

THE FATIGUED FORTNIGHTLY

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Roman Gods

By Katie Bray

The alarm sounded shrilly beside me. As I rolled over to hit the snooze button, I found a delicate white hand turning it off. I opened my mouth to plead for just another ten minutes, but the lovely creature beside me was already shaking out her golden tresses as she rolled over and stood up.

“Don’t be silly, darling,” she murmured. “You know as well as I that we both have a lot of work to do. I’ve got to send my son to visit this Kevin Federline creature, and I’m sure you’ll want to go to Iraq again this morning to incite some more insurgents.”

“They’ll be fighting for years as it is, ten minutes doesn’t matter,” I began, and then paused, thinking. “Wait, you’re trying to drag Kevin Federline away from his wife and family to marry that hussy, Brittany Spears? I thought we agreed that you wouldn’t break up any more marriages for pop stars.”

“I don’t think, my dear, that you have room to talk on that count. Oh, my husband is coming home from his alternative energy sources conference tonight, so we’ll have to meet at your place.”

“He’s really lost it, hasn’t he? I mean with the way those humans have harnessed the earth’s power, the very atom’s power, I’d think he’d be in his glory—you remember how proud he was at the start of the Industrial Revolution, while we were all thrilled to return to the cultural canon in new and exciting ways through the Romantic poets, he was bragging about coal, mining, and the steam engine. And now he’s worried about protecting the earth?”

“He took modernism harder than most of us, though he doesn’t show it.” She paused, standing in front of her closet. She threw several white robes on the bed before finding ripped jeans and a saucy tee shirt. “Oh I know he’s always been somewhat of a joke, and Sandro certainly didn’t think him wonderful enough to paint in that seashell, but he’s really having a mid-eternity crisis. I think his environmental mumbo-jumbo is harmless enough; it’s Neptune that I’m worried about.”

“Neptune?” I pulled on my own shirt and racked my brains. “I didn’t see him at our last meeting. I noticed because the ambrosia lasted much longer than it usually does. How do you know what he’s been up to anyway?”

“Oh he dropped by one day last week looking for Vulcan. Of course, I told him if he actually showed up to anything anymore, he would have known that Vulcan was at that conference, but he just stormed off (quite literally, my dahlias were drenched), mumbling to himself about hurricanes and tsunamis.”

“You don’t think he’s actually going to go through with those threats, do you?”

“He’s bored. In this age there’s no one as grand as Ulysses to torment on an individual level, so he’s trying to make up for it by causing harm to a larger number of lesser people. I miss the old days, when we all took sides and squared off against each other, really interfering in human wars, none of this weak ‘I respect the decisions of mankind’ nonsense—or, what’s worse, no war at all, like the Cold War.”

“You know I was hoping to get some support going for this current endeavor, take bets, line up sides, just like the old days.”

“Sounds good, darling. Have a good day at work.”

“You, too, Venus.”

Pin Child

By: Evan Stewart

Damn! That's cold.

What's this metal thingy? It's got me! It's got me! Help! Monster! With a claw! And no discernable intent except to leave me stranded 3 feet in the air! Maybe it wants candy!

No. Probably not. I want candy. And I'm bored. What to do?....Hmm.... It is a nice view from up here. Well, I imagine it would be if it weren't so dark. Dark and soothing. The gentle whirl of machines in the background, the feeling of calm permeating every pore, and the cruel harsh light banished from my sight.

AHHHH, CRUEL HARSH LIGHT HAS NOT LEFT! IT WAS ALL A LIE!! A LIE!!!

On the upside, I can see now. Sort of. Light spills onto the hardwood floor below revealing curious black lines between two large metal ditches. I wonder what that's for? Maybe I'm hanging over a sewer pipe in some rough part of town. That's right foos, come to papa. He's got enough canned whoop-ass for every punk who comes a-calling. This is charity, bitches.

Heeeeeeeey, a lady friend. She's pale as the moon, got curves in all the right places, and the sexiest red strips this man has **ever** seen. But she looks worried. There's no need to be scared when daddy is around.

So we're not near a sewer pipe. No good looking lady would ever be seen near that kind of place. But why is she scared? For that matter, why are all these people scared? Someone roughed them up pretty bad. They need a defender. Don't worry my people! I, King of the Dark Place Over the Sewer Pipe, shall protect you! Let me down, foul monster! I must fight things and slay stuff and look all heroic!

It worked! Like my Momma always said, you show a bully your strength and he'll gently lower you to the ground, then place you on a spot marked "X". Momma, you so smart. With your super sharp blade and chrome exterior, you carved a man out of me. Don't worry, Momma, I'll do you proud. See that black thing coming this way? Yeah, your special little guy is gonna knock it silly!

Nooooo!! Man down! Man down! Charlie took us by surprise! Tom too! It's horrible! Bodies everywhere! Oh God, why is the world so cruel? Why must you torment your servants so? I know why. This is WAR. No time for little sissies who run crying and screaming with the first man falls. There are still three of us left. Three to carry the torch of the dead and three to avenge their souls. Forward, men! Stand your ground! When that officer shows up at your family's door, make his salute all the stronger with the courage you show here today! Here it comes.
Stand fast! STAND FAST! AHHHHH!!!

Ugh, my head. Where am I?

Damn! That's cold.

Poem

by Kirsten Hansen, Age 8

Through the waving green grass she flew,
The sun sparkling brightly off droplets of dew,
Against her legs scratched nary a thistle,
The wind sailing past with a gentle whistle.

Up the climbing tree with a leap and a bound,
To a secret spot she had long ago found.
A juicy sweet peach, packed as a snack,
Was quickly grabbed from the bright orange pack.

As well as a novel, a feast for the eyes,
Reading and reading with contented sighs.
Deep in the branches with the book she did snuggle,
Surrounded by the fragrance of honey suckle.

Encircled in reds, greens, and browns,
Not til dinner would she ever come down.



New York

By John Wass

Webster was left speechless trying to describe what existed between these two beings. In the broadest schema, a *being* was all one could actually consider them, for their personal relationship was nothing less than inhuman. One lay teetering on the edge of the bed, her small frame stiff as a board, and her feet recently wiped clean of the muck she had accrued during a midnight trek to the local Thai store.

Now, one could expect normally to find condoms thrown inconspicuously into dressers with the hope of retrieving one at a more opportune time; Janice is, at best, the illegitimate step-child of Normal. Strewn so freely that even poor Oedipus would have no difficulty finding one, were individually-wrapped sanitary wipes used solely for personal cleansing prior to the parting of sheets for bedtime. Adjacent to these wipes was her shag teddy, a relic of a failed past relationship that, for some reason, brought peace to a weary day; it was her gatekeeper for the Sandman's early morning rendezvous. It was a mystery that a symbol of such a heartbreaking time could prepare her mind for sleep, but the man lying a thousand miles away on the other side of the bed was more than eager to solve this conundrum.

Continued on page 5...

Conventional Wisdom
By Meg Weckstein

Conventional wisdom is: write
what you know, but
I can't write about this.
My whole creative process is so
Fallacious - I
Wonder if they make
Viagra for writers.

~~~~~

I got caught in the rain and when my green shoes get wet the dye  
bleeds.

It stains my socks

And my feet. Even after two showers (three,

Four, as many as you can count showers) my toe nails

Stay tinted green. Even nail polish remover doesn't get the color off.

I have to wait for the green to grow out, then I can clip it.

I need to paint them – my toenails. The only color I can find that's

Not blue or purple (middle school nail polish will never run out) is

A kind of mauve. It'll do.

I need to paint them because the only black shoes I brought

Are open-toed. I will not have Jolly Green Giant toes for the funeral.

Everyone will notice because we will all be staring down

At our feet. It's a fact of life.

Ironic.

Mauve painted over Jolly Green Giant toes. It

Feels symbolic. Perhaps not. Perhaps it's just mauve over green in

Black shoes at a funeral.

*Continued from page 3*

He, too, slept with his back to the center of the bed, except Tim's body preferred the fetal position. A throw pillow clutched between his arms reassured him that he was not alone; the side effects of a five year break-up still lingered, weighing heavily on his mind and body. Though asleep, his subconscious would never consider relinquishing its grip and allow the pillow to crash violently to the cold floor below; his dreams intensify, distraught, unsafe.

A full-size bed split three ways; no-man's land separates the two. The cold radiates from the center out, and before morning Janice and Tim will feel its effects at the extremities. It is too late, the chill has awoken Tim and he becomes restless. "I could roll over," he thinks to himself. He begins to rationalize, "Her body will keep me warm ... she's got to be cold ... I'm doing this for the both of us, not selfishly." Five minutes pass and he manages to squirm halfway across the bed; faintly rejoicing beneath his breath. In the subsequent five minutes he cuts the distance in half again. Her scent is getting stronger and he can now identify the outline of her black hair pulled tight in a ponytail.

Another five minutes of meticulous maneuvering gains him half the distance he previously gained. Ready to lunge for Janice and relieve his body of the cold numbing his heart, Tim is taken aback by her body's sudden unprovoked rocking. This causes his outstretched arm to waver, and instead of embracing her, he watches her body fall limp to the floor. Only a faint thud is heard, for the new carpet successfully muffles the sound. Immediately Tim can feel his blood surging through his veins, back to his heart, vigorously pumped back out to fight the chill overwhelming his body. The warmth is instantaneous, as is the deep sleep that ensues. His body goes limp.

Moral: When you are cold, turn on the heater.

## Question and Fart by Rachel Mulheren

anyone can write. more  
than  
this  
is  
unmental  
fun damn tally  
fundamentally  
is  
this  
won  
more than canny right?

Stranger.  
I rode three  
stories up  
from the music  
library  
with the ghost  
of a previous pass-  
enger's  
fart.

# German Politics: Victory in Defeat?

*Or, Fun With Balloons*

By Keith White

A major step was taken on Monday towards resolving the German governing crisis. Following one of the closest elections ever, and weeks of speculation over which parties would comprise the governing party, earlier this week both major parties agreed to form a grand coalition government.

The basics of the deal are as follows:

- Angela Merkel, leader of The Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), receives the German chancellorship
- The Social Democratic Party (SPD) will retain a majority of the cabinet majorities (8 of 14). Their leader, Gerhard Schroder, is out of the government completely.

So what's going on? And why is this election such a big deal? And what does that above deal mean anyhow?

## Political Significance of the Election

*Strange Days in Berlin*

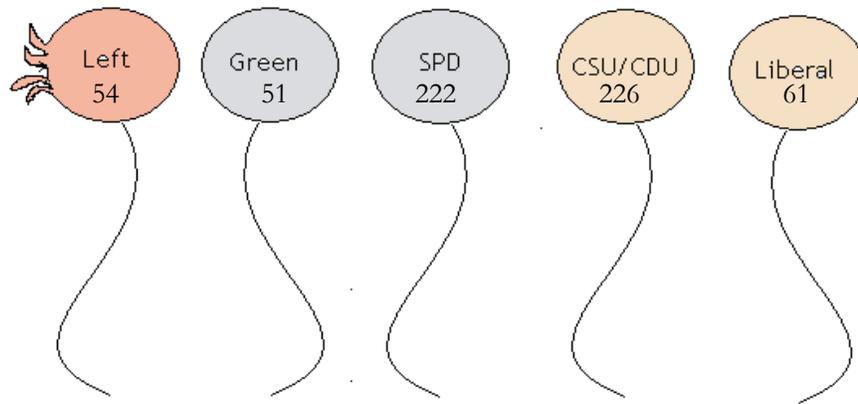
While being the land of dirndl and Lederhosen, Germany also stands as a parliamentary system. When one votes in Germany, they make two votes. One for their district representative, and then another for their preferred party. Hence, any party that receives at least 5% of the German vote gets representation within the German Parliament (the Bundestag). Now there is another house, the Bundesrat, representing the 16 states of Germany. In its case, states are given representation based on their size (kind of like Congress). It basically serves as a check on the Bundestag. For, like the British Parliament, the Bundestag merges both the executive and legislative powers of the state. So, while the Bundesrat is important, the focus of this article will be the Bundestag vote.

The electoral result of September's election was a virtual tie between the SPD and the CDU/CSU parties (think of them as the Democratic and Republican parties German-style). The combined CDU/CSU block received 35.2 percent of the vote, as opposed to the SPD's party's 34.2 percent. The result: deadlock.

Now, both parties came into the national election with planned coalition partners. Owing to the Parliamentary style government, German politics has numerous small parties— that when merged with the larger parties, can form governing collations. For the SPD, the Green Party stood as a critical ally. But the Green Party lost ground, getting only 8.1% of the vote. The Greens and SPD could not manufacture a majority for the SPD—as they did last election. So what about the planned coalition partner for the CDU/CSU: the Liberals? While they defied expectations by getting nearly 10% of the vote, it still wasn't enough to form a coalition.

But, if you have been adding up voting percents, there's still 10% out there. Did Germans just vote for 3 small parties, none of which received the minimum 5%?

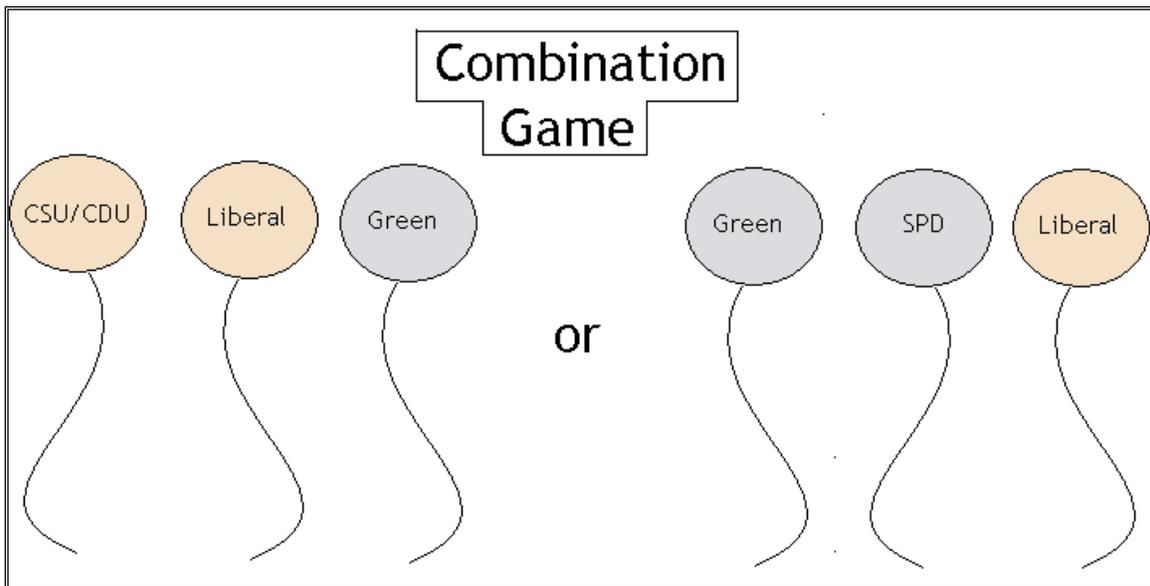
Outside of both camps stood the Left Party, a pyrrhic party deemed untouchable by the establishment. While its 8.7% was significant, it was out of both major blocks potential coalitions. Why? It stands as an extreme leftist party, considered unable to lead Germany forward. While not calling for a socialist revolution, they were formed out of dissatisfaction with the SPD leadership.



And so we get to the same result: electoral deadlock.

Neither major party could broker a majority of seats within the lower house with traditional allies: 302 is the magic number. Faced with this situation, the SPD and CSU/CDU first tried to bring another smaller party into the fold. Why? Bringing a smaller party would get either major party the requisite number of seats, with the least amount of power dilution.

The race began with the SPD gunning for the Liberals, and the CDU/CSU hungering for some Greens.

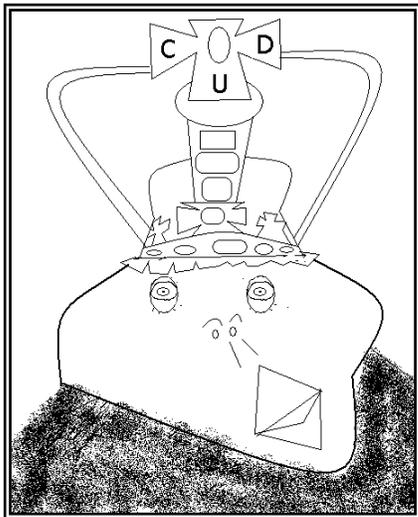


As we know, neither of the above combinations occurred. The question is why?

A CSU/Liberal/Green coalition would have to overcome a major obstacle: the Green Party's route to electoral power through the SPD coalition. Since 1998 the Green Party and SPD have forged the ruling coalition within Germany. Thus, barring a huge shift in Green politics, the Greens seem a stable leftist party. If they did decide to cynically hold onto power with the Liberal and Christian parties, they would probably be punished for this decision in the next election. Why? Any formation of a German government shares one basic distinction: that it will not last for long. Most

commentators give the current CDU/CSU and SPD alliance a year. So if the Greens bailed out on their ideological partners to simply hold onto power, they would probably destroy any chance of a coalition with the SPD for the near future. And seeing as the CDU/CSU would run in the next election pinning their Liberal partner's success, any position within a Conservative government would be a tenuous one at best for the Greens.

By stepping aside, the Greens preserve their current ideological orientation and can wait until next year to generate a Leftist majority. The same logic applies to a hypothetical combination of the Liberal and Green and SPD. While the Liberals have never held power, they desire a conservative government, so they too will hedge their bets until next year. But both these options overlook the simplest reason.



A Grand Coalition of the CSU/CDU and SPD is the natural result. Both parties are large and heterogeneous. The SPD and CSU/CDU parties consist of liberal and conservative wings. It is important to remember that the Christian Democrats are not a radical reform party, but rather a moderate center right party. When it comes to divides over the economy and social policy, the CDU/CSU and SPD have more flexibility to maneuver for compromise.

The smaller parties can afford ideological purity. Their voters knowingly choose them to represent certain, small causes—and don't necessarily expect them to be in the governing coalition. But the larger parties represent large sectors, all with the profound desire to have diverse needs met. Both parties are therefore not only accustomed to the art of compromise, but have a vital need for real power in the Bundestag.

### *Germany at a Crossroads*

Why are the Germans so conflicted about the way forward? One can perhaps understand their ambivalence by investigating their recent strains.

It is certainly not spring time in Germany. Germany, though no longer physically divided, has paid a sharp price for its reunification: 20% of its budget (the equivalent of America's defense spending). When one factors in the considerable amount of social spending by the German state, economic stagnation is a natural result. What was physically divided is now economically drained. The economic juggernaut of Europe has endured a decade of low growth (and recently non-growth) and creeping unemployment. Gerhard Schroder won election in 1994 campaigning against the initial economic exhaustion brought on by reunification. Over ten years later, the malaise has not lifted from the German economy. Below you will find a chart of the economic woes facing Germany (borrowed from a recent OECD report).

While this chart makes Germany look exceeding dire, most Germans still enjoy a high standard of living. But Germans know their current trajectory is not sustainable. So why is it taking so long for real reform (which most voters want). Why is Germany not producing a reform figure, in the mold of Britain's Thatcher?

|                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Employment Benefits</p> <p><i>Pernicious Incentives</i></p>              | <p><u>Problem:</u> The German state requires firms to give large benefits to their employees. These benefits make every 1 dollar spent on workers, cost another 1 dollar spent to the government (As opposed to the US 1:1.30 ratio). This system discourages risk-taking.</p>                                                                                                                                  | <p><u>Solution:</u> Cut workers' benefits, but this comes at a strong price: alienating a large sector of the voting block. With unemployment so high and business growth so feeble, there is a growing consensus for a moderate cut in worker benefits (by both direct and indirect cuts)</p>                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>Export Economy Blues</p> <p><i>The fizzling boom</i></p>                 | <p><u>Problem:</u> European economics have depended on giving other developed countries high-technology goods. Hence, it could be said that the unjust American economic system makes room for the egalitarian German system.</p>                                                                                                                                                                               | <p><u>Solution:</u> Germany export sector is actually beginning to pick up. Yet the costs of labor mobility have made the firms less competitive. Furthermore, years of economic stagnation have hurt domestic economic growth.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p>Tax System</p> <p><i>Costly Leveling</i></p>                             | <p><u>Problem:</u> The top 20% of German income-earners face a 45% income tax (vs. the American rate of 35%). This is a recent reduction, before last year the maximum rate of taxable income was 55%. Unlike the American system, the lower 3/5s of the economic motor pay less to the system.</p>                                                                                                             | <p><u>Solution:</u> The general solution is to spread the costs of the welfare state. An easy way to do this is to increase work co-payments. The high rate of German unemployment is making the tax system unsustainable. Welfare states only work, when people are making taxable incomes. People also out of work, won't be as against corporate tax-cuts to generate jobs.</p>                                                                            |
| <p>Unemployment</p> <p><i>A Path towards Wealth?</i></p>                    | <p><u>Problem:</u> Benefits are higher and not tied to a demand that workers find other work (equivalent or not).</p> <p>Naturally, citizens will take advantage of such a system—sucking up public money while making it harder for firms that need workers to fill their needs.</p>                                                                                                                           | <p><u>Solution:</u> Germany can, like Sweden, institute a brutal retraining program. People taking unemployment would have to accept state retraining any job offers. The social costs of such a policy can be large. Past white-collar workers will find it hard to work in less prestigious positions. Such a policy without a complimentary policy of fostering business growth would lead to alienating a mobilized section of the German population.</p> |
| <p>Education System:</p> <p><i>Better Learning, but Less Economical</i></p> | <p><u>Problem:</u> Within college-education, competition for placement is low. Naturally, the government favors large access to universities. Yet, for such a costly system it is important that the state make smart social capital investments.</p> <p>This means not only making it harder to get into college, but making structural incentives for students to learn the skills needed by their state.</p> | <p><u>Solution:</u> As seen in Britain, calls to make the upper-education system more competitive and efficient can stir strong dissention. Education, like healthcare, is considered a privilege with Germany. And going after predominantly wealthy and educated populations tend to get politicians in trouble (especially when they themselves are products of the status-quo).</p>                                                                       |

## *Comparing Thatcherite Britain with Merkelite Germany*

Thatcher entered government during a much more pronounced crisis than that of the current state of the German economy. Past Conservative and Labour attempts to satisfy economic needs through Keynesian economics had hit a wall. Before, England guaranteed full employment at a cost of steady (but manageable) inflation. While workers 'earned' less, the trade off seemed fair (meaning politically viable). Additionally, the tool of printing more money to encourage domestic growth and jobs guaranteed elections for both major parties throughout the post-war years.

By the mid-1960s and 70s the situation had changed. The British economic system, after 20 years of riding a post-war boom, started to fall behind. Businesses that were at top form, began to recede. Depressed GDP made the typical Keynesian approach to deficits less effective. Additionally, the oil shock of 1973 cost Britain considerable sums of money. Since they were dependent on foreign oil, this only exacerbated their deficit. The tried and true strategy of solving problems with money led to out of control inflation. Suddenly, what had worked for so long broke down.

It took a considerable crisis for British politics to reform itself. Remember, Britain shares the rare distinction of taking an IMF loan.

Germany, while in poor condition, is not facing such a threat. The middle class can still count on its money being worth something. But the costs of delay are even more dangerous: the German economy is over a third of the economy of the European Union. In a sense, the laggard German economic motor preserves itself off the larger European economic system. And because it is the European economic powerhouse, other countries can do little about forcing Germany to accept reforms.

Germans aren't blinder to reality than others. So why are they moving so slowly?

### *Institutions*

There is an interesting institutional difference between Germany and Britain. While both are parliamentary democracies, Britain does not give as representative a political outcome as Germany.

Britain uses a "first-past-the post system" for its elections. In each district the candidate with the most votes wins the seat. Unlike in Germany, there is no guaranteed representation for any party that receives over 5% of the vote. Thus, like the American system, the British system exaggerates the margin of victory for the victorious parties. An example of this system's effect is worth noting. Within the critical year of 1979 (the one that brought Thatcher to power) the conservative party did garner 7% more of the vote than Labor, but held 7% less than the combined Labor-Liberal total vote. With such a thin mandate, how could it impose its will on British politics? Simple: its representation in Parliament was a 43 seat majority.

A result like this in Germany would have made Thatcher's government a minority, unable to guarantee the necessary votes for her reforms. In all likelihood, the Labor and Liberal parties would have formed a stable majority government. Such an outcome would have delayed, if not further hampered, British economic reform.

In the British system, the party receiving the most votes (however few they might be) almost never has to form a coalition government. The exact opposite is true in Germany. Yet such thoughts are

academic. Barring a revolution or mass British migration, German politics are staying just that: German.

*What will be the effects of this Grand Coalition?*

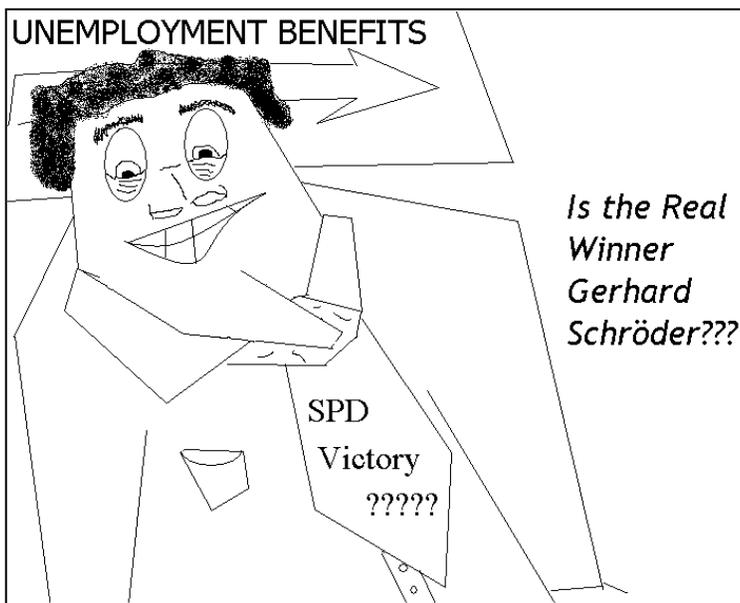
On the face of it, the winner of the German government deal is Merkel. The election was originally Merkel's to lose: in early polls her party was ahead of the SPD by 15-20%. But a late surge by the SPD reduced her victory to 1%. Speculation ran wild that while victorious, Merkel's diminished victory would bring her removal as CDU/CSU head. Yet she has survived, and now takes the reigns of power. This is a first for her, and a first for her nation: she is the first female Chancellor of Germany.

But it seems clear that she will most certainly not be the German Thatcher. Her diminished victory in the general elections has broken her control over the party, strengthening factions against her proposed reform path. Furthermore, she leads a government where her main rivals for power, the SPD, can logjam any policy at a whim.

There is a hope that these two center parties can bring together their reform wings, and push aside their more inert members. Such a combination could lead to substantial reform. And unlike a combination between the CDU/CSU-Liberals-Greens or SPD-Green-Liberals, this Grand Coalition as a majority brings with it control of both houses German Legislature (the Bundestag and Bundesrat). So if the parties can agree to anything, at least it will become law. But if even the coherent coalition of the SPD and Green parties retarded Schroder's plan for economic reform, how can a Grand Coalition possibly deliver any real reform?

The election has convinced both major parties that the electorate is in flux. Instead of fostering cooperation, both parties will jockey for position in the next election. And for Merkel, the face of the government, a year of stagnation would ultimately end her career and bring her party back to the minority.

The real winner seems to be Schroder. Whether the government fails or succeeds he has the flexibility to take credit or run against come the next election. Why?



While Schroder has lost the Chancellorship, he has achieved two important results. First, he came back from political oblivion to a razor thin loss. The majority of Germans voted for Left Parties (when one counts the votes of the radical Left party). There has not been, at least yet, a profound shift in the German political make-up.

Second, by forming a government that guarantees his party equal power, he has kept the SPD strong and has indebted the SPD leaders that hold cabinets positions to himself.

If the government succeeds, he can take significant credit for it and position

himself as the natural head-of-state prepared to steer Germany straight after a bout of painful reforms. And if the government fails, Schroder can use the ensuing public disillusionment to revamp his SPD party, pushing it to accept greater reforms—making it more formidable in the next election.

In short, Schroder has the political benefit of being both a literal outsider (he has no official position within the government) and an intimate constructor of it.

But such a scenario for Schroder's return to power is unlikely. The history books are what will be important for him now. And for that he needs an SPD that continues to hold power and remains a viable party. Its one threat, Merkel leading a glorious reform that turns voters her way, has been diluted: any progress she makes has to be shared with the SPD. While he will no longer be the one to push the party, he has provided it with breathing space. If this is used correctly, the Left will remain the governing party of Germany.

One thing is clear: the German population will soon have to make a definitive decision. Last month saw the opposite. Change is coming: the only question is when.

