

Germany: Christian Democrats nominate right-winger Stoiber to run for chancellor

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The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) have launched their joint campaign for this year's general election with bombastic slogans and aggressive attacks on the Social Democratic-Green Party government. Although the *Bundestag* (federal parliament) elections are not until September 22, the internally divided CDU/CSU have tried to seize the initiative, in order to use the attack on the Schröder government to draw their own ranks together.

Disputes between the leaders of the two parties—Angela Merkel (CDU) and Bavarian Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber (CSU)—had raged for months. Finally, in mid-January, Stoiber was able to gain the nomination as the joint “Union” candidate to contest the chancellorship. At the first election campaign rally, dubbed “Harmony” and held in an overcrowded hall at the Frankfurt Congress Centre, Stoiber called for unity. The Union parties had a “real chance” of winning the elections in the autumn if they spoke with a single voice, Stoiber declared.

Stoiber held Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) responsible for the “miserable balance-sheet” of the red-green government. Unemployment, recession, new debts—after only three years this government had put Germany in last place in Europe, Stoiber said. As head of a new government he would oversee a fundamental change in course, he proclaimed, but remained very vague about the details. “Our policies are for less government and lower expenditures, leaving more money in the pocket of the every citizen,” he said. People should be able to be “proud again of what is carried out in this country,” he added.

German virtues like “diligence, hard work and discipline” had to be encouraged more. He would not compromise on the question of immigration. “The cohesion of our society should not be endangered by yet more immigration,” he said. In response to globalisation, the cry “We are one people!” should remain the motto of the nation.

In the field of social policy, Stoiber accused the government of complete failure and promised that if the Union parties won the election there would be considerably more state aid for building up the low-wage sector. He said the job market had finally to be liberalised in order to achieve “more jobs in the lower income range.” He added that the SPD-Green Party government's business taxation policy had disadvantaged the *Mittelstand* (small to medium-sized businesses) for the benefit of the larger corporations “in an almost grotesque way.” A Union government would no longer tolerate this.

Loud applause by CSU functionaries, and even their standing ovations and shouts of joy, could not hide the fact that Stoiber remains disputed as the candidate for chancellor in the CSU's larger sister party, the CDU. It is worth noting that the Union has launched its campaign before even agreeing on a common election programme. Stoiber's use of very general formulations in his speech and his contradictory and somewhat clumsy responses in recent days reflect not so much a “lack of professionalism,” as noted by some commentators, but rather the political tensions within the Union concerning its future orientation.

Rather than putting an end to internal disputes, the nomination of the Bavarian prime minister as the candidate for both Union parties has merely served to intensify them. Although the right-wing forces feel themselves strengthened, Stoiber only has a chance if he can prevent the Union breaking apart and unite both parties behind him.

Moreover, he is attacking Chancellor Schröder for a political course he himself has pursued for many years as prime minister of Bavaria. His pompous formulations about the Union representing the interests of the social centre sound like an echo of Schröder's speeches about the *Neue Mitte* (new centre). However, the core of the Schröder government's political crisis—which Stoiber is seeking to utilise for his own election victory—consists in the fact that the rapidly unfolding polarisation of society is wiping out the middle-class layers, eliminating the very social base for such policies.

Stoiber represents a political transition on the part of the Union. For many decades, the CDU and CSU considered themselves to be *Volksparteien* (people's parties), representing a broad social spectrum. They were founded at the end of the Second World War, not as classical parties with clearly defined programmes and distinct potential electorates, but as a union, i.e., a melting pot of different parties and political currents. They combined the most varied social layers: farmers and craftsman, workers and industrialists, businessmen, housewives, small manufacturers, state officials and intellectuals.

This broad social orientation was reflected in a programme that avoided clear statements and aimed at general acceptance. Christian conservatism and hysterical anti-communism formed the parties' threadbare ideological framework and served to counterbalance various interests.

By the mid-1990s, this type of politics had come into conflict with the needs of globally operating corporations, which no longer

accepted that in Germany, before every change in economic and working conditions or every mass layoff, a *Betriebsrat* (works' council) or social committee had first to be consulted. They demanded the authority to carry out unambiguous cuts in welfare and regarded the function of politics as the implementation of such attacks on the general population.

The CDU party finance crisis of recent years was used as a lever to implement these changes, but the effort has faltered. Stoiber's nomination marks a new offensive by right-wing forces inside the Union.

Stoiber is being pressured far more than it would seem on the surface. He is reacting to strong social and political currents, and his complicated and tortuous formulations create the impression that he himself does not yet know what views he will adopt in the future.

Behind him, however, forces are already forming that are prepared to ruthlessly push through extremely right-wing policies. One of these is Hesse state Premier Roland Koch, who is the political embodiment of the corrupt and parasitic elements that gained economic influence during the speculative boom of recent years. Three years ago Koch won the Hesse state elections with an openly racist campaign against granting dual nationality to immigrants living in Germany. It was subsequently established that he financed his election campaign with illegal donations and insolently lied to a parliamentary committee investigating these intrigues.

Stoiber's role is to open the way for the rightward turn of the Union. His political history certainly reveals the requisite credentials.

Stoiber, who trained as a lawyer, began his political career thirty years ago in the Bavarian CSU and soon became one of the closest collaborators of Franz Josef Strauss, one of the most notorious right-wingers in the post-war period. Like no other German politician, Strauss embodied the unbroken influence of Nazi politicians in the first decades of post-war West Germany. Among his closest friends and political advisors were such people as Dr. Eberhard Taubert, who had occupied a senior Nazi position in Berlin in 1932 and ranked among the closest associates of Hitler's propaganda minister, Josef Göbbels.

Another intimate of Strauss was the CSU *Bundestag* deputy Siegfried Zoglmann. Under Reinhard Heydrich and K. H. Frank, who was later the *Reichsprotektor* in Bohemia and Moravia, Zoglmann belonged to the highest echelons of the Nazi dictatorship in Prague. Another personal friend of Strauss was Dr. Fritz Ries, an influential German industrialist who made a fortune during the Third Reich from the expropriation of "Aryanised" Jewish property and from slave labour in factories near Auschwitz. Strauss' wife Marianne was also financially involved in Ries' firms.

After Strauss was forced to resign as federal defence minister in 1962, as a result of several dubious weapons deals and other corruption scandals, he concentrated on the leadership of the CSU, becoming Bavarian premier in 1978. He made Edmund Stoiber one his closest confidantes and CSU general secretary. In 1980, when Strauss, in typical Nazi fashion, called left-wing critics and writers "rats and flies," Stoiber defended him. Although rather

hesitant and wavering in his own views, Stoiber became the unconditional defender of Strauss, and inside the CSU was dubbed "Strauss' blonde guillotine."

His route to the top of Bavarian politics was paved with intrigues and dirty manoeuvres. Max Streibl, Stoiber's predecessor as state premier, had to resign in 1993 after anonymous letters revealed that he had enjoyed private trips to Brazil financed by the friendly state enterprise, Messerschmidt-Boelkow-Blohm. The same year, Theo Waigel gave up the CSU party leadership after information was leaked to the press about his affair with the skier Irene Epple. Edmund Stoiber took over both posts in 1993.

Stoiber combines the old forms of CSU "client politics" with right-wing populist demagogy. Two years ago, when Jörg Haider and his far-right Freedom Party received a large vote in neighbouring Austria, Stoiber demonstratively advocated Haider's participation in government in Vienna. When the other European Union states subsequently initiated sanctions against Austria, Stoiber invited Austrian government head Schüssel to Munich and expressed his solidarity with him.

Stoiber enjoys similarly close relations with Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, whose election victory he celebrated by attending a joint meeting in Milan.

For a long time, Stoiber hesitated to seek the chancellorship candidacy because the chances of success were rather small. There are two reasons he has finally taken this step. First, he is reacting to the strengthening of reactionary political forces all over the world after the September 11 attacks and the subsequent American military offensive. Second, the international economic crisis and rapid rise in unemployment have thrown the SPD-Green government into deep crisis. In view of the increasing disillusionment and indignation of considerable sections of the population with the anti-social policies of the incumbent government, the Union anticipates better results in the September election.

Some days ago, leading Green politicians welcomed Stoiber's candidacy, believing that abhorrence for the CSU chairman would lead to votes for another "red-green" government. This is pure cynicism. Three years of SPD-Green government have indeed created the conditions under which a reactionary such as Stoiber can hope for an election victory. This underscores the fact that the SPD and the Greens have no answers to the great social problems confronting the German masses, and are good only for preparing the way for extremely right-wing political forces.



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