

ONE

INTRODUCTION

For four decades, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) ruled the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with an iron fist and a tin ear. Well known for its inefficient economic planning, fealty to Moscow, and ruthless secret police, the SED, however, was not renowned for flexibility in the face of change. With its Stalinist structures and aging cadres, the SED stubbornly clung to a communist system in crisis, resisting even the limited reforms that Mikhail Gorbachev had begun to introduce in the Soviet Union after 1985. East German politburo member Kurt Hager famously articulated his party's hard line in an April 1987 interview in the West German weekly *Der Stern*: "If your neighbor changes his wallpaper in his flat, would you feel obliged to do the same?"¹ Such bullheadedness earned SED leaders a reputation for being "fossils" and "cement-heads." They were caught off guard by the pro-democracy demonstrations that spread in fall 1989. In October, Gorbachev, visiting East Berlin for the fortieth anniversary of the GDR's founding, cautioned SED chief Erich Honecker that "life itself punishes those who arrive too late." Just weeks later, Honecker and other hardliners were swept from office, casualties of a peaceful revolution.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) formed out of the wreckage of the SED in late 1989. It is notable that this party, whose leaders and members came overwhelming from the ruling party, proved as adept at adaptation as the SED was rigid. Two remarkable transformations have allowed it to survive and even thrive, against all odds, in unified Germany. The first metamorphosis occurred when the PDS successfully transformed itself into a party of regional protest and interest representation. Its success as a de facto eastern party led to its consolidation and set the stage for subsequent efforts to establish itself throughout the country. As heir to the discredited SED, it overcame a hostile environment in which its very existence was viewed by many as a provocation. Germany's center-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) characterized it as left-wing extremist and demanded that federal and state

offices of constitutional protection closely monitor it. Others opposed it out of concern for transitional justice, as an obstacle to an honest and forthright reckoning with the GDR past. Nonetheless, the PDS' share of the eastern vote in Bundestag elections climbed from 11.1 percent in 1990 to 19.8 percent in 1994 to 21.6 percent in 1998. Its regional resurgence, a central focus of this study, sheds light on the relationship between representation and integration in unified Germany.

In the mid-2000s, the PDS embarked on an extreme makeover. Through name changes and party merger, the PDS became the Left Party (*die Linke*) in 2007.² The new party drew heavily on the PDS' membership, leadership, and electorate, yet, unlike its predecessor, surged in western Germany. Whereas the PDS had never come close to clearing the 5 percent threshold needed to enter a western state parliament, the Left Party joined six western state parliaments between 2007 and 2009.³ In the September 2009 Bundestag election, the Left showed that it was a rising force in the west, where it captured 8.3 percent of the vote, in the east, where it finished a close second to the CDU at 28.5 percent, and nationally with nearly 12 percent. Just seven years earlier, the PDS had garnered four percent nationally. How did its successor so dramatically expand beyond the former GDR?

To its critics and supporters alike, the PDS became a measure of eastern integration after unification. Initially it was widely assumed that once easterners began integrating successfully within the Federal Republic (FRG), they would lose interest in a party so closely identified with the GDR. A leading scholar reasonably observed, "the constituency for an Ossie party is likely to exclude all those in the East who are economically successful and politically cosmopolitan. That would leave the PDS as the party of a shrinking constituency fighting a rear-guard action."⁴ The party regarded its own political isolation as evidence that western elites did not want pluralist integration, but rather eastern assimilation to the western model. The PDS stated in its 1993 program that: "In contrast to the established parties we do not want a westernization of the east."⁵ In the words of Gregor Gysi, the party's parliamentary leader, "Whoever wants unity must come to terms with the PDS and also with me. Unity cannot be had any cheaper. I had to get used to your chancellor and now you also have to get used to me."⁶

The PDS and the Left Party are windows on the complex relationship between representation and integration. On a general level, this relationship is of great bearing to contemporary Europe. It lies at the heart of the widely felt democracy deficit in the European Union (EU); it is central to debates surrounding immigrant communities; and it informs center-periphery relations in many European countries. This book examines the nexus between German unification, eastern concerns about representation, and the electoral performance of the PDS and Left Party. Its story of halting integration, placed

in a comparative perspective, underscores why perceptions of representation especially matter during times of state building.

The Left is among the largest parties in eastern Germany and is increasingly influential in national politics. There is much interesting and important about this addition to a German party system that has proven remarkably durable since the late 1950s.⁷ How did the PDS transform itself into a successful party of eastern German protest and interest representation? How did a regionally based party become a viable national one by the late 2000s? A former communist party, carrying baggage from a discredited dictatorship, had achieved in German politics not only a rare second act as a *de facto* regional party, but also a third act as a left-socialist protest party with broad national appeal. Yet the second act had not fully played out when the third began, with tensions persisting between the party's past and present incarnations.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Drawing on primary materials, secondary literature, interviews, survey results and voting data, this book focuses on the PDS and Left Party within the context of German unification and its aftermath. As case studies, they provide a gauge of evolving east–west relations in Germany since unification. They allow for a broadly comparative vantage point on integration and minority representation in the Federal Republic. This entails not only the incorporation of sixteen million easterners following unification, but the post-1945 absorption of around eight million German expellees from the east. The rise of the PDS relates to political regionalism and the recent resurgence of regional parties in advanced industrial democracies.

This opening chapter begins by examining leading theoretical perspectives on the PDS and its successor party—the Left. To account for the PDS' comeback as a mostly eastern party, some scholars pointed to its appeal among those hit hard by the post-communist economic transition; others highlighted its ties to a socialist subculture that had survived unification. Two additional perspectives had the PDS and Left filling “vacuums” in the German party system, whether as the proponent of abandoned left-wing positions or as the champion of neglected eastern interests. After considering the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, this book considers how descriptive representation, reflected in the composition of elites, affects minority interest representation, institutional legitimacy, and a sense of equal citizenship among historically disadvantaged groups in society. It argues that a lack of descriptive representation, as measured by the number of easterners in elite positions in unified Germany, played a key part in PDS and Left Party success in unified Germany.

This opening chapter proceeds to show how the narrowing of a descriptive representation gap in West Germany advanced the integration of expellees in the 1950s, thereby hastening the decline of the refugee party, the League of Expellees and those Deprived of their Rights (BHE). Formed in 1950, the BHE had challenged the political establishment on behalf of disadvantage Germans expelled from central and southeastern Europe following World War II. This chapter first examines the BHE's leadership, membership, and voters in the early 1950s. As will be shown, the West German political class responded to the expellee challenge in a manner that hastened the BHE's decline. How does the rise and fall of the BHE relate to the PDS and Left Party? The lessons of the largely successful expellee integration of the 1950s support this study's main theoretical findings about descriptive representation, while offering insights into the continuities and discontinuities of postwar German political development. They also raise the question of why the West German political class went to enormous efforts to accommodate expellee elites in the 1950s, yet all but ignored the lessons of this successful integration in the early 1990s.

Chapters 2 to 4 examine how the PDS came to embrace eastern protest and interest representation as a successful political strategy. Chapter 2 introduces the PDS as it emerged out of the collapsing SED in 1989–1990 and struggled to find its way in unified Germany. Its SED roots were a mixed blessing. While they provided grassroots presence and an experienced leadership, they undermined the party's efforts to distance itself from the discredited GDR. In 1990–1991, the party appeared as the representative of the former communist elites not as the voice of the east. Chapter 3 shows how unification ran up against descriptive representation for eastern Germans. It broaches the reasons behind the elite substitution and the PDS' exclusion, focusing on state-building concerns, transitional justice, and party politics. With German unification, the logic of state building had overlapped imperfectly with the forging of a common national identity. Policies that hastened institutional uniformity left many easterners feeling alienated and marginalized in their new country. Chapter 4 shows how inadequate descriptive representation, an unintended consequence of unification policies, enhanced the PDS' stature as an eastern representative, its grassroots presence, and its standing among protest voters. This was a time when easterners grew critical of the country's political institutions and the PDS attacked the established parties for an alleged anti-eastern bias. Taken together, these three chapters examine the PDS' resurgence against the backdrop of mounting eastern concerns over representation.

Chapters 5 and 6 chronicle the transformation of the PDS into a party with greater national appeal. By the early 2000s, the PDS no longer found itself at the center of election campaigns, nor did it experience parliamentary quarantine. Although normalization offered opportunities, as chapter 5

shows, it also eroded the pillars of the PDS' past electoral success, causing problems typical for protest parties in power. This contributed to the party's 2002 Bundestag election setback, its subsequent crisis, and its determination to navigate a new course. In chapter 6, we analyze the party's return to national prominence as part of a reconstituted left. The chapter covers the initial cooperation between the PDS and the Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice (WASG) in the 2005 federal election, the resulting process of formal merger and the Left Party's position in a transformed party system.

The concluding chapter places the argument in broader comparative perspective by showing that PDS success in the 1990s had much in common with regional party resurgence in other industrialized democracies at the time. Uneven economic development, a sense of cultural distinctiveness, and the lack of descriptive representation also bolstered regionally based parties in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Canada in the 1990s. The sources of political regionalism were not so different from those present in the FRG.

PERSPECTIVES ON PDS SUCCESS

With its electoral gains, the PDS became the object of extensive scholarly attention. Political scientists focused on how the party was profiting from economic downturn in eastern Germany, on its following among an established socialist subculture in the east, its growing success among left-wing voters disillusioned by the rightward shift of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, and its function as "the voice of the east" in a western-dominated political system. Each of these perspectives will be briefly examined in turn.

Winning the Losers?

As the transition to capitalism proved wrenching, communist successor parties rebounded throughout east-central Europe.⁸ These parties, which enjoyed an organizational head start over their rivals, often in the form of large party memberships and seasoned party officials, developed social democratic platforms that called for a gentler economic transition without forsaking the market economy, individual liberties, minority rights, or eventual EU and NATO membership. They were able to profit from shaken voter confidence in previous non-socialist governments that may have laid the foundation for future growth, yet had presided over declining living standards for many citizens. In the early 1990s, the political scientist Herbert Kitschelt put forth a model of cleavage formation in the post-communist states of east-central Europe. "The general proposition following from this image of post-communist social structure is straightforward: Those who expect to become

'winners' of the market system are likely to endorse libertarian/promarket policies and parties, whereas potential 'losers' will search for protection from the process of privatization and market dependence."⁹ Many peasants, workers in inefficient state-owned industries, salaried public servants, and those on fixed incomes faced economic hardship and increased social insecurity. Transition losers lost confidence in the parties in power and became a constituency, although by no means the sole or even primary one, of the resurgent postcommunists.¹⁰

In Poland, the Union of the Democratic Left (UDL), headed by the post-communist Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP), increased its vote share from nearly 12 percent in 1991 parliamentary elections to around 20 percent in 1993, enough to form a governing coalition with the Polish Peasant Party. In 1995, Alexander Kwasniewski, who had served as youth minister in a communist government in the mid-1980s, became president after edging the incumbent Lech Walesa in a close election. The Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP), as successor to the communist party, came to power after increasing its parliamentary presence from 33 seats in 1990 to 209 seats in 1994. In Lithuania, the Democratic Labor Party (LDDP), which had broken away from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1990, assumed office in 1992 after its share of the vote in parliamentary elections increased to 42.6 percent. Former communist politician Algirdas Brazauskas was elected president in early 1993.

Did the PDS resurgence fit this pattern of post-communist resurgence? On July 1, 1990, Chancellor Helmut Kohl addressed the nation on the day of the landmark currency union that had delivered the Deutschmark to East Germany. He reassured East Germans that "no one will be doing worse than before" and famously promised "blossoming landscapes."¹¹ Massive deindustrialization and structural unemployment followed, with total employment in eastern Germany contracting by more than one-third (or 3.5 million jobs) in the three years after the peaceful revolution of fall 1989.¹² Although living standards quickly rose in the region,¹³ due in large part to financial transfers from the west, many eastern Germans nonetheless regarded themselves as worse off than before.

It was at this time that the PDS rebounded. Thomas Falkner and Dietmar Huber recognized a broader pattern: "As in Poland, Lithuania and Hungary, the success of the SED heirs is also initially and primarily a reflex to the severities of the systemic change, which in Germany, given the old federal states' economic strength, was linked less to the existential/material sphere than to the entire manner of unification that spelled downsizing, elimination, closings and exclusion for whole strata of the population of the former GDR."¹⁴ In the 1994 Bundestag election, the PDS captured 24 percent of the vote among unemployed easterners, outpacing the 19.8 percent it had

won in the east.¹⁵ It did well among easterners who had been compelled to change jobs and it performed strongly in areas hard hit by agricultural restructuring.¹⁶ The party more than doubled its vote share—from 12 percent in 1990 to 26 percent in 1994—among eastern women aged twenty-five to thirty-four, a demographic group that confronted joblessness, fewer day-care opportunities and restricted abortion rights.¹⁷ The PDS made gains among easterners who had lost out or believed they had lost out in the post-communist transition. Rainer-Olaf Schultze concluded, “the PDS, simply put, is the party of unification losers.”¹⁸

Yet other data did not support this conclusion. In the 1994 federal election, the PDS performed disproportionately well among eastern civil servants and salaried employees, while underperforming among manual laborers,¹⁹ even as deindustrialization shuttered factories throughout the region. PDS voters were on the whole better educated and relatively well off.²⁰ In 1998, Oskar Niedermayer pointed out that the PDS voter has “at the least an average income, which once again makes clear that the PDS vote is not comprised of the objective (material) unification losers, but rather the subjective (psychological) unification skeptics or objectors.”²¹ A long-term statistical analysis revealed limited supporting evidence for the transition losers’ hypothesis.²²

Economic crisis had created fertile ground for protest and populism in the former GDR and throughout eastern and southeastern Europe. It did not, however, determine the form that this would take, whether success for ultra-nationalists (e.g., Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party in Russia), communists (e.g., the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in the Czech Republic) or for a regional party such as the PDS. The relative disadvantage of eastern Germans vis-à-vis their western cousins in newly unified Germany added insult to injury and lifted the PDS, as a *de facto* regional party, in the 1990s.

A Socialist Milieu in the East?

In the 1990s, the PDS was widely regarded as the representative of a socialist milieu in eastern Germany. The concept of a milieu party drew upon M. Rainer Lepsius’s influential analysis of the party systems of Imperial Germany (1871–1918) and the Weimar Republic (1919–1933). To Lepsius, the concept of a “social moral milieu” designates “social units which are formed through a coincidence of several structural dimensions such as religion, regional tradition, economic situation, cultural orientation, and a configuration of intermediary groups specific to a social stratum. The milieu is a socio-cultural entity that is characterized by a specific affiliation of such dimensions with a certain segment of the population.”²³ If anchored in a

social milieu, a party can count on loyal voters and dedicated activists that derive identity through party service.

The PDS was the only party in eastern Germany rooted in a tightly knit subculture. Drawn from the GDR's upper service class (*Dienstklasse*), its core supporters included eastern intelligentsia, former state functionaries, officials in the SED and its affiliated youth, women's and trade union associations. These party stalwarts had remained loyal to the GDR through thick and thin and now backed the PDS. In unified Germany, they espoused a commitment to social justice, anti-fascism, and international solidarity, defended (and often embellished) the GDR's achievements, expressed dissatisfaction with the FRG, and considered unification to have been a de facto annexation. They held "anti-western" values that included a distrust of the market, distance from the nation, and slightly more pronounced authoritarian values than libertarian ones. They were geographically concentrated in the former administrative centers of the GDR, especially in East Berlin. As the SED successor, the PDS represented the interests and attitudes of this anti-western milieu in the former GDR.²⁴ It seemed doubtful that subsequent generations of easterners, who came of age in the Federal Republic, would fill the ranks depleted by the passing of rock-ribbed partisans. The PDS was expected to slowly wither away.

A comparative perspective seemed to bear this out. Slow decline beset communist milieu parties in southern Europe after the cold war. In the 1990s, these parties stagnated and turned inward toward a traditional communist subculture that had existed in Latin Europe for much of the twentieth century. Communist parties in France, Portugal, and Spain, and Italy gradually lost members and voters as their core milieu eroded.²⁵ They retained symbols, ideological appeals, and platforms that still resonated among traditionalists, but generally did not attract new constituencies. This fate appeared to await the PDS after unification.

However, the PDS did not experience gradual decline, but rather nearly doubled its eastern vote share in federal elections in the 1990s. Moreover, in the 1998 Bundestag election, it emerged stronger in agrarian regions and among blue-collar workers—neither part of the pro-GDR subculture. All the while, its base fell in relative importance, dropping from nearly two-thirds of all PDS voters in 1994 to just over half in 1998.²⁶ Overall, there were signs that the PDS was becoming an eastern catchall party (*Volkspartei*) that appealed across class, regional, and generational lines. The party did well among young voters, many of whom had but childhood memories of the SED state. By joining forces with western trade unionists and ex-Social Democrats in the mid-2000s, the PDS—now calling itself the Left Party. PDS—made inroads among a traditional working-class subculture in western Germany long linked to the SPD. The Left Party reached far beyond the SED-forged milieu in the east in terms of its electorate.

PARTY SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Although economic crisis and an eastern socialist subculture created conditions favorable to PDS resurgence, they found expression within a specific institutional landscape. Cleavages, whether class-based, religious, or regional, must acquire political salience, and institutions, such as a party's organizational strength or a church's resources, often make the difference.²⁷ In unified Germany, the PDS not only benefited from but also contributed to political regionalism. Without the material, personnel, and organizational assets of the old SED at its disposal, the PDS would have lacked the strong grassroots presence in the east that bolstered its reputation for eastern interest representation. The FRG's institutional landscape would play a large role in the party's resurgence. In a unitary system, the PDS would have had a diminished parliamentary presence, but in federal Germany it sat in six eastern state parliaments (including Berlin) in 1990, even before it had begun to surge in elections. This helped keep the party in the public eye and provided it with a valuable forum. Germany's modified proportional representation further enhanced the party's parliamentary standing. Although the 5 percent hurdle did present a formidable barrier to Bundestag entry, certain exceptions favored the PDS. For instance, the election law waived the 5 percent hurdle if a party won a plurality in three districts. This helped the PDS in 1994 when it finished first in four eastern Berlin districts, yet received less than 5 percent nationally. Moreover, as a one-time exception, the Federal Constitutional Court imposed separate 5 percent hurdles in the former FRG and the former GDR for the 1990 Bundestag elections. Since the PDS secured 11.1 percent of the eastern vote, it returned to the Bundestag, even though it had captured only 2.4 percent countrywide.

Another east–west conflict showed that party systems matter. In Israel during the 1950s and 1960s, oriental Jews from the Middle East and northern Africa were disadvantaged in a political system led by the western (Ashkenazi) Jews of eastern Europe. Israel's oriental Jews were disproportionately poor, culturally marginalized, and all but absent among the country's political, economic, and military elites.²⁸ This, however, did not find expression in the Israeli party system until Likud and the religious Shas party emerged as voices of the alienated oriental Jewry. That an oriental party did not form earlier can in part be attributed to the political hegemony of the overwhelmingly Ashkenazi Labor party; the lack of organizational resources among Oriental Jews; and a unitary state that favored the majority.

An Ideological Opening?

As the SPD and Greens moved toward the political center in the late 1990s, the PDS and later the Left Party stood to be the main beneficiaries. The

logic of this argument was straightforward. When a party adjusts its program and policies in the hope of appealing to new segments of the electorate, it runs the risk of alienating former supporters and creating an opening for another party to win over disillusioned voters. Giovanni Sartori observed that unidimensional spatial competition occurs more frequently in party systems with at least five parties.²⁹ After unification, the FRG had five Bundestag parties—the CDU/CSU, SPD, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Greens, and PDS. In 1998, Gerhard Schröder and the SPD campaigned as the “new center” (*Neue Mitte*) and once in power with the Greens pursued a centrist agenda. By the late 1990s, scholars speculated that the PDS was attracting voters that had become disillusioned with the SPD and Greens.³⁰ At this time, the PDS attributed its electoral success to the SPD’s alleged disregard for social justice and even claimed to represent social democratic tradition better than the SPD.³¹

A similar dynamic appeared in northern Europe in the 1990s when left-socialist parties gained after Social Democrats tacked toward the political center. The Left Party (V) of Sweden, the successor to the Swedish Communist Party, won support among former SAP voters by opposing the governing party’s welfare state cuts.³² To David Arter, “the social-democratization of the communist successor parties in Finland [VAS] and Sweden [V] was facilitated by the neoliberalization of the ruling Social Democrats.”³³ In the Netherlands, the Socialist Party increased its vote share fourfold (from 1.3 percent in 1994 to 5.9 percent in 2002), while the Labor party governed with the center-right Liberals. In 2006, it received 16.6 percent of the vote. In Norway, the Socialist Left Party, which had attacked the Labor party for its allegedly neoliberal economic policies, increased its vote share from 6 percent in 1997 to 12.4 percent in 2001. These left-socialist parties performed well among former social democratic voters by claiming policy positions that the center-left parties had, at least temporarily, relinquished.

Political developments in western Germany did not initially support the thesis that a vacuum on the left of the party system, arising as the SPD shifted rightward, would result in PDS success.³⁴ Even after the Schröder government had pursued modest neoliberal reforms and supported NATO’s military involvement in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, the PDS lost ground in the 2002 Bundestag election. By 2004, however, left-wing opposition to the government’s welfare state reforms was lifting the PDS. The following year it joined forces with the WASG, a new party that gathered in disillusioned former Social Democrats and trade union functionaries. The PDS contested the 2005 Bundestag election as the Left Party.PDS (*Linkspartei.PDS*) and gained in the west among former SPD voters. After 2007, the Left Party advanced further at the cost of the SPD, a junior partner in a CDU/CSU-led government until fall 2009. This lent support to the hypothesis that it

was occupying ideological space previously held by the SPD. Another party system gap, however, sheds light on how the PDS established itself as a leading eastern party after unification.

A Representation Gap for East Germans?

This study builds on scholarship showing that the PDS would stage its comeback as an advocate of eastern interests.³⁵ There is little question that the manner in which the two German states unified reinforced western predominance in the Federal Republic. West Germany's interior minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), who led negotiations on the Unification Treaty in 1990, made it clear who was in charge. "My set speech went as follows: Folks, it is about the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, not the reverse operation. We have a good constitution that has proven itself. We will do everything for you. You are heartily welcome. We do not want to ride roughshod over your wishes and interests. But a union of two equal states is not taking place. We are not beginning afresh with equal starting positions."³⁶ Some scholars went so far as to assert that West Germany had colonized the former East Germany.³⁷ To make the case, Dümke and Vilmar pointed to the extension of western institutions eastward; western acquisition of property in the east; the ascension of westerners to leadership positions in the east; and pressure on easterners to assimilate to the dominant western culture.³⁸ Others avoided the term colonization, while focusing on the institutional legacy of unification for east–west relations. Heidrun Abromeit reasoned that the East Germans' weak negotiating position in 1990, their much smaller population, and the wholesale transfer of western German institutions eastward had produced a "representation gap" within parliament, the political parties, the interest groups, and the institutions of federalism.³⁹ She claimed that "for a variety of reasons—institutional, party political and those conditioned by mentality—the 'voice of the east' is as good as silent in the Bundestag."⁴⁰ Abromeit predicted that easterners, seeing themselves as a structural minority, might respond in three ways: with outward migration; political unrest, or developing their own political party.⁴¹

Rather than a new party, the PDS gradually won recognition as a regional advocate. In state and federal parliaments, it claimed to speak for a population that went beyond the fallen GDR elites and presented itself as an authentic champion of neglected eastern interests. In 1990, polls showed that 11 percent of eastern voters believed that the PDS was representing their interests; by 1998, the share had risen to 38 percent.⁴² According to a 1994 study, among those who were particularly concerned about eastern problems, 11 percent favored the PDS. This group comprised one-fifth of the party's voters and was slightly more prevalent among its core voters.⁴³

By the late 1990s, many non-PDS voters in the east recognized the party as a representative of eastern German interests and a needed counterbalance to the predominantly western parties.⁴⁴

However, did the German political establishment really fail eastern Germans? A Slovak, Pole, or Latvian could point to the massive economic assistance that western Germans had provided eastern Germans during and after unification. Because the Federal Republic financed eastern infrastructure and extended its welfare state, easterners were spared the poverty, hyperinflation and decrepit infrastructure that plagued other former Warsaw Pact countries in the 1990s. In this regard, the former GDR enjoyed a “privileged transformation” that was not allowed to fail.⁴⁵ Unlike their former Warsaw Pact neighbors, easterners also enjoyed the advantages of a functioning, well-run administration—a “ready-made state”—that the Federal Republic extended eastward.⁴⁶ In western Germany, taxpayers shouldered much of unification’s financial burden. In the early 1990s, 57 percent of westerners fully or partially agreed with the statement: “I fail to see why so much money is flowing to the new federal states and the west is being neglected.”⁴⁷ Few westerners accused the political establishment of neglecting eastern interests.

Rather than advance a mono-causal argument, this study argues that economic crisis, eastern cultural distinctiveness, and party system dynamics together created an opportunity for the PDS to present itself as the voice of the east. In eastern Germany, a widespread perception of inadequate interest representation, fueled in part by the dearth of easterners among the FRG’s elites, lifted the PDS and its successor the Left in a number of ways. A lack of descriptive representation, as measured by the share of easterners in elite positions, illuminates why protest often took the form of political regionalism (to the benefit of the PDS); why a reconstituted socialist milieu included younger, reform-minded SED cadres; and why eastern dissatisfaction with unified Germany’s political institutions remained so high. Together these developments, in combination with economic crisis and a feeling of eastern cultural difference, lay at the heart of the PDS’ rise.

DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION

Descriptive representation occurs when representatives resemble those they are representing.⁴⁸ Its proponents contend that it improves substantive representation and instills a sense of equal citizenship among a previously disadvantaged population. Although descriptive representation is commonly associated with physical attributes such as skin color, a person’s gender, or a physical disability, it also may apply to shared life experiences.⁴⁹ Accordingly, deputies with an agricultural background should have a presence among those representing the farming community. Descriptive representation is deemed justified because “no amount of thought or sympathy, no matter how careful or honest, can jump the barriers of experience.”⁵⁰

Its critics point to its potentially harmful impact on effective governance. Hanna Pitkin has argued that it reduces representation largely to “re-presenting” either a picture of, or the views of, the electorate within the legislature. “It has no room for any kind of representing as acting for, or on behalf of, others; which means that in the political realm it has no room for the creative activities of a representative legislature, the forging of consensus, the formulating of policy, the activity we roughly designate by ‘governing.’”⁵¹ Other problems include which groups merit special treatment and whether descriptive representation strengthens particularistic identities and a belief in essentialism.⁵²

A case for descriptive representation can nonetheless be made under certain conditions. First, the descriptive representation of historically disadvantaged groups, Jane Mansbridge has argued, may improve communication between representatives and their constituents. “The deeper the communicative chasm between a dominant and a subordinate group, the more descriptive representation is needed to bridge that chasm.”⁵³ Second, if minority interests are unformed and unarticulated, descriptive representation increases the likelihood that as issues appear unexpectedly, the representative will “react more or less the way the voter would have done, on the basis of descriptive similarity.”⁵⁴ Third, when members of marginalized groups sit in parliaments, federal cabinets, boardrooms, and the courts, they may contribute to a gradual redefinition of what it means to be part of a group that had earlier experienced “second-class citizenship.” Writes Mansbridge, “when descriptive characteristics signal major status differences connected with citizenship, then a low percentage of a given descriptive group in the representational body creates social meanings attached to those characteristics that affect all holders of the characteristics. Low percentages of Black and women representatives, for example, create the meaning that Blacks and women cannot rule, or are not suitable for rule.”⁵⁵ Finally, descriptive representation can increase the political system’s legitimacy by vicariously promoting a sense of inclusion among members of the disadvantaged group. They are more apt to identify with the institutions and their policy outcomes if members of their own group were present and involved in the democratic process. To Mansbridge, “this feeling of inclusion in turn makes the polity democratically more legitimate in one’s eyes.”⁵⁶

Mansbridge’s last two points have less to do with improving substantive representation than with countering the symbolic and psychological effects of insufficient descriptive representation. This study considers substantive representation as well as the psychological impact of descriptive representation. Concerns about representation commonly give rise to identity politics; criticism of the governing institutions on the grounds that they favor one group over another; minority opposition to the political establishment; and increased minority protest that takes the form of political regionalism. Together, these developments buoyed the PDS’ electoral fortunes at a time

when many easterners were experiencing economic hardship and self-identifying as former GDR citizens. They occurred within the context of unification policies that prioritized administrative efficiency and transitional justice above descriptive representation. Forty years earlier, the West German establishment pursued a different strategy toward a newcomer population that in key ways had resembled the sixteen million joining the Federal Republic in 1990.

LESSONS FROM THE 1950S: THE BHE AND EXPELLEE INTEGRATION

Integration strategies and descriptive representation mattered at the dawn of the Federal Republic. The rise and fall of the West German BHE drives home this point. The year 1990 was not the first time that a transformed German state absorbed millions of “new” Germans with cultural traditions and economic circumstances distinct from those of the majority population. In the early 1950s, expellees and refugees from the east struggled to establish themselves in West Germany. Not unlike the eastern socialist milieu after unification, an expellee subculture viewed its new country with unease. The pro-GDR milieu of 1990 and the expellee milieu of 1950 housed citizens whose preferred answer to the national question (whether a separate GDR or a greater Germany) had not carried the day. In both instances, this milieu looked to a political party that would represent its specific cultural, political and economic interests. In the early 1950s, it was BHE; in the 1990s, the PDS rose to the occasion.⁵⁷

While a booming economy and the mixing of newcomer and native populations hastened the BHE’s decline, greater descriptive representation played a role as well. In this respect, the lessons of the 1950s buttress this study’s argument. Whereas insufficient descriptive representation in the 1990s would slow integration by affecting perceptions of citizenship, institutional legitimacy, and political identity, the federal government’s embrace of the expellee cause defused newcomer protest. As we shall see, the BHE faded once it lost middle-class supporters who no longer needed the party for help, its position as the advocate of “second-class” citizens, and its status as an opposition party. The PDS would face some of these problems by the early 2000s as the established parties began to reach out to the party.

THE RISE OF THE BHE

Germans from the east had already paid a heavy price for Hitler’s expansionist ambitions. In the aftermath of defeat, millions either fled or were expelled from eastern and southeastern Europe. By 1950, nearly eight million expellees and refugees resided in West Germany; the number had risen to nearly ten million by 1960.⁵⁸ Many of them longed for past homelands, reluctant

to face an uncertain future in the Federal Republic. The League of Expellees and those Deprived of their Rights (*Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten*—BHE) formed in 1950 as a de facto refugee party, attracting scant support among native western Germans. The BHE, an expression of newcomer alienation and protest, criticized the western German establishment for neglecting the expellees' plight. This section begins with an overview of the economic disadvantage, cultural estrangement and political marginalization that many expellees faced by the late 1940s. Next, it examines the BHE's leaders, members, program, and electorate before turning to the political establishment's response to the party and expellee disadvantage. This reveals that an inclusive strategy contributed to expellee integration and underscores the importance of descriptive representation.

After World War II, the spectre of downward social mobility loomed large for these unwilling newcomers from the east. Many had arrived in the west destitute and without means. They were heavily settled in the agrarian regions of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, and Bavaria; although less war-torn than the cities, these areas offered limited employment opportunities. In 1949, expellees made up 16.2 percent of the population in the Federal Republic, but comprised 34.5 percent of all unemployed.⁵⁹ They were disproportionately wage laborers. Whereas slightly less than 50 percent of native western Germans in 1950 were blue-collar workers, 75 percent of all expellees belonged to this category.⁶⁰ Many, if not most, expellees who had been self-employed prior to the war were unable to re-establish their farms, practices, and shops in western Germany.⁶¹ Expellees occupied the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder possessing the lowest incomes, the least wealth, and the highest unemployment rate. As a miserable "fifth estate" ("*ein fünfter Stand*"), they contended with grinding poverty in temporary settlements and often faced hostile westerners who associated them with hyper-nationalism, National Socialism, and eastern inferiority.⁶² West Germans looked down on the expellees, resenting the added competition for scarce housing and jobs. When a nativist association sprang up in 1950 that pit "home grown" against refugee, Theodor Heuss, as federal president, condemned the development as disgraceful.⁶³ In short, conditions appeared ripe for political extremism. In his opening Bundestag address of 1949, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer stressed, "One has to solve it [the refugee problem] if one does not want to let West Germany become a center of political and economic unrest for a long time to come."⁶⁴ That political extremism did not ensue, argues Rainer Schulze, "is perhaps the true West German 'miracle' of the post-war period."⁶⁵ As late as 1953, polls revealed disproportionate support among expellees for a one-party state (29 percent of those polled) and little confidence in the political system.⁶⁶

A difficult cultural adjustment awaited many expellees in western Germany. The Imperial Germans (*Reichsdeutsche*) constituted the largest

single group (approximately 4.4 million) and included East Prussians, East Brandenburgers, Pomeranians, and Silesians. Although the Imperial Germans often struggled to adjust to different cultural settings—for instance a big city dweller from Breslau landing in a Bavarian village—they had remained part of a German state. In this regard, they differed from the nearly two million Sudeten German expellees in western Germany who had joined the Reich following the 1938 Munich Pact. The Sudeten Germans had lived for generations within multi-national states, either in the Habsburg Empire prior to World War I or in Czechoslovakia between the wars. Even they, however, faced a less difficult adjustment than did ethnic Germans from scattered agrarian communities in Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. It is the ethnic German whom Lucius Clay, the American commanding officer in Germany, had in mind when he wrote in the late 1940s:

Separated from Germany through many generations, the expellee even spoke in a different tongue. He no longer shared common customs and traditions nor did he think of Germany as home. He could not persuade himself that he was forever exiled; his eyes and thoughts and hopes turned homeward.

The ethnic Germans of southeastern Europe had little experience with representative democracy and showed a “certain distance to western and central European forms of civil society and political-cultural individualism.”⁶⁷

The expellees arrived in western Germany having survived the horrors of ethnic cleansing, an experience that further set them apart from their new neighbors. They had been violently uprooted from their homelands and compelled to flee westward under often harrowing circumstances. Around 600,000 Germans from the east are thought to have perished.⁶⁸ Many others were mistreated when Soviet soldiers, local inhabitants and local authorities encountered now vulnerable German settlements in eastern Europe.

The expellees' stark underrepresentation in West German politics in the late 1940s increased their alienation. This gap was in part the result of the western allies' decision after the war, initially backed by the main West German parties, to prohibit political associations among expellees.⁶⁹ Fearful of revanchism and political extremism, the western allies did not allow refugee groups to compete in local politics until 1948–1949 or at the state and federal levels until 1949–1950. This was an integration strategy that accorded expellees political and civil rights of citizenship, while, at same time, curtailing their right of political association. They hoped that the parties they had licensed—the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD)—would establish a following among the refugees and thereby hasten political inclusion. This expectation was only partly borne out. In the 1949 federal election, more than one million expellees

representing nearly 5 percent of the electorate voted for independent expellee candidates, even though these candidates stood little chance of entering the Bundestag.⁷⁰ Many others voted for the populist Economic Reconstruction Union (*Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Vereinigung*—WAV), which reached out to the expellees in an effort to slow its own political decline.⁷¹

In the late 1940s, the licensed parties did not include expellees within their ranks in proportion to their share of the population, nor did they make expellee concerns a priority, in part out of fear of alienating western Germans.⁷² Expellee politicians generally lacked influence within the established parties at this time and were largely absent from two important institutions. None were present among the fifty-two-person Economic Council (*Wirtschaftsrat*), which had served as legislative assembly in U.S. and U.K. zones of occupation, whereas there was just one expellee among the seventy-two members of the Parliamentary Council who drafted the West German Basic Law.⁷³ Disproportionately few expellees sat in the state parliaments, even in those *Länder* where the share of newcomers was greatest. For instance, in Bavaria more than 20 percent of the residents were expellees, yet expellees comprised but 4 of 204 state parliamentarians in 1948.⁷⁴ They were underrepresented in the first Bundestag—of 421 deputies, 60 or 61 were expellees, but even they lacked an organizational basis in parliament for cooperation across party lines.⁷⁵

BHE Leadership and Membership

As would the PDS forty years later, the BHE heavily drew on an organized subculture. As the cold war intensified, the western allies relaxed the coalition prohibition and paid less heed to complaints from communist bloc countries regarding refugee activity and revanchism. Several types of expellee association arose. On the basis of their place of origin, expelled Pomeranians, Sudeten Germans, Silesians, and East Prussians, among many others, established clubs to preserve cultural ties to their former homeland. These became the basis for the influential Homeland Provincial Societies (*Landsmannschaften*) that combined at the national level within the United East German Provincial Societies in August 1949, later renamed the Federation of Homeland Provincial Societies in 1952. The Homeland Provincial Societies upheld local traditions and lobbied hard for the right of expellees to return home.⁷⁶ Additionally, regional associations, focusing on the social integration of refugees in western Germany, sprang up at all levels and demanded equal rights for the expellees. Many of these united in spring 1949 within the Central Association of Expelled Germans.⁷⁷ Founded that same year, the Federal Republic guaranteed expellee groups the right of free assembly.

As did the eastern German socialist milieu of the 1990s, the dense associational network of expellees groups organized reluctant newcomers on the basis of past experiences in a “lost homeland” and trying circumstances

in a new state. It faced daunting organizational barriers. Although originally settled mostly in rural, isolated areas where war damage had been minimal, expellees were later resettled or allowed to move to more economically dynamic regions. This settling and resettling further complicated the formation of expellee networks. Nonetheless, a well-organized, mobilized milieu had emerged by the early 1950s that was embedded in the cultural clubs, professional associations, economic interest groups, and social activities run by and for Germans from the east.

This subculture brought forth the BHE. In July 1950, Schleswig-Holstein residents surprised the political establishment by voting in large numbers for the new party in a regional election. Waldemar Kraft and others convened in early 1951 to found the national party. The BHE had to build an organization largely from the ground up because it did not draw upon the formal or informal networks of a pre-1933 predecessor.⁷⁸ It played “catch-up” because many expellees had already joined other parties, as the western allies had hoped would happen. Without the connections of native politicians, however, they would face the difficult task of rising within parties dominated by western insiders. To middle-class expellees, political engagement often was a vehicle to escape downward social mobility in their new homeland. In his landmark study of the BHE, Franz Neumann considers this motivation central to the party’s founding.⁷⁹ When it did form in 1950–1951, the BHE lacked the seasoned personnel, financial assets, and party structures of its chief competitors.⁸⁰ In this regard, it would differ from the PDS, which had inherited the remnants of the SED’s previously expansive organization.

The BHE generally found support among expellees without significant wealth, political connections, or party experience. They were among the poorest residents of West Germany and in many cases struggled to afford the modest membership fees the BHE imposed. Nonetheless, they were dedicated to the expellee cause. Often unemployed or retired, they had spare time to devote to the BHE, as would many retired or unemployed PDS members after unification. By 1953, the BHE had a membership of more than 150,000, of which an estimated 99 percent were expellees.⁸¹ It featured the highest ratio of members to votes received and counted on its committed activists during election campaigns.⁸² The refugee associations and BHE cooperated, even though the interest groups maintained political independence. Virtually all BHE politicians were active in an expellee association.⁸³ There was so much overlap in personnel at the local level that the BHE organization and the expellee association were in some cases one and the same.⁸⁴

Party Program

Under Waldemar Kraft, the party’s first leader, the BHE stressed the expellees’ right to a dignified existence that included jobs and adequate housing

in the FRG. It lobbied for a comprehensive Equalization of Burdens law (*Lastenausgleich*) that would materially assist those most hurt by the war. The BHE also pledged to represent those “deprived of their rights” (*Entrechtete*) who had lost property as a result of wartime air raids, who had suffered disproportionately from the currency union of 1948, or whose public service careers had been terminated as a result of denazification. Initially, its revanchist foreign policy goals, which focused on the expellees’ right to return to their lost homelands (*Heimatrecht im Osten*), took a backseat to its social policy demands (*Lebensrecht im Westen*). Yet as the social integration of the expellees advanced, the party’s foreign policy demands became more prominent. In 1952, the party officially renamed itself the All-German Bloc/BHE (GB/BHE) in an attempt to attract western Germans committed to the 1937 borders.⁸⁵ By the mid-1950s, the GB/BHE had a party program with a focus on restoring Germany’s pre-war borders.⁸⁶

The BHE opened its doors to former National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) functionaries. In fact, “no other bourgeois party likely counted as many former Nazi functionaries among its ‘office holders’ as did the BHE.”⁸⁷ The party contributed to dismantling political barriers that had sidelined former Nazi functionaries after World War II.⁸⁸ It seemingly mattered little that BHE founder Waldemar Kraft had been an honorary SS officer; that the expellee affairs minister in Bonn, Theodor Oberländer (BHE), had participated in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923; and that the BHE openly criticized denazification. Kraft explained, “we are not ready to cover for someone who has come into conflict with the penal laws. But we do not want to have anyone punished for his political convictions. For us it matters what views one holds today. The fact that within our ranks resistance fighters stand next to former leading National Socialists is evidence that we have performed real work toward reconstruction in the sense of genuine democracy.”⁸⁹ On denazification, Hesse’s BHE chairman maintained, that “it is perhaps the greatest mistake of our young democracy that one has barred millions of fellow citizens from political activity because of their political pasts, threatened their livelihood, and treated them as second class citizens.”⁹⁰ Forty years later, the PDS would voice similar concerns when it demanded an end to “witch hunts” in the east; an end to the “cold war” in Germany; and a cessation of the “victor justice” that tried former East German officials for human rights abuses committed in the GDR.

BHE Electorate

In the early 1950s, the BHE flourished in those regions with the most expellees. In Schleswig-Holstein, where about one million refugees comprised one-third of the state’s population, the party won 23.4 percent of the vote in the July 1950 state election. Angry about inadequate housing,

high unemployment, and inadequate public assistance, many had voted for the BHE out of frustration with the government's handling of refugee affairs.⁹¹ In the 1950 Bavarian state election, the BHE won 12.3 percent; in the Lower Saxony state election of 1951, it garnered 14.9 percent. This fledgling party captured 78 percent of the expellee vote in Schleswig-Holstein; 58 percent in Bavaria; and 55 percent in Lower Saxony.⁹² Its call for social rights resonated strongly among Germans from the east. A 1953 poll revealed that 85 percent of BHE voters backed the party because it represented refugee interests.⁹³

The "typical" BHE voter was an elderly, Protestant expellee living in a rural community. The BHE drew heavily from impoverished workers and agricultural laborers and received a greater share of votes from pensioners than did any other party.⁹⁴ Whereas the PDS in the 1990s would run strongly in the former administrative centers of the GDR, the BHE had its best results in the countryside.⁹⁵ Expellees at times comprised a majority in the country villages of Schleswig-Holstein, eastern Lower Saxony and eastern Bavaria where they endured acute housing shortages, unemployment rates that at times exceeded 50 percent and hostility from native inhabitants.⁹⁶ Many refugees languished here, among them the elderly with strong emotional ties to their old homeland. Their high concentration in parts of the countryside proved a boon to BHE recruitment in 1950–1951. Despite efforts to attract westerners, the BHE received nearly all its votes from expellees in the early 1950s. A 1953 survey indicated that only 5 percent of the party's supporters were native West Germans.⁹⁷

Although formed at different times and under very different circumstances, the BHE and the PDS both arose as local insiders and national outsiders. Although embedded in a geographically concentrated subculture, both were outsiders in regards to their leadership, milieu and program. Each loudly and persistently accused the German political establishment of neglecting minority interests, compelling the political class to fashion a response.

INCLUDING EXPELLEE ELITES AND THE BHE

To attract expellee voters, and to fend off the BHE electoral challenge, the mainstream West German parties adopted key expellee demands on social and foreign policy, recruited expellee leaders to join their ranks and placed expellees on their party lists. Electoral considerations, but also concern about expellee radicalization, led the mainstream parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP) to pursue a strategy of inclusion toward the expellees after 1950.⁹⁸ By 1950, the CDU/CSU had an internal party group to house expellees deputies within its Bundestag ranks, an auxiliary party association for those from the east (*Landesverband Oder/Neisse*) as well as expellee expert panels.⁹⁹ The SPD and FDP also developed internal party structures for expellees.¹⁰⁰

Expellee politicians gained added influence within the established parties, in part because of the BHE challenge to the Bundestag parties.¹⁰¹

At this time, Linus Kather (CDU) stood out as a forceful expellee advocate. Heading the Central Association of Expelled Germans, he refused to toe the CDU party line in the Bundestag and aggressively (and successfully) advanced expellee interests inside and outside of parliament. Historian Hans-Peter Schwarz described Kather as “one of the toughest interest representatives in Bonn’s parliamentary history.”¹⁰² In the early 1950, he led an informal coalition of Bundestag deputies from the governing parties that helped mediate the competing demands of the expellee organization, the governing parties, and the federal ministries regarding the *Lastenausgleich* (LAG).¹⁰³ Implemented in 1952, the LAG counts among the most important pieces of social legislation in the history of the Federal Republic, providing financial assistance to destitute expellees and demonstrating the country’s commitment to addressing their acute social needs.¹⁰⁴

Yet there was more to the expellee outreach than such practical considerations as winning votes or forming governments. In West Germany, anti-communism served as a crucial link between expellees and the established parties that allowed both natives and newcomers to regard themselves as cold war victims. West German politicians pointed to the expellee plight as evidence of postwar German suffering at the hands of communists. This lent legitimacy to expellee demands and underscored the FRG’s claim, as legal successor to the German Reich, to be the sole legitimate representative of the German nation and the champion of Germany’s 1937 borders.¹⁰⁵ West German anti-communism shifted attention away from Third Reich crimes and toward postwar Stalinist abuses. Writes Daniel Levy, “The fate of expellees and German victims was frequently invoked to establish that Germans suffered from the war no less than those attacked by Germany. It was mostly intended to abrogate the responsibility for the war crimes committed by Germans.”¹⁰⁶ Whereas anti-communism would facilitate partnership with the BHE and the expellees, it would contribute to the PDS’ exclusion four decades later.

The GDR’s approach to its expellees further fanned anti-communism in the Federal Republic. In 1950, it officially recognized the Oder-Neisse line as its border to Poland. As part of a heavy-handed assimilation policy (*Einschmelzung*), the SED state prohibited expressions of expellee culture in public life—for instance banning traditional eastern music from the airwaves—while cracking down on those who identified themselves as refugees.¹⁰⁷

In addition to “equalization of burdens,” the FRG provided former cultural and administrative elites from the east with employment opportunities. In Article 36 of the West German Basic Law, the federal government was required to hire civil servants “in due proportion from all federal states.” This was interpreted to include their place of origin as well as their place

of current residence. According to Article 131, the federal government was obligated to secure government service positions for expellees who had been civil servants prior to their expulsion.¹⁰⁸ Both provisions helped expellees assume a prominent place in the West German civil service. According to federal data released in 1950, expellees were heavily represented among civil servants (*Beamte*) in the federal expellee ministry (91 percent), the Bundesrat affairs ministry (63 percent), the federal chancellery (52 percent), the ministry for all-German affairs (46 percent), and the agricultural ministry (37 percent).¹⁰⁹ By 1952, they comprised one-fifth of *Beamte* at the federal and state levels.¹¹⁰ They held more than one-fourth of all top administrative positions (*Oberste Bundesbehörden*).¹¹¹

Constitutional provisions also assisted expellees in the fields of culture and education. Karl Heinz Gehrmann writes, "Among the expellees a significant share of the former cultural elite landed on its feet and found again an appropriate job, a supportive environment (*einen sozialen Ort*) and felt jointly responsible for shaping the West German reality."¹¹² In 1954, more than 22 percent of all teachers in the Federal Republic were expellees; they were in fact overrepresented, especially in the elementary and middle schools.¹¹³ Integration proceeded as well, albeit more slowly, at universities where the faculty had a large say in whether professors from the east would be offered positions.¹¹⁴ This discretion allowed universities to drag their feet in appointing eastern academics, even though as tenured civil servants they were entitled to resume work and, until hired, draw a temporary salary. The federal government expedited the placement process by providing federal funds to universities to support temporary positions for not yet employed eastern professors.¹¹⁵ Older expellee professors who did not find university positions were later extended the benefits and privileges of emeritus status.¹¹⁶ For those instructors without civil service status, and therefore not protected by Article 131, the federal government and other agencies offered scholarships and financial support to help them find their way in West German academia.¹¹⁷ Together, such measures contributed to the integration of displaced cultural elites from the east.

The West German government's commitment to former eastern civil servants hastened the integration of potentially disruptive newcomers who would otherwise have been confronted with downward social mobility and redundancy in West Germany. This affirmative action for expellee elites stood in stark contrast to how former GDR elites would be treated after unification. In 1990, it was decided that civil service status would not be automatically extended to easterners who had occupied equivalent positions in the GDR. Although many teachers would hold onto their jobs, eastern faculty, especially in the heavily politicized social sciences, struggled to remain in academia in unified Germany.

By 1950, both the state parliaments and the Bundestag had begun funding the preservation of eastern German cultural heritage. They accepted the leading role of the expellee associations in protecting this cultural legacy, while ensuring continuing federal and state assistance even as the expellees successfully integrated.¹¹⁸ The “culture paragraph” of the Federal Expellee Law of 1953 allowed the Bundestag to intensify and formalize its commitment to preserving eastern heritage: “The federal government and the states have, in accordance with their constitutional mandate, the responsibility to maintain among the expellees, refugees and the entire German nation an awareness of the cultural heritage of the expulsion territories (*Vertreibungsgebiete*) as well as the responsibility to secure, supplement and evaluate archives and libraries.”¹¹⁹ In the 1950s, federal and state governments worked closely with expellee organizations in shaping West Germany’s school curriculum to include the geography and culture of former German homelands, in funding scholarly research on the expellee experience, in broadcasting radio programs about the expellees, and in financing picture films about the German *Heimat* in the east.¹²⁰ Countless projects and programs were initiated at the federal, state, and local levels in support of the expellees.¹²¹

This public sponsorship provided expellees with official recognition of their earlier lives and offered them a sense of shared purpose in their new homeland. To a far greater extent than would be true of former GDR citizens, the expellees in the 1950s received public recognition of honorable lives lived under difficult circumstances. This advanced the expellees’ integration, while at the same time reducing the need for a separate party.

Although West German politicians had not welcomed an expellee party, they nonetheless readily cooperated with the BHE once it had formed. The Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats formed coalitions with it to ensure themselves majorities in parliament since the BHE often tipped the scales between the center-right and the center-left.¹²² The established parties also accepted the BHE on the basis of shared values. They, too, blamed communism for the postwar partition and did not fault the expellees for the hyper-nationalism of the interwar border regions that had contributed mightily to the German catastrophe. They and the BHE propagated the goal of a unified German nation within the borders of 1937, rejected the use of force to attain this goal, and distanced themselves from National Socialist ideology. The bourgeois parties on the center-right (CDU/CSU, FDP, and the German Party [DP]) could form coalitions with the BHE on the basis of its preference for private ownership of the economy; the Social Democrats could ally with the BHE in support of economic redistribution and social policy. In short, the established parties, whether on the center-left or on the center-right, did business with the expellee party. The BHE formed a coalition with the CDU, FDP, and DP after its strong 1950 showing in

Schleswig-Holstein.¹²³ In Bavaria, it demonstrated versatility by allying with the center-right CSU and the center-left SPD in the wake of the 1950 state election. The next year, it teamed with the SPD and the Center party in Lower Saxony. After the BHE had received 5.9 percent of the vote in the 1953 Bundestag election, Konrad Adenauer, ever the pragmatist, brought it into a center-right governing coalition with the CDU/CSU, FDP, and DP.

In the 1950s, the BHE participated in fourteen different regional governments (usually center-right ones), entered one national government (1953–1955) and placed forty-five ministers. As it entered into coalition talks, the BHE demanded that it lead the expellee affairs ministry or an equivalent office. Although accused of “political blackmail,” the BHE usually had its way; it ran an expellee affairs ministry fifteen times and held the post of state secretary for expellee affairs on five occasions. Additionally, it headed an agricultural ministry four times, an economics ministry, and a finance ministry.¹²⁴ By including the BHE, the established parties increased the descriptive representation of expellees and hastened their integration.

The SPD, CDU/CSU, and FDP treated the BHE as a legitimate expellee voice. Together they drafted and implemented important social legislation to alleviate hardship among West Germany’s most destitute citizens. Within a few years, the organized expellee subculture had been transformed. Whereas this milieu had been feared, outlawed, and repressed under the western allies’ coalition prohibition, by the early 1950s it had assumed a place in the public life and national identity of the Federal Republic. The expellees were encouraged to hold two mutually supportive identities: that of an eastern German (e.g., Sudeten German, East Prussian, Schwabian from Hungary, Silesian, Transylvanian German) and that of a citizen of the Federal Republic. In contrast to the 1990s, *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the east) and *Ostidentität* (eastern identity) were accepted and even celebrated in the 1950s.

As we shall see, the established parties would not treat the PDS like the expellee party of 1950. They would not form a coalition with it for eight years; nor would they cooperate with it on legislation; nor would they recognize it as a legitimate representative of eastern interests. In short, whereas the BHE became part of the national project of the 1950s (a stable western democracy committed to national unity), the PDS would not be a welcome part of the national project of its time. In the early 1950s, the Federal Republic had sought to engrain a perspective on the expellee experience, as presented by the expellees themselves, within the West German historical consciousness and national identity. Whereas concerns about social justice led Bonn to reach out to the expellees, as victims of the ethnic cleansing of the mid-1940s, considerations of transitional justice in the early 1990s would lead Bonn to exclude the pro-GDR milieu and its political representative, both widely associated with SED crimes.

INCLUSION AND THE BHE DEMISE

The BHE soon declined and it did so rapidly. In the 1953 federal election, it entered the Bundestag with 5.9 percent of the national vote and 34 percent of the expellee vote. Four years later, the party won 4.6 percent nationally as its share of the expellee vote fell to 26 percent. In state elections in Schleswig-Holstein, an early BHE stronghold, the party won 6.9 percent in 1958 and 19 percent of the expellee vote. The party also lost significance in Bavaria and Lower Saxony.¹²⁵ By the late 1950s, many of its leaders had left the party for greener pastures, often in the CDU; most of its voters had moved on as well. The economic boom of the 1950s hastened the BHE's decline. As expellees left rural areas where they had been settled and secured jobs and adequate housing, they increasingly turned their backs on the BHE. The party remained the party of the oldest and poorest expellees, that of a shrinking, backward-looking constituency.

The inclusion of the cultural and administrative expellee elites into the West German mainstream had countered a ghetto mentality. By 1950, the West German bureaucracy was working closely with the Central Association of Expelled Germans, "as a kind of auxiliary or supplemental administration," to address the social needs of expellees.¹²⁶ The Central Association of Expelled Germans reported that its membership had risen from 1.5 million in 1953 to 1.8 million in 1955, whereas membership in the Homeland Provincial Societies increased from around 1.33 million in 1950 to an estimated 1.52 million in 1961.¹²⁷ The share of expellees participating in conventions rose from 11.2 percent in 1952 to 12.3 percent in 1962.¹²⁸ A further measure of a vibrant social milieu, expellee newspaper circulation remained at a constant high between 1953–1954 and 1957–1958.¹²⁹ Throughout the 1950s, expellee organizations successfully articulated the *Ostalgie* (i.e., nostalgia for a past way of life in the east) of their time, yet increasingly without the BHE. In eastern Germany after unification, by contrast, the reconstitution of a socialist milieu would go hand in hand with PDS resurgence and nostalgia for the GDR (*Ostalgie*) correlated with support for the SED successor.¹³⁰

Although the expellee groups cooperated with the BHE in the 1950s, they maintained political neutrality to a greater extent than would pro-GDR interest groups following unification. None of the teachers, journalists, artists, or bureaucrats among the expellees had to turn inward for recognition, protection, and patronage, in contrast to former GDR elites in unified Germany. Although the expellee organizations and the BHE provided both cultural recognition and support to this stratum, they increasingly did so in conjunction with state and federal agencies required by law to employ expellee civil servants and to promote expellee studies. This strengthened expellee ties to the state. A survey taken in Lower Saxony in 1950–1951 showed that the civil servants were the most content among the expellees.

Whereas merely 24 percent of the blue-collar workers, and 30 percent overall, expressed satisfaction, 82 percent of the civil servants interviewed were satisfied with their situation in West Germany.¹³¹ The BHE, not surprisingly, performed poorly among civil servants and self-employed professionals. Its backers were considerably less well informed about politics than those expellees who supported the other parties.¹³² This distinguished it from the PDS, which would do well among salaried public employees and highly educated voters in the new *Länder* in the 1990s.

The BHE's participation in governing coalitions put its unity to the test. In 1950, BHE leaders could all agree that the licensed parties had not adequately addressed the pressing social and economic problems of the expellees. Once in office as cabinet ministers, they had to make difficult decisions that pit those who favored continued participation in government against those who preferred that the party join the opposition.¹³³ In particular, a wrenching debate over Adenauer's foreign policy of western integration (*Westbindung*) exposed deep rifts within the party. The federal ministers Kraft and Oberländer backed the chancellor staunchly, whereas others feared that deeper western ties would entrench the postwar partition of Germany and the separation of the expellees from their former homelands. The party split in 1955 when Kraft and Oberländer (known as the K.O. group) left the BHE after most of its members in parliament had rejected Adenauer's policy toward the Saar, a German region that had been separated by France following World War II.

As the BHE entered into government at the state and national level, it became part of the West German establishment of the 1950s. It employed expellees within the public sector and aggressively directed government moneys toward its constituents, becoming itself an engine of integration. According to Franz Neumann, "The process of integrating the expellees, which leveled the difference between old citizens and new citizens, was greatly advanced by the BHE-functionaries in district administrations and in the ministries."¹³⁴ The BHE used its influence to shape implementation of the Equalization of Burdens Act of 1952; Theodor Oberländer (BHE), as federal expellee minister, played an important role in expanding the terms of the law.¹³⁵ Because it single-mindedly funneled jobs to expellees in the expellee ministries it headed, while lacking a clear ideological platform, the BHE has been described as a patronage party par excellence.¹³⁶ In so doing, it lessened the plight of refugees and thereby contributed to its own redundancy. In a sense, it helped put itself out of business.¹³⁷

In summary, when the West German establishment reached out to expellee elites, it diminished the BHE's long-term prospects. With the economic upturn of the 1950s, and the inclusion of expellee representatives, the protest that had bolstered the BHE declined as the native-newcomer cleavage receded into the background. The BHE failed to consolidate its

position within the expellee milieu; it could not attract younger, educated professionals; and it lost its appeal as a protest party as well as its *raison d'être* as the advocate of an underrepresented minority. The narrowing descriptive representation gap, and with it greater cultural and political recognition, hastened the refugee party's demise. In contrast, the lack of descriptive representation after German unification would allow the PDS to reposition itself successfully as the "authentic" voice of the east. This is the story to which we now turn!