



Volume 10. One Germany in Europe, 1989 – 2009
Election Victory for the “Alliance” (March 19, 1990)

Die Tageszeitung (taz), a left-of-center West Berlin newspaper, describes the extent of the conservative victory in the first free elections in GDR history. The article quotes surprised politicians who try to explain the election results and ponder their possible effect on the unification process.

GDR Voters Hungry for All-You-Can-Eat Kohl-Slaw. Sensational Victory for the “Alliance”

A completely surprising outcome to the Volkskammer elections in the GDR: Conservatives triumph but fall just short of a simple majority. The favored SPD receives a measly 22 percent, the PDS gets 16 percent. Citizens’ movements far behind with 3 percent. “Nothing remains of the GDR but a footnote in world history.”

Berlin (taz) – The first free *Volkskammer* elections in the GDR ended with a sensational victory for the conservative “Alliance.” According to the latest projection by ZDF television at 10 p.m., a landslide victory for the Kohl protégés was certain. It gave the three parties of the “Alliance” a total of 49.8 percent. The question was not whether the conservatives would win, only whether they would achieve an absolute majority. According to this projection, they would fall just short of it, with 199 of 400 seats.

The big loser in the GDR elections, which drew a turnout of more than 93 percent of all eligible voters, is the SPD, which only received 22 percent of the vote. The Social Democrats had been the clear favorite in virtually all of the polls. The PDS, with 16 percent, did surprisingly well.

Within the Alliance, the CDU dominated. According to a projection by ARD television, the former block party and namesake of its sister party in Bonn received 40.5 percent of the vote alone. The DSU brought in 6.8 percent, and Democratic Awakening, with its booted-out Stasi man and ex-chairman [Wolfgang] Schnur, received 1.0 percent.

Of the smaller parties, the Liberal Alliance did best, with about 5 percent. The mothers and fathers of the revolution who banded together in the Alliance 90 coalition [the citizens’ movement], remained on the margins, however, apparently receiving a mere 3 percent of the vote. And the Green Party and the Independent Women’s Association formed an election coalition that received 2 percent of the vote.

Initial statements by East-CDU chief [Lothar] de Maizière and SPD chairman [Ibrahim] Böhme already pointed to the formation of a grand coalition. Maizière said that he advocated broad cooperation with other parties in the future *Volkskammer*, since “constitutional changes must be implemented.” Böhme nodded to him amicably and expressed basic agreement in entering into coalition negotiations with the “Alliance.” He said that he himself would not be part of a future GDR government.

Deputy chairman of the GDR-SPD, Markus Meckel, was the first to acknowledge his party's defeat. He mentioned “extremely problematic” and unfair campaigning in recent weeks and the voters’ “lack of experience” as possible causes and called the result catastrophic for the country. Meckel's party colleague Steffen Reiche said, “The GDR citizens have voted for the government of the Federal Republic, not for any particular party.”

The initial reaction of Horst Korbella, deputy chairman of the East-CDU, was: “I am stunned.” Lothar de Maizière, perhaps the future minister president of the GDR, sees a future “full of expectations for us and for the government of the Federal Republic.” The CDU chief definitely wants to import [Elmar] Pieroth, the wine diluter from the West, to be the economics minister of the GDR.¹

Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke of a “joyous hour,” because the GDR citizens had voted against any form of extremism. He said that the SED's successor party, the PDS, had been dealt a clear rejection. And that the people of the GDR had instead made it clear that they want to embark on a path, together with the Federal Republic, that leads to a unified Germany. At the same time, Kohl appealed to the citizens of the GDR: “Stay home.” Together with the Federal Republic, they should help “build up this wonderful country.”

SPD chancellor candidate Oskar Lafontaine (SPD) predicted a process of rethinking the promises made to the GDR. The CDU would “depart from its designated course, as it did with the issue of GDR resettlers.”² The SPD would keep watch, he said, to make sure that election fraud did not continue to occur.

After the initial prognoses about the results of the first free elections in the GDR, Minister President Hans Modrow sees his party, the PDS, as being in a “position where it's possible to do something.” In his initial response, party chief Gregor Gysi said that the results show that the former SED has made “great progress in the process of renewal.” In the future, he said, the party wants to practice “modern, left-wing, and in particular socialist politics against monopolies and autocracy.”

¹ Elmar Pieroth, a wine dealer accused of altering his product, was Berlin senator of economics in the 1980s and 1990s – ed.

² GDR resettlers [*Übersiedler*] were GDR citizens who moved to West Germany – ed.

The revolutionaries of November 9 were bitterly disappointed by the election returns. Wolfgang Ullmann of "Democracy Now" fears "a hurricane of national sentiment" gathering steam. In the eyes of writer Stefan Heym, after the election results, "nothing will remain of the GDR but a footnote in world history." Heym continued: "The snake is swallowing the hedgehog; the snake will have digestive problems." The elections, he said, were preceded by a revolution created by two groups. Whereas the first group stood up at great risk for a better GDR, the second group wanted to eliminate it and ultimately won.

In light of the election results, Konrad Weiß of the New Forum called for the SPD to "join us in the opposition." Weiß was disappointed with the election results themselves but said he didn't really reckon with more votes. "We don't need hundreds in the *Volkskammer* to present our position." Jens Reich spoke of successfully gaining attention for the citizens' movements in the GDR, despite the fact that Alliance 90 received only three percent of the vote.

Foreign observers viewed the conservative victory with skepticism. The results were perceived as a "victory for the Deutschmark" and a "victory for Kohl" in both East and West. Reports said that a speedy unification of Germany could now be expected.

Source: "DDR-Bürger haben den Kohl fett gemacht. Sensationeller Wahlsieg für die 'Allianz'" ["GDR Voters Hungry for All-You-Can-Eat Kohl-Slaw. Sensational Victory for the 'Alliance'"], *taz*, March 19, 1989.

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