

German foreign policy position enhanced by Schmidt's victory

by Robert J. Jackson

The October election in the Federal Republic of Germany firmly established the stability of this 'Fourth and Richest Reich', as it has been termed by author Edwin Hartrick. The election campaign and result indicated fairly clearly where West Germany will head in both domestic and foreign policy in the next few years.

On October 5, 1980, after one of the most personally vindictive campaigns in modern German history, 88.7 percent of the eligible voters in the Federal Republic went to the polls to elect a new *Bundestag*. Campaign rhetoric had inexorably cast Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Helmut Schmidt as an arrogant pension swindler, Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) leader Franz Josef Strauss as an emotional anti-Communist madman.

Clear mandate

Before the results were tabulated, American journalists speculated that the only result that would augur badly for the United States was a clear SPD majority, which would make it independent of its coalition partner. The SPD coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) increased their majority from 10 to 45, but most of the increase was due to the FDP, the small coalition partner led by Hans Dietrich Genscher. It moved up its percentage of the vote from 7.9 to 10.6 for a total of 14 more seats.

With the four seat increase of the SPD, the coalition now has 271 seats compared to 226 compared for the CDU/CSU. The splinter parties and the 'Greens', the environmentalist party, fell well below the five percent minimum that is required for representation in the state or federal parliaments.

As expected, the CDU lost more votes in the North than the South. For many northern voters, Strauss was simply not acceptable. The FDP, which possesses a small stable vote of only three percent, gained mostly in the North where many voters did not want the SPD to be too strong, but nevertheless wanted to keep out Strauss.

The parties tended to neutralize each other because the heavy SPD concentration on foreign policy during the campaign contrasted with the CDU/CSU

concern with domestic policy. The CDU played on the traditional fears of war and inflation, and the themes of *Ostpolitik*, domestic debts and pensions were all hotly debated in the campaign.

Since coalition victory was expected, the fact that Schmidt is safely ensconced in office for another four years means that German foreign policy will be fairly predictable and along the lines already established. Under his tutelage, the Federal Republic has already quietly increased its role in world affairs. A tired Helmut Schmidt in the last days of the campaign elaborated on that role by describing a dangerous world within which he was working to create a more relaxed and united central Europe, underlining that it was he, along with Giscard d'Estaing, who kept detente alive by getting the West talking again.

In both foreign and domestic policy, the strong mandate the ruling coalition received will give Mr. Schmidt much greater leverage to pursue his goals. The left wing of the SPD will have considerably less significance now that the FDP is stronger, and the poor showing of the ecologist party will allow him more freedom internally to develop his nuclear policy.

Three pillars

In view of these results, the efforts of the new government will almost certainly continue to build on what have become the three pillars of Mr. Schmidt's foreign policy; *Ostpolitik*, Europe and NATO. Domestically, the state of the economy and energy policy will dominate.

The Schmidt commitment to *Ostpolitik* was one of the most contentious issues of the election campaign. For him, exchange of information and cooperation be-

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