in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. But with a Red-Red coalition emerging in Berlin, which had been for decades divided between East and West, the political climate here changed substantially. Until then for Berlin, namely the political West-Berlin it appeared unthinkable that the PDS might be included into the government of the German capital. As there were the precedences of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, government participation in Berlin in the eyes of the PDS apparently had no longer an absolute value but was rather the chance for a breakthrough of the party in the whole of Germany. In this respect, the Red-Red Berlin government is more than a coalition variant in the parliamentary game. Whether the breakthrough can succeed, depends on many factors.

The decisive question is whether the new government coalition has brought about or at least started with a change of politics in the land of Berlin. Does the PDS in government prove to be an innovative, competent and reliable force?

Our analysis of the government actions (see chapter 2) shows the following picture:

SPD and PDS created in Berlin a stable government. They developed a business-like, constructive cooperation including the readiness for compromise and conflicts on both sides. In this way, a foundation for new government politics has been laid. This does not yet mean a change of politics, nor reform policies, but the government proved able for political acting. In a "media society", where above all mistakes, omissions, and conflicts are discussed and dramatised, this is not a small achievement. In this – as different interview partners affirm – the PDS as a newcomer in government has a significant share. To that extent, the PDS in Berlin has proved its capability for a coalition, for government participation and democracy. For the PDS this is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a successful test of its practical abilities. Because the proof for coalition and government participation has already been delivered by the PDS of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, as is recognized even by authors of the conservative Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See Lang 2003.

The Red-Red government of Berlin has introduced a first change in the style of politics. The style typical of the last decade – one of metropolis euphoria and dramatically rising debts, of graft and corruption has been questioned and started being overcome. The Red-Red government has returned the city a more realistic look into the future. A long-term budget rehabilitation was introduced, which is supposed to create the prerequisite that the land will be able to act in the future, too. In important policy fields a number of new approaches and important projects can be observed. It is obvious that the government and the coalition parties are striving for a transparent and more communicative style of politics.

The political and economic horror scenario as a result of a PDS government participation predicted by certain sides has not materialised. Berlin is rather on the road to a tolerant and liberal city, open to the world. This perception of Berlin is spreading fast.

But the “great” change in policy, which mainly, but not solely the adherents of the PDS are associating with an upswing of the economy, a reduction of unemployment and more social justice, so far has not come true. This causes growing disappointment in the party and its environment.

The verdict would be even more critical, if the question was not about a change of politics in comparison to the preceding government, but about a change of politics, which would react to the new challenge: to initiate modernisation and reform processes for sustainable, future-oriented, economic, social, ecological and democratic developments. This task Berlin is facing just like all the other German lander. An altering of the course, a new, future-oriented path of development with social security is (not) yet in sight. In view of the dominant neo-liberal model of society, the shrinking space for the policies of a land, the strategic and conceptual weakness of the PDS at the Federal and regional levels, when measured by the standards of modern left-socialist politics, this could not realistically be expected.

Nonetheless – the defence of certain social standards, small improvements for the disadvantaged, steps towards more democracy and liberties are not to be underestimated. The people are interested first of all, whether in a pragmatic and understandable way, steps are taken to overcome their material and social problems. It is by this standard that they measure success or failure of the government coalition.

In reality, there is no Chinese wall between the “defence of the social interests of the citizens”, “small improvements” and “opening the way” for partially new social development logics. A transformation politics of transitions, which would respond to the new conditions and challenges, still has to be designed.

A beginning change of course, but no new quality of politics in the land – this is the answer given today to the question about a change of politics in Berlin.

3.3. The consequences for society and the civil actors

These consequences are measured and evaluated by the *indicators*

- *political public opinion*
- *citizens' participation.*

Political public opinion

Modern, reform-oriented politics – other than structurally conservative politics – only has a chance, if it relies on democratic public debates and democratic public learning processes.

Creating an autonomous, independent *political public opinion* becomes the most important challenge and prerequisite for progressive reforms. This is not an easy task. On the one hand, public opinion is divided into various public opinions internal to the organisations of parties, associations, interest groups, milieus and scenes. On the other hand, it is a public opinion communicated by the electronic and print media. In this sense there are fragmented, disparate

public opinions cut off from one another. The task is to bundle these disparate public opinions and set the tone in the interpretation of one's own policies.

At the same time political public opinion is a part of the political culture, i.e. the totality of the dominant opinions, dispositions, values, patterns of behaviour of the population in a certain territory.⁵⁶ It has had its historic development and it does not change automatically with a change of government. The demand of the new coalition in Berlin for a "change of mentality" in the city is obviously reflecting this fact.

The change from the Grand Coalition of CDU and SPD to the SPD-PDS government took place against the background of a change in the social mood of the city. For the first time over a long period, a mood for change was again to be felt in Berlin. From the new coalition the people expected to stop the omnipresent graft in the city, the system of corruption, the suppression and concealing of Berlin's problems, and that it would act in a more transparent and credible way. This created favourable conditions for developing a new political public opinion in the city and for a closer involvement of the citizens.

Creating a new political public opinion means, first of all, to draw the attention of the public to the policies of the land, to communicate its political concepts to the citizens and to win them over for the political goals of the coalition.

The government work of the new coalition is more publicly debated than that of the former one. Essential government projects have been discussed and prepared for decision with associations and other organisations. This is in particular true for the senators, the parliamentary group and the Berlin PDS organisation. "Turn concerned people into active participants!" became a hallmark of the PDS in government.

The efforts to develop a political style of dialogue, debate and common search for solutions are despite all difficulties undeniable. This can be said of the Senator of economic affairs in his relationship to the associations of industry, trade, tourism and business; of the Senator of social affairs in her collaboration with the diverse interest associations in the social and health sector, but also with the numerous social organisations and associations of the city; and this is a characteristic of the policy of the Senator for culture and science in his activities towards the heterogeneous and complex institutions, organisations and individuals of Berlin culture and science. If continuously developed, these beginnings could lead to something new in the traditional "political business" of Berlin. Hitherto they are mainly limited to debates with interest organisations.

Until now there is hardly any public discourse on the fundamental questions of the social development of the capital and the land of Berlin. Gregor Gysi of the PDS was the first to initiate by a famous speech a debate on the goals and the future of the capital.⁵⁷ Stefan Liebich, chairman of the Berlin PDS and its parliamentary group, took up this impulse with his statement: "Berlin at the starting point".⁵⁸ The PDS was not able to hold on to these discussions in a constructive way, and lost its initial role as a generator of ideas for the discourse on the goals and the future of the capital. In the meantime, there are new attempts of individual senators to revive the public debate in the capital "at least" in their "own" policy field with long-term concepts for development and visions. Examples are the paper presented by the Senator of culture Thomas Flierl on August 13 2004, "Berlin: Perspectives through Culture" (see chapter 2) and the paper presented by the Senator of economic affairs Harald Wolf, "Berlin 2004-2014. A growth initiative." (see chapter 2).

The mood of change, typical for Autumn 2001, could not be transformed into a new political public opinion and an initiative of society for the development of the capital. The rather favourable conditions of the city – progressive socio-cultural milieu, a relatively strong political Left and left-

⁵⁶ See Berg/Koch 2000: 94.

⁵⁷ Gysi 2001.

⁵⁸ Liebich 2002.

liberal-centre, no conservative political hegemony – were not sufficiently utilised to that end. The interest in the policies of the land dropped again, the dialogue between senate and citizens became fragile. A mood of passivity and lethargy has spread again in large parts of the population. The expected “change of mentality” is not taking place. The government coalition has no leading role in the interpretation of its own policies and intentions. The media are reflecting the topics of the coalition in a limited way. The PDS has only in selected cases succeeded in presenting its specific topics to the media with a certain effect.

As the government coalition has no strategic vision, it has permanently to justify, why the budget emergency is requiring today this and tomorrow another kind of finance cuts. Various social actors turned away and developed an “alternative public opinion” to the Red-Red Senate (see the Initiative against the banking scandal, trade union protests, student strikes, the call for early elections). Senate and PDS feel difficult to deal with these protests. Especially for the PDS, these forms of social protest against policies it is carrying out, are an unusual situation, which requires new learning. Its capacities for communication and dialogue are subjected to a new test. It is challenged to openly discuss this criticism in society and draw new stimulation from it. Generally, it is to be noted that its style of politics in the government coalition and in the public is not enlightening enough. As a government party, it must neither create the impression, that in principle it is always right, nor permanently excuse itself for participating in government and therefore being exposed to the constraints of the budget emergency. Necessary is the correct public handling of the contradictory relationship between the goals aimed for, the expectations of the voters and the possibilities of their realisation given the relationship of forces as well as the real scope for action.

Citizens' participation and Citizens' municipality

The consequences and results of the new coalition government's policies for the *democratic participation and co-determination rights* of the citizens and their associations are ambivalent. The coalition has, not least by initiatives of the PDS, introduced a whole series of measures to improve the chances for participation (see chapter 2, esp. 2.3.5). These have the potential to lead to a new political culture in Berlin. But their utilisation by the individual actors is as diverse as its perception. Here one has to take into account that all over Germany the principle of “citizens' participation” earns high ratings in the polls, in practice, however, existing possibilities are used too little. This is explained by a generally dwindling interest in politics and an enormous loss of confidence in the political parties and institutions.

The *democratic citizens' society*, which is participating from below in the political process, thus contributing its own potential, is also little developed in Berlin. This could be a central project, in which the PDS could participate by generating ideas and stimulating practical realization.

One precondition for that is the *democratic citizens' municipality*. For Berlin, this means new rights and space for the boroughs to shape their own policies. The relationship between the *senate* and *city boroughs* is not free of conflict under the Red-Red government either, since the budget emergency has led to further cuts of the means in the boroughs and for this reason to a massive reduction of their social and cultural infrastructure. Nevertheless, a few positive developments have taken place. The boroughs were more involved in several conceptual endeavours (e.g. business website, tourism concept, gender mainstreaming). Borough problems are considered more by the senate, there is more readiness to take arguments of the boroughs into account (e.g. Special Programme East, allocation model for support of education, designed by senate and boroughs). Yet, as before, centralisation attempts are made in the various policy fields; decentralisation and self-administration are not a determining tendency in Berlin politics.

Access to the website of the Berlin administration for all citizens is developing well and used by more and more people in the capital. Here, Berlin in comparison with the other big cities in Germany is in the first place.

Although, as the creation of a new political public opinion, the leading role in the interpretation of government policies and citizens' participation are concerned, the ambivalences dominate, a

positive change of the political climate in the capital and new chances for citizens' participation are evident. It is now up to the coalition, not least to the PDS, to return in the second half-term a more positive climate for the policies of the land. For the PDS, this also means to see its role as a government party and in social dialogue in a new light.

3.4 The consequences for the Red-Red coalition and its supporters

These consequences are measured and evaluated by the *indicators*

- *acceptance of the Red-Red coalition,*
- *new actors' constellations.*

By *acceptance* we understand the chance "to find open or tacit approval for certain opinions, measures, proposals and decisions with an identifiable group of persons and be able to count on this approval in defined conditions and in a promising way".⁵⁹ The category acceptance, therefore, is a relevant reference level for measuring the effects of the Red-Red coalition government's work.

Two and a half/three years after a Red-Red government in the German capital has been formed, a general *basic acceptance* of this coalition in Berlin can be stated. In the land, its population and as a rule also in the associations it is accepted as something normal. This is true of all actors close to or far from the coalition. This is a new situation for the capital. Today, there are no discussions on the question, *whether* a Red-Red coalition is justified for the capital, but *how* it is making politics, how it is living up to the expectations of the interest groups, the political reference groups, the voters and not least the media. This basic acceptance stems from the fact that the coalition has become the natural contact address and negotiating partner of the many interest groups and associations.

Moreover, the government is pragmatically fulfilling its duties. As serious coalition crises have not taken place, the media were rarely able to spread "scandalous news". The predictions of the conservatives, a Red-Red government in the capital would meet with overall rejection, have not come true. On the national level, rejection, reservations and criticism of the Berlin coalition government have not disappeared completely, but hardly play a role on the political agenda. The criticism that surfaced in the wake of the public protests of the PDS against the law Hartz IV ("left populism", "lack of responsibility"), quickly subsided. Maybe also because the Berlin SPD, after having first reprimanded its coalition partner, remembered its "virtues" and again emphasised the "smooth functioning" of the coalition.

All that belongs to the credit side on the balance sheet of the Berlin coalition.

This basic acceptance of the coalition, however, does not mean that all its plans, measures and decisions are accepted. Here, we find a remarkable dissent in the land of Berlin: While the political actors, the senate, the coalition parties and their parliamentary groups – in spite of all constraints and references to particular deficits and individual mistakes – see the work done generally in a positive light, the population's satisfaction with the work of the government from 2001 until summer 2004 has rather gone down.

A representative survey by the opinion research institute Emnid gave the Red-Red government in July 2004 the grade of 3.9. The scale reached from 1 for "very good" to 6 for "very bad". Even its own supporters granted their respective parties only a "satisfactory".⁶⁰ This is also manifesting itself in the evaluation of those politically responsible in the city, which Forsa is doing regularly. The Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, was in November, 2004 as ever on first rank, but on the scale between plus 5 (very good) and minus 5 (very bad), he received only plus 0.7. The other senators of SPD and PDS got, rather mediocre grades, too.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lucke 1995: 104.

⁶⁰ Emnid: July 2004. See also Neues Deutschland of August 2, 2004.

⁶¹ Forsa: November 2004. See also Berliner Zeitung of November 20/21, 2004: 25.

If in November 2004 elections to the Berlin City Council had taken place, the Red Red coalition would have got 43% (SPD 28%, PDS 15%) of the vote – a full 10% less than 2001 (52.2%).⁶² The fact that all of these are short-term impressions, that the work of the opposition is hardly judged any better (CDU 3.9; Greens 3.5), and that CDU and Free Democrats (FDP) do not have a majority – all that cannot conceal the fact, that Red-Red has to face quantitative and qualitative losses of acceptance.

The causes of the loss in confidence are not investigated and discussed by the senate in a serious way. In contrast to the governments, for instance of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania or Saxony, the Berlin Senate does not even order its own surveys on the development of its acceptance data, the effects of its policies, the expectations of the citizens and the different interest groups etc. The losses in acceptance can also not be explained by external factors (e.g. nation-wide trends) alone. They are not merely a communication problem either, as SPD and PDS are sometimes stating. Pending a serious investigation, we see the following general reasons for the adverse mood and dissatisfaction with the coalition:

The actors (senate, parliamentary groups, parties), on the one hand, and the different interest groups, on the other are partly following conflicting logics and often put up different evaluating standards for successes, deficits, and failures. Different perspectives and evaluations of specific endeavours, therefore, are the rule. What a senator, for instance, sees as a success, because he has considerably beaten down the cuts intended by the Senator of finances, the people concerned see as a loss and a failure, because their benefits are reduced nevertheless. The latter do, of course, not see that their allowances (as is frequently the case in Berlin) continue to be higher than the national average. Therefore, not all institutions and interest groups can be satisfied with the coalition and its plans at the same time. Here we hit upon *structural* reasons for the different evaluation of the coalition.

At the same time, *political and cultural* reasons are playing their role. Both East and West Berlin were, at the times of the division and block confrontation, cities with certain privileges, which produced a specific welfare mentality on both sides. Since acceptance today can hardly be “bought” by material means, Berlin suddenly finds itself in a new situation. At the same time, a reliance on the state has always been cultivated in the whole of Berlin. If these expectations are not met by a social-democratic-socialist government, disappointment is quickly spreading. Especially, if, as has been the case, a clear picture and realistic alternatives are discussed too little with the public. Citizens, after all, perceive the conditions of their existence in complex and do not distinguish, which effects are to be attributed to the government of the land, the federation or to economic powers.

A *political and strategic* reason for the adverse mood and dissatisfaction with the government, moreover, has to be seen in the fact, that the coalition does not play the spiritual and moral guiding role in the land and has only limited power to interpret its own decisions. The coalition partners – and in particular the PDS – must learn to practice an “acceptance management”, to woo for confidence and acceptance of the public and the various interest groups.

The above-mentioned reasons cannot hide the fact that the main problem for left parties in government is their political credibility. That can be won, if one’s policy is marked by continuity instead of opportunistic adaptation to changing conditions and moods, by clearly outlined goals instead of a laissez-faire approach, by competence, justice and openness. In this respect, there were deficits in the policies of the Red-Red coalition and the PDS during their first half-term of government.

Actors *politically close* to the coalition such as trade unions, social associations or social movements have seen their expectations of the coalition being met not at all or only to a limited

⁶² Ibid.

extent. Disappointment and disillusionment were spreading. Their criticism was and is not to be overheard until this day. Yet, it is the trade unions, which seem to undergo a process of differentiation and transformation in recent times. On the other hand, a part of the social movements (e.g. the Berlin Social Forum) has, mainly using populist arguments, made an open break with the Red-Red government and is calling together with the Trade Union of the Police (GdP) and the Trade Union of Education and Science (GEW) for an ousting of the Red-Red senate and early elections. They did not gather the requisite number of signatures of support, however.

Actors *politically far* from the government coalition such as business lobbyists, employers' associations, but also the diverse associations in the health sector, after seeing their prejudices and fears not confirmed, have passed on to a business-like collaboration with the Red-Red senate.

The Red-Red government has to learn that it will only be supported by its traditional allied organisations, associations and movements, if it is – even when financial reasons do not allow an immediate solution – attacking the problems in a transparent way in dialogue with its partners and if its proposals and decisions are perceived as socially just. This is all the more important, since because of the budget emergency, Red-Red will often not be able to fully meet the demands of the organisations, associations and movements close to it. Thus, credibility becomes the key problem of Red-Red and in particular of the PDS' acceptance increasing or decreasing.

New actors' constellations

The formation of the Red-Red coalition government itself constituted one of the most deep-going upheavals of political actors' constellations in the capital since 1990. Whether this upheaval results in changes of the overall fabric of the actors' constellations and the balances of power, time will show. At the moment there are no studies available on this question.

With the PDS as a governing party, the political actors' constellations have certainly changed. Depending on whether the PDS can establish itself as a left socialist project, this would have long-term strategic consequences for the overall actors' constellations in the party system. Whether this leads to a renewed Left able to strengthen even the Left within the SPD, cannot be answered clearly today. But the chances for that have now become rather larger than smaller in the medium and long run. This also due to Red-Red coalitions in other federal states of Germany.

Trade unions and social associations thanks to the new coalition have now an improved informal access to the actors in government. *Alliances for labour* (accords of labour and capital in individual enterprises to secure jobs) are being promoted in the meantime by the senate as well as by the boroughs, the trade unions and the employers' associations. Called into life for improving the situation on the labour market, these alliances create new chances for new coalitions of actors – decision makers and office-holders from politics, the economy and society.

The relationship between the *media* as extraordinarily important institutions of the public and the Red-Red senate have also become closer and more normal, what definitely shall have its influence on the further development of actors' constellations.

A general change of social actors' constellations in Berlin as a result of the Red-Red senate and the government participation of the PDS is not yet to be seen. A new quality of the social and cultural basis of the Left in society has not come about .

New institutional forms of inter-party dialogue within the democratic Left of Berlin (PDS, SPD Greens, extra-parliamentary movements, social initiatives) have so far not emerged .

3.5. The consequences for the PDS

These consequences are measured by the *indicators*

- *political acting ability*
- *present position in the competition of the Berlin parties.*

Following the consequences of coalition formation and coalition work closely, is of high significance to the parties concerned, in this case the PDS. However important the consequences for the land, the society, the coalition government are, the interest of a party in its voters, influence, profile and acceptance is essential. Ruling for the sake of ruling, even at the risk of survival, cannot be the strategic concept of a party, at least not such a small one as the PDS. Being in government or in opposition, however, is not, as often discussed in the PDS, a question of choosing one of the two, but doing both at the same time. This is hard to accomplish in practical policies, harder for example than was assumed in 2001 in Berlin.

How government participation is affecting the PDS? While this is of central importance to the party and is being controversially discussed, there are no qualitative analyses, studies or interpretations on this subject. The "Half-Term Report" of the Berlin PDS executive has, for the time being, also bracketed this question. This study did not intend to approach the relationship between government participation in Berlin and its influence on the PDS as a question for empirical research. We want to refer mainly to qualitative aspects and problems.

Political acting ability

According to its share of the vote, the PDS is represented by 33 deputies in the Berlin City Council (SPD 45, CDU 35, Alliance 90/The Greens 14, FDP 13 [15]) and by three senators for the first time in the government of the land of Berlin. With its actors involved indirectly or directly in government work – a further four borough mayors, 13 borough councillors and the deputies of the Borough Chambers of Representatives (BVV) – the PDS got the chance to participate directly in the political shaping of the land, to develop the necessary competences and capabilities. Compared with its previous role as political and parliamentary opposition, the party now faced new challenges.

The Berlin PDS and all the actors had to start learning by doing, since they had hardly undergone the necessary conceptual and strategic preparation for this task. Yet, they took their chance, *demonstrated abilities for policy-making* and gained in *know-how*. We have seen this in the various policy fields. Despite all criticism of senate decisions taken with the consent of the PDS, the party and its senators have been granted this from different sides.

Government participation gives the PDS the chance to get in touch with *social spheres, interest groups, and associations*, to which it had no or relatively few relations as an opposition party. Among them are the CIC, the Chamber of Craftsmen, the employers' associations, the associations of municipalities, associations of the medical profession, the social insurances, the Union for Environment and Nature (BUND). Here, things have definitely changed. One talks with one another in a matter-of-fact way. The PDS is considered a normal contact partner. The talks and negotiations are usually seen rather positively by these interest associations and the PDS senators described as "accessible", "open-minded" and "competent" people. This helps the PDS to gain more acceptance in the land and nation-wide.

As a governing party, the PDS has got influence on the voting behaviour of its land in the *Federal Council* (the second chamber of the national parliament). As the PDS rejected the Hartz laws, the government of Berlin – in contrast to the original intention of the SPD – had to refuse its consent to these laws, initiated by the SPD-Green federal government. In the practical work of the Federal Council or in the meetings of lander ministers and state secretaries, the PDS senators are accepted as partners. So Berlin Senator for economic affairs Harald Wolf together with the PDS Labour Minister of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Helmut Holter – have taken the initiative to unite all concerned ministers of the East German lander to discuss the consequences of the federal government's labour market policies for the East and to submit common proposals.

As a governing party the PDS has easier access to the *media*. Senators and deputies have got better chances to present their proposals, positions, and ideas directly to the public, thus

increasing the party's political influence on society. At least, discrimination against the PDS in the media world has been reduced. Media presence today is of strategic significance for a party.

Government participation, therefore, offers the PDS the chance to significantly *increase its capability to shape and communicate politics*. However, an ambivalence of government participation is evident. Only a minority (senators, deputies, borough mayors, and their staff) is involved in government action. In other words, only a small circle is presently able to collect new experience and insights, knowledge and competence. Government participation does not challenge the whole party and its environment in the same way. This makes the *experience of the PDS membership differ* in space and time, as the Berlin example shows.⁶³ Moreover, government participation in the beginning is producing substantive gaps in the evaluation of its results, its sense and purpose. The membership is inclined to overestimate the influence of the smaller coalition partner and underestimate the constraints and logics of negotiation processes. Many are complaining that original PDS positions were not pushed through. The difference between hoped for and real results of government participation is often causing disillusionment and disappointment with the PDS grassroots. Let alone the furious criticism by representatives of different social movements or interest groups, many PDS members are confronted with in their daily political work. This in turn leads to internal communication problems as well as heated debates on the pros and cons of government participation. The Berlin PDS has been living with this situation for a long time.

The Berlin PDS executive and the parliamentary group are trying hard to qualify the inner-party debate. A recent example is the mid-term report "On the way, not out of the woods", discussed at basis conferences, in the Internet and at the third session of the 9th Berlin Party Congress on May 16th, 2004. By establishing a strategy forum and several working groups on subjects, which play an important role in government work, inner-party communication and democratic will formation shall be improved. The presentation of the PDS Berlin in the Internet is also serving this purpose.

The decisive factor remains, however, whether and how the PDS in the second half-term will be able to sharpen its profile in the government coalition as a generator of ideas for a future-oriented concept of Berlin. It has to develop specific projects, which prove it as a modern political force committed to social justice. This does not mean to reduce its interest to some reference projects and to disregard the coalition agreement as a whole. Yet, if the PDS does not have a few important projects of its own with the corresponding actions inside and outside government, it will be reduced to the role of a social corrective. This, however, is too little as a proof of grown policy competence and capability as a result of government participation.

The position of the PDS in the competition of the Berlin parties

Has taking over government responsibility improved or worsened the position of the PDS in the competition of the Berlin parties? Especially in the PDS and its environment, this often becomes the question, by which success or failure are mainly measured. While government participation cannot be reduced uniquely to the current position in party competition, this remains a central point of reference for any party in a coalition. Particularly so for a party achieving only about 5% of the vote on the national level.

The formation of the SPD-PDS coalition in Berlin was a decision of high significance on the principal direction of politics. Such decisions usually have polarising as well as mobilising effects. It is therefore justified to ask, whether the membership and the mobilisation capability of the Berlin PDS have increased or decreased since its entry into the Berlin government.⁶⁴ On this subject, no special investigations or systematic observations in the Berlin organisation have been made. The known facts are as follows:

- According to responsible people in the Berlin party executive only about a hundred people left the party in connection with its participation in government. Most of these strictly rejected the

⁶³ See Koch 2001b: 130.

⁶⁴ See on this and also on the following Koch 2001b: 115ff.

preamble to the coalition agreement. The entry into government, on the other hand, did not bring the Berlin PDS any *push in membership* either. The *losses in membership*, on the contrary, are continuing since the end of 2001. In 2002, for example 207 entries and 426 resignations were registered. But as a rule, there is no connection to the government question. The general loss in members (apart from the resignations mentioned) is due to the age structure of the party (more than 2/3 of PDS members in Berlin are over 60 years old). Their number shrank from 11,067 at the end of 2003 to 10,385 in July 2004 (SPD: 17,800, CDU: 13,500, Greens: 3,486, FDP: 2,693).⁶⁵ With the exception of the Greens (plus 29 members), all parties in Berlin kept losing members during this time.

Neither the formation nor the action of the Red-Red coalition government has thus changed the conditions regulating the readiness of people to organise in parties. Since the PDS has by far the most problematic age structure, the reduced readiness of people to join parties is hitting it especially hard. The development of the membership does not indicate a fundamental change of the position of the PDS in the party competition as a result of its government participation.

- The question how government participation is influencing the party's *campaign and mobilisation capability* is more difficult to answer. Investigations into this problem do not exist. Some conditions have become less favourable: Government action – moreover in the situation of a budget emergency – is a thankless business. The policies of a land are rarely concerning the big questions, where everybody can put in a word, but mainly dealing with rather detailed problem solutions, law initiatives and rules, whose political impact and connection to guiding ideas or social development trends cannot easily be understood. The results are mostly compromises with much pro and con. Instead of mobilising the PDS and its environment, this can rather lead to retreat. In leading bodies of the Berlin PDS there is the impression that some are “playing” and the others are “looking on”. The PDS seems to have lost ground here. To what extent, by what means and with what effects the Berlin PDS executive seeks to counter this trend, could not be explored in detail for this study. In any case, the activists in the Berlin party organisation and the parliamentary group are showing considerable political engagement. Maybe the tendency of shrinking mobilisation capability is only reflecting a trend of the past few years observed in the whole PDS. Obviously, there is a need for new ideas and concepts to involve the members more in the activities of the Berlin organization again.

- Since the PDS left the opposition and entered government, its relationship to the various *extra-parliamentary movements* has become more complicated. Former cooperation has given way to frequent clashes. Both sides feel difficult to get used to this new strained situation. To renew and intensify the talks and contacts with these movements, groups, initiatives and associations again, would above all be a challenge for the Berlin PDS organisation and its branches in the city boroughs. On the one hand there can be no question of PDS members supporting a movement for the toppling of the Red-Red government. But on the other hand for a successful government participation of the PDS the extra-parliamentary movements, criticism from society, various forms of cooperation between politicians and civil society are urgently needed. In this respect, the PDS can point to its relations to a number of organisations with a traditionally benevolent position vis-à-vis the PDS, that is not without criticism (certain trade unions, social associations etc).

Generally speaking, the PDS has improved its position in the party competition as it was able to establish contacts to new social areas, interest groups and associations.

- For the position of the PDS in the party competition its *relationship to the SPD* in the land and nation-wide plays an important part. The main points here are its own credibility, competence and profile, the presentation of qualified personnel accepted in society – and not the constant vying and comparing with the SPD.

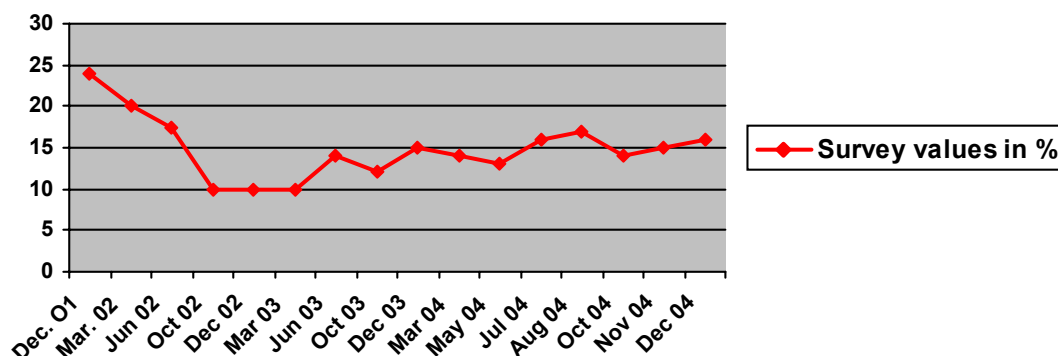
⁶⁵ See Neues Deutschland, August 9, 2004.

Conflicts between the SPD and PDS in the coalition are unavoidable. They arose in Berlin from concrete questions of budget consolidation, which was in principal supported by the PDS, from different priorities in certain policy areas (e.g. city development, transport policy), and most recently, from political decisions of the federal government, accepted by the Berlin SPD, but not the PDS. The relationship became more tense, when the Berlin PDS called for participation in the “Monday demonstrations” against the Hartz IV laws of the federal government.

In its relationship to the SPD, the PDS has a certain room for manoeuvre, which it must try out from case to case: If it oversteps it by too much public criticism and confrontation, it risks the break of the coalition. If it does not use it fully and tends to unilateral adaptation, it loses credibility and threatens the support of its members.⁶⁶ In the conflict over Hartz IV, the Berlin PDS has used its chance and prompted the SPD, in particular Mayor Klaus Wowereit, who at first had openly criticised the PDS, to give in.

- *Credibility and trust (capital)* are of high value for political parties. The differentiation and restructuring processes in the social and political milieus, fading attraction and growing suspicion of parties and institutions in the population have changed the situation considerably. When credibility and trust get lost, it is nowadays much harder to win them back. This is true particularly for the PDS with its specific history of emergence and development after 1989/90. Government participation offers new chances, but means new risks as well. The latter especially with the specific milieus and loyal voters of the PDS. A tight-rope walk. The opinion polls as an indicator of confidence and trust are proving this.

The Berlin PDS in the opinion polls



Source: Emnid, Forsa

As the table shows, the Berlin PDS in 2001 reached an extraordinary election result – far beyond the potential up to then believed possible. For that, there were a number of reasons, contributing to the favourable situation of the Berlin PDS at that time: a social mood for change, the collapse of the Grand Coalition after 12 years, the hope of many citizens of East Berlin that with the PDS, a change of the situation in the city could come about more quickly, Gregor Gysi’s candidacy.

But the table also shows, how speedily the PDS survey results went down, when the government was taking its first measures with serious implications for the various population groups of the city. Only since the end of 2003 the survey results for the PDS are increasing and stabilising again.

In the European elections in June 2003, the PDS Berlin obtained 14.4% of the vote (SPD: 19.2%; CDU: 26.4%; Greens 22.7). In comparison with the European elections of 1999, it lost a full 28,000 votes, of which 26,500 in the Eastern part of the city. The critics of government participation saw in this a further indication of the fact that government participation was doing the PDS no good. A

⁶⁶ See also Koch 2001b: 119.

party of the Left entering government in times of the dominance of a neo-liberal model of society and a budget emergency, can be of no advantage in the struggle for votes. Measured by that standard, the result of the European elections in Berlin was quite acceptable for the PDS and in no way the “flop” (in comparison to 2001) prophesied and calculated in the aftermath by its critics.

The Berlin PDS representatives interviewed for this study, have set the goal to come as close as possible to the election result of 2001. Nevertheless, they believe that realistically the potential of the PDS is between 16 and 18%. It should be won back in any event.

- The government participation is only one, albeit particularly visible indicator that the PDS’ *situation in the party competition* has fundamentally changed. Other than in the 90s – it is no more unaffected by the rules and logics of party competition in Germany. It is now evaluated by the voters by whether it has to offer convincing alternatives and concrete proposals for a solution of the problems troubling the people – work, social security, health, education, taxes, and pensions. And as a governing party, it sees itself more than ever exposed to the question, which of its proposals it can practically realise. The expectations of the Berlin citizens to the policies of the land and therefore also to the PDS are considerable.⁶⁷ In government responsibility, the challenges to the PDS have increased significantly. In competition with SPD, CDU, FDP and Greens it has to develop new approaches for solutions and options for action in policy areas under lander responsibility (education, culture and science, administration and its reform, municipalities, domestic security; EU and regional policy). This is also a matter of guiding images, visions and action for the future of the capital. Here, the Berlin PDS in government has gathered new experience, in some areas new policy offers, but still has a conceptual deficit.

The question asked in the beginning, whether taking over government responsibility has improved or worsened the position of the PDS in the competition of the Berlin parties, can on the basis of the two indicators only be partly answered. For giving a definite answer, time is too short and the evidence inadequate. Yet, some *summarising statements*, sketching a contradictory picture, seem already possible:

In its new situation the Berlin PDS had much to learn and has not escaped unscathed. The expectations to the new government coalition in the environment of the PDS have in many respects yielded to disappointment and disillusionment. Here, the resignation of Gregor Gysi as vice mayor and Senator for economic affairs played its part. The cuts made by the Red-Red government into the social and cultural infrastructure of the city cost the PDS voters’ approval. All the more so, as the latent crisis of the party as a whole erupted after the national elections of September 2002 and worsened at the party congress in Gera in October. The government participation in Berlin was declared, by parts of the PDS, as the main reason for the electoral disaster at national level. This made the complicated situation of the Berlin party even more complex. Had the party then withdrawn its confidence in the Berlin organisation or steered a counter-course, the continuation of government work would have been at stake. As is well known, things did not happen this way. When summarizing the experience of government participation in Berlin, the conceptual deficits were, however, overcome only step by step (see chapter 4).

The results of government participation alone are clearly not speaking for themselves. The question whether to continue, and – even more – how to do it, remains disputed in the PDS and its environment. A motion strongly criticising government participation in Berlin, introduced at the party congress in October 2004 in Potsdam, was refused by a great majority of the delegates.⁶⁸ Formations like the Communist Platform, the Marxist Forum, and the Gera Dialogue have not stopped their criticism.

On the other hand, it can not be asserted that government participation has caused damage to the PDS. Neither its policy-making ability, nor its position in the competition of the Berlin parties have

⁶⁷ See Wittich 2004.

⁶⁸ See 9th Party Congress of the PDS, First Session, 30 and 31 October, 2004 in Potsdam, Motions: 24-29.

suffered. On the contrary, government participation has widened its range of action. It is taking part in shaping the policies of the land, it has gained in professional and political competence, has won access to new interest groups and associations, is able, by its senators, to take initiatives on the national level.

Government participation of the PDS has become a normality in the land and nation-wide. Currently, the situation of the PDS in the party competition seems to be improving again. If it is able to convince the public by manageable projects, by an open and consensus-oriented political style, its acceptance could well grow further.

Generally speaking, it should not be overlooked, that the difficult situation of the PDS in Berlin is mainly due to the history of its emergence and development since 1989/90 and not alone or mainly to government participation and its consequences. Government participation might become a real chance for the PDS to break the traditional limits of its ability for political action in the medium and longer term. The decisive criterion clearly is the acceptance and credibility won by politics with clearly defined goals, continuity, competence and openness.

4. Left-socialist politics in government: experience and conclusions

The observation and analysis of PDS politics in government responsibility allows to derive some experience, define problems and draw strategic conclusions. The former toleration model in Saxony-Anhalt, the Red-Red coalition in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania as well as government participation of left socialist parties in Western and Northern Europe shall be taken into account.⁶⁹

1. The project “A left socialist party and its politics in government” is a project of strategic learning.

In contrast to most other West European countries, in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany the existence of an influential party to the left of the social-democracy, accepted as a coalition partner, has never been a normal thing. Left socialist politics in government were unthinkable. The PDS, understood here as an ideal type of a left socialist party⁷⁰, is the first attempt to change this situation.⁷¹

Government participation of the PDS in Germany means breaking new ground in theory and political practice. It is a unique test for the party itself, but also for the democratic Left, the public and the political culture of the country.

As a project of strategic learning “Left socialist politics in government” up to now has been playing no serious role neither in the PDS and its environment, nor in the public or in political science. The potential of reflection and stimulation, inherent to this project – as to contemporary regulation and steering processes, effective instruments of politics in face of the crisis of state capitalism, alternative options for actions, transformation projects capable of gaining major influence, the cooperation among the democratic Left in perspective – all these questions remain to a large extent unexplored.

For the PDS as political organisation, dealing with this project is a test case of its capability to learn through experience.

⁶⁹ The following theses are first generalisations which require further critical reflection and are supposed to stimulate further debate.

⁷⁰ It is of no interest here to what extent the PDS is really a left socialist party or not.

⁷¹ See also Hoff 2004.

2. Due to the structural weakness of left socialism in Germany, government participation of a left socialist party was discussed up to now mostly as a theoretical phenomenon (Whether to do it?) and not as a practical one (How to do it?).⁷² Setting such limits to the debate is in contradiction with the changed situation.

Government participation like opposition becomes an immanent part of the politics of a left socialist party. This is proven by the experience of left socialist and communist parties in Western Europe.⁷³ In today's Germany, this is true for the East, where the PDS is anchored both in the party system as well as in society.

In a parliamentary democracy the question whether a party is in government or in opposition is not essential for political competition. This should also hold for left socialist parties. They have become part of the competition for political influence and power. At least in Germany parties have this function. Government participation for a left socialist party is not simply "damage limitation" and a "necessary evil" but a legitimate and under certain conditions innovative form of politics, of political action.

Political parties among other things have the goal to implement their programme, their alternatives, their policies. It cannot be seriously denied, that government participation and government power are offering principally new opportunities to that end. Although government action is tied up to the logics of the system and material constraints, and the scope of action for a land has narrowed in Germany, government action nevertheless implies chances for policies and social change. After all, even parties in opposition strive for political influence in the parliamentary system, and try to force their political will on the government. Using parliament *solely* as a stage and as a mouthpiece for extra-parliamentary protest, can even for a left socialist party not be the sole strategic orientation. Nonetheless, for a party it can under certain circumstances be a more promising strategy to act as the opposition in the political system. A left socialist party, therefore, needs a coherent overall strategy, defining in a new way the relationship of opposition and government responsibility as two forms of political action with their corresponding and differing moments. Here, the PDS' experience of government participation in Berlin is offering new insights.

The decisive factor for the future of a left socialist party, however, is not in first place whether it is acting in government or in opposition, but its profile, its credibility, its competence and its social basis.

3. There is no general recipe, whether government participation shall be assumed in practice. As the experience of left socialist parties in Western and Northern Europe is showing, government participation has to be decided under the concrete historical conditions on a case to case basis.

The cases of Berlin and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania allow to formulate three criteria:

- Does the situation in society and a possible coalition allow a change of politics?
- Is the coalition partner ready for a new political start?
- Is the left socialist party as to its concepts, its cultural and personnel resources ready to contribute to government work something "of its own" and act as reliable partner?

These general criteria have to be filled in with concrete ideas and proposals in the coalition negotiations and in government action.

There can also be situations in society, where government participation or toleration of left socialists becomes necessary, if only to prevent a government of the Right. In this case

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See Birke 2003, Kebir 2003, Porcaro 2003, Süßner 2003.

government participation would be necessary, even if the social conditions for a fundamental change of politics or even more – the transformation of society – are missing, and action is solely motivated by “preventing the worst case”.

4. When a left socialist party enters government, there is no guarantee of success. Government responsibility means new chances and new risks. The question, how gains are to be maximised and losses minimised, must therefore constantly be considered in government action.

Possible gains can be detected at various levels: *Materially*, because demands which were put forward in vain during oppositional times now have better chances of being realised. *Politically*, because government participation of left socialists improves their competence for action, opens them ways to new institutional and social actors and on the whole increases their acceptance in society. *Socio-politically*, because convincing government action by a left socialist party can be a decisive step to establish a left socialist project as a political normality. In Germany this would mean a deep-going change of political culture.

But there are also new *risks*. The tendency to be integrated and absorbed by the system, the requirements as well as material constraints of government action could turn out to be a “trap” for a left socialist party. Government participation means being involved in the ambivalences of the system, in the overlapping of capital and social logics.⁷⁴ Avoiding one side (the capital logics) and putting one’s stakes only on the other (social logics) is hardly possible in government action within a capital-dominated order. For a left socialist party in government, therefore, it is all the more important to strengthen the social logics and to stick to policies of social justice and citizens’ participation.

In face of the deep-going upheaval in the capitalist economy and within bourgeois civil society, the lack of concepts on regulatory action of left parties in government, on alternative options, on the effectiveness of Keynesian instruments in today’s economic policies and the necessity for new instruments is dramatically felt. If only for that reason, the question of a socialist profile, a socialist identity, is put in a new way. Increased competence in government action can go along with loss of profile and identity of the left socialist project.

The junior partner in a coalition is soon in danger that its hand-writing, its identity is no longer recognisable (enough) in the negotiations and the manifold compromises of government action. However, the smaller coalition partner has not only limited, but also – what is often overlooked – specific levers for action. He can use them, if he is producing innovative ideas, convincing alternatives and is mobilising political public opinion.

Left socialist parties must learn how to approach and use these contradictions in a productive way. Risks are not overcome by isolating oneself and retreating, but by mobilising the intellectual potential, critical of the present situation in society. Also in this sense, government participation is a permanent learning process, which can, if critically reflected and evaluated, become the actual gain for a left socialist party.

5. There is no panacea to minimize the inevitable dilemmas of left socialist parties in government. However, the PDS experience in Berlin allows to make the following observations:

- Before entering government, no expectations should be raised or promises made, which later on, despite one’s best intentions, cannot be kept. Doing so, would only provoke disappointment. What is necessary, is a serious analysis of the economic, financial and social situation, a critical assessment of the previous administration and above all the

⁷⁴ See Brie/Klein 2004.

presentation of feasible alternatives.

- The goals of government participation must be defined in a clear and intelligible way. Required are a central idea, a positive guideline, showing the way into the future. The Left will develop leading qualities only if, along with the “troubles of flat”, it can credibly point out, “Where to go”. It needs a political concept, which compared to others should have three characteristics: It has to be more socially just, more productive (innovative), and more attractive for alliances.
- For the smaller partner in the coalition it is particularly important to define its own main political projects. They should prove this party as a “modern political force”, be “acceptable to its milieu”, feasible during the current term of office and be good for presentation in the election campaign. Such inter-department projects should be transposed into operative political techniques, be implemented with the common energy of the senators and the parliamentary group. Here, it is worth while to have a close look at the acting of the Greens in the federal government, who – however critical one may see their politics as a whole – have largely succeeded in this respect.⁷⁵
- The main problem of a left party in a coalition obviously is, how credible its policy is or is being perceived. Experience shows that credibility can be won, if one’s policy is marked by continuity instead of opportunistic adaptation to changing conditions and moods, by clearly outlined goals instead of a laissez-faire approach, by justice and openness.

6. The project of a left socialist party entering government in a land only has a real chance of success as a common project of the regional and national party. Only together both can win or lose.

The PDS did not understand this for a long time. In 2001–2004, the relationship between the Berlin PDS and the national party on the project of government participation ran through several phases, which can be described as “*cooperation*” without discussing problems – “*confrontation*” – “*coexistence*” – “*cooperation*” while discussing problems.

When entering government, the Berlin PDS has taken the arduous task of breaking new ground: in the fields of practical policies, ideas and strategies. It did this, without being able to rely on the preparation of the necessary concepts by the whole party. The weaknesses of government participation, therefore, are reflecting the weaknesses of the whole party.

The PDS’ government participation is the practical test on whether and how a Red-Red coalition is able to bring about “different politics” in Germany, whether and how left socialism in government can make a genuine and accepted contribution to that goal. The advocates and actors of the project are obliged to prove that this allows not only a policy of damage limitation or of the “smaller evil”, as their critics suspect, but a real change of politics. They have a significant responsibility. Advocates and opponents will both refer to the result of this “test”.

The least the actors of this venture can, in their “practice test”, expect from the party, is critical support in the spirit of solidarity. Because it is in the interest of the whole party, to pass the test of this experiment and to learn from its experience. If it succeeds, the party as a whole can reap the benefits, e.g. gain new knowledge on society, new competence and more acceptance, strengthen its political influence, enter new actors’ constellations. If it fails, the whole party has to bear the losses, especially the consequences of the demonstration that left socialist government participation offers no practical alternative to the dominating neo-liberal project.

Instead of critical support in the spirit of solidarity, since September/October 2002 there have been increasing accusations to the Berlin PDS and mutual blockages. Only when Lothar Bisky was re-

⁷⁵ See Pasternack 2004.

elected party chairman and the new PDS National Executive constituted in 2003, the situation started changing gradually. This was also when the official debate on government participation in the PDS took a new course.

Government participation is understood and treated by the present PDS leadership as an “immanent part of PDS politics”. The results of government work in Berlin and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania are meanwhile interpreted in a more balanced way. Insiders note that the exchange of information and the common elaboration of alternative concepts for national policies has improved. In June 2004, a second meeting of the PDS National Executive with the chairmen of the Berlin organisation and its parliamentary group on government participation in Berlin took place, where experience was exchanged in an objective and constructive way. The fundamental differences in the evaluation of government participation in the whole party have certainly left their marks on both sides. This can hardly surprise. Because the controversial debate within the PDS on the issue of government participation has deeper roots. After all, it only mirrors the different ideas of the character of the party, its role in today’s society, its strategic orientation and the effectiveness of the different levels of political action.

The dissent in the evaluation of the chances and risks of government participation is therefore not soon to be overcome. The question is, whether this discussion is led on the real issues of political practice: the options and results of left socialist politics in government. Only in this way it can help the party to gain in political substance. But this requires of the national party’s leadership to evaluate the experience of government participation systematically and in an unprejudiced way, to draw the necessary conclusions for its own concepts.

7. Left-socialist politics in government responsibility requires dialogue and communication with the social movements and trade unions.

This is all the more urgent, as, given the participation of a left socialist party in a coalition government, the functions and responsibilities it shares with the social movements and the trade unions, are becoming more diverse. A left-socialist party is not obliged to support an extra-parliamentary movement for the toppling of its own government. Yet, without an open and public dialogue with the various social movements and trade unions, without a strategy of social mobilisation, a change of politics will not be achieved, and a left socialist party will not survive.

The new chances of government participation are to be utilised to consolidate the social and cultural basis of the democratic Left in society, above all to strengthen the actors of civil society and civil engagement. In order to do so, new institutional forms have to be explored.

Beyond that, a dialogue with the Left in the social democracy and the Greens as well as with left party initiatives has to be organised. It could contribute to reach an understanding on the options of alternative policies and transformational projects.

8. Government participation is changing the relationships between the actors of the party – the ministers (senators), the parliamentary group and the party organization.

A party’s government participation makes its ministers and its parliamentary group the focus of public attention and the evaluation of the party itself. Even within the party organization of the land, attention is shifting in the direction of the parliamentarians and those bearing government responsibility, whose knowledge, abilities, and competence are considerably challenged.

Under these circumstances the party organization has to do two things: On the one hand, it has to actively support government participation, show solidarity with and also exercise a certain control of the actors. But its role should not be reduced to that of assistance to and defending of government action. On the contrary, it should retain or rather regain its capability for the strategic offensive (lead open intellectual debates, take the initiative for project formulation, strengthen its ties to the social movements, mobilise the party membership). On the other hand, the party

organization is called to develop “authentic” (but realistic) left socialist policies and discuss them with the public, since government work with its complicated parliamentary negotiation procedures is in general of a compromise nature. This does not mean to lead a double strategy, but left socialist politics in different action spaces is assuming different forms.

9. Government participation of a left socialist party puts the question of its relationship to the social-democratic coalition partner in a new way.

The experience of the Berlin PDS (the PDS of Saxony-Anhalt and of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania) are corresponding with those made by left socialist parties of Western and Northern Europe during their participation in governments led by the social democracy:

- As the experience of Italy, France, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands prove, neither an uncritical proximity to the social democratic coalition partners, nor a harsh distance from them or even the collaboration with populist forces in order to topple coalition governments, have brought success to the socialist left. An uncritical proximity leads to a loss in identity and credibility with the voters. A harsh distance, opposition tactics against the social democracy threaten the government project, lead to uncertainties (in some cases even splits) in the left camp, to the loss of power of a democratic left government, and as a rule to losses of left electoral potential.⁷⁶
- Required is a balanced relationship of strengthening one's own profile in programmes and practical policies (project definition, elaboration of alternatives, a close relationship to the social and democratic movements, presence in social focal points) and an unexcited collaboration with the coalition partner on the basis of mutual trust. Both sides have to accept that the other is different than oneself and essentially should stay so.

Preserving “strategic independence” of the social democracy as well as the two other large political blocks (Red-Green, Black-Yellow) will be decisive for the long-term politics of the PDS. This is rising new questions as to the relationship of cooperation and autonomy.

10. Breaking a coalition is the exception and the last resort. By doing so, the underlying problems as a rule are not solved, but postponed or even worsened.

This does not mean that an early break-up of a coalition, only a temporary cooperation in government must be a taboo. If the basis of cooperation (the coalition agreement) is revoked by one side and/or the other side is being forced to unilateral adaptation to the coalition partner, to giving up its own profile and projects, a break-up of the coalition can principally not be excluded.

After the entry into a coalition for a certain time and after significant political and personal investment in it, a break-up, however, would be the worst case for PDS politics. The consequences are foreseeable:

- In the long run, the credibility crisis of the PDS in the public would more strongly manifest itself (“Hiding their own failures”, “Leaving the sinking ship”, “Just aren't capable”, “Unreliable”) than as a consequence of objective and subjective governing weaknesses .
- For a long time to come, the PDS would be regarded unfit as a coalition and government partner.
- Within the party, this would be seen as a “victory” of the “protest and opposition wing” over the “left socialist reform and society transformation wing” with long-term consequences for the profile and politics of the party.

Reflecting on the issue of left socialist parties' government participation, it must be considered that left socialist politics in government is only *one* form of political action with specific chances and

⁷⁶ See Kebir 2003 and note 67.

limits. Social and political change, social transformation require the “unity and difference” of *various* forms of political *and* social action, of political *and* civil-society actors and projects. All the more so, as we see today a reduction of uniquely state and power-political orientations and an increase in hegemonic socio-political orientations. A left socialist project in Germany is likely to have a chance in society, however, only in the unity of *both* levels of action and orientation. If only for that reason, sharply confronting one level with the other, as can be observed within the PDS, is a questionable approach.

In this sense, the project of a left socialist party in government responsibility – be it in Berlin or Mecklenburg-West Pomerania – is a political and civil society project, a project of strategic learning for gaining new competence, for the qualification of political action in society.

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Interviews

PDS parliamentary group in the Berlin City Council

Hoff, Benjamin; spokesman for economic and scientific affairs

Krüger, Marian; member of the main committee

Lederer, Klaus; spokesman for legal affairs

Liebich; Stefan; head of the PDS group

Simon, Ingeborg; spokesperson for health affairs

Wolf, Udo; member of the foreign affairs committee

Zillich, Steffen; member of the domestic affairs committee, chairman of the PDS

organization in the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg

Zotl, Peter-Rudolf; spokesman for administrative reform

Senators

Flierl, Thomas, Dr, Senator for science, research and culture

Knake-Werner, Heidi; Dr, Senator for social affairs, health, and consumer protection

Wolf, Harald; Vice Mayor and Senator for economic, labour and womens' affairs

PDS Berlin executive

Gabelin, Annegret; member

Liebich, Stefan; chairman

Schatz, Carsten; secretary

Wolf, Udo; member

Social Scientists (Party Researchers)

Neugebauer, Gero, lecturer, Free University of Berlin

Stöss, Richard, lecturer, Free University of Berlin