

## The German Electorate Refused?

At last week's general election in Germany, the two main candidates for Chancellor were Angela Merkel of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Gerhard Schröder of the Social Democrats (SPD). Merkel is **relatively pro-free market** and she **supported** the liberation of Iraq. Schröder is a socialist who opposed the liberation.

So in this election the Germans were choosing whether to continue on the path of appeasement and socialism, or to move in the direction of freedom, capitalism and opposition to tyranny. The result was a tiny (1%) swing from the SPD to the CDU/CSU, resulting in a slight majority for the latter, plus a somewhat larger swing away from both of them towards fringe parties. Under a rational electoral system (the British or American electoral system known as First Past the Post), that would have been an end of the matter. Merkel would now be Chancellor implementing her party's programme, and all the other parties would be holding endless post-mortems, struggling to improve their ideas so that next time, they can be the ones who persuade more electors than anyone else that they had the best policies for the future.

Unfortunately nothing of the sort has happened, nor can it happen – because of Germany's proportional representation (PR) electoral system. PR allows parties with a small share of the vote to get seats easily. This provides an incentive for parties to split into ever smaller parties, which then take seats in the legislature making it almost certain that every government will be a coalition government. By contrast, First Past the Post tends to **amplify differences** in the number of seats parties get, compared with their share of the vote, and so tends to give rise to parliaments in which one party has a clear majority.

As a result of the German election, no party will be able to implement the policies that it thinks are right. Consequently, nobody will be able to assign responsibility for the effects of the policies that do get passed. For instance if Merkel becomes Chancellor in a 'grand coalition' with the SPD, the anti-capitalist and anti-American tendency in Germany will blame her for everything that goes wrong and give the SPD credit for everything that goes right. So, ironically, she and her party might do better if she does not become Chancellor. Schröder is arguing that he should remain Chancellor because the two geographical divisions of the CDU/CSU

should be regarded as separate parties, making the SPD the largest party after all. He also says that 'the electorate has refused to give a mandate' to either party. Nonsense. Quite possibly not a single elector took that view. It was a pure artefact of the electoral system.

Yet on such sophistry, the fate of a nation could hang. Another possibility is that Schröder will cling to power by forming a coalition with the far-left PDS – something that he pledged not to do, but the system may not leave him able to fulfil that promise. In that case the outcome of the small electoral swing in which the ruling party is overtaken by the opposition will be that the latter is frozen out of government altogether; and meanwhile the loony-left ideas of the fourth-largest party pervade the character of the next government, for its leader will have the power to remove the Chancellor the moment he displeases him. All in the name of greater representativeness. Such is the perversity of PR.

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