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After German Election, Deadlock Hardens

By [RICHARD BERNSTEIN](#) and JUDY DEMPSEY

BERLIN, Sept. 19 - The stalemate in German politics deepened Monday, the day after an inconclusive national election result, as key party leaders rejected some of the coalition solutions that might otherwise lead to the formation of a new government and the selection of a chancellor.

Most important, the chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Franz Müntefering, confirmed that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder would refuse to enter into any coalition with the main opposition party that did not choose Mr. Schröder himself as chancellor.

This, for the moment at least, seemed to rule out a "grand coalition" between Mr. Schröder's Social Democrats and the Christian Democratic Union, the party of Mr. Schröder's main rival as chancellor, Angela Merkel. That option had been deemed the most likely outcome in the event that no party won a majority.

In that scenario, Mrs. Merkel, as leader of the party with the biggest bloc of seats in Parliament, would then become chancellor, while Mr. Schröder would step down. But both Mr. Schröder and Mr. Müntefering have ruled that out.

For her part on Monday, Mrs. Merkel said at a news conference that she had opened negotiations with other parties in an effort to form a coalition that would command a parliamentary majority.

Her first talks were with the leaders of her party's traditional coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party, even though the election left the two parties combined about a dozen seats short of a majority. That means that Mrs. Merkel still needs to find support from another party, and it was unclear where that support would come from.

One possibility was the Green Party, which is now Mr. Schröder's coalition partner. And Christian Democratic officials said Monday that talks would be held with the Greens.

"We need to speak to the Greens and the F.D.P. in the next few days," said Dieter Althaus, a Christian Democrat who is prime minister of the state of Thuringia. "What we need is the largest possible consensus. We have our own agenda. We need to conduct open talks."

The chairman of the Greens, Reinhard Bütikofer, did not rule out an agreement.

"It's the turn of the C.D.U.," he said. "They should say what they've got to say."

But the best-known Green politician, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, when asked at a news conference if he would be willing to serve in a government headed by Mrs. Merkel, said, "Mrs. Merkel will not be chancellor." He did not elaborate on his reasons for that statement.

But by Monday, Mrs. Merkel's grip on the chancellorship did seem to be slipping, even in her own party. The Christian Democrats had not expected the poor showing on Sunday, and historically they have not tolerated failed candidates.

When she stepped onto the podium in the headquarters of the Christian Democrats, she received mild applause from staff members who had remained after late-night drinking and dining.

During past regular Monday meetings of the party's presidium, senior Christian Democratic party leaders always lingered in corridors, waiting to mix with the journalists. There were always a few premiers from the states outside Berlin who would stand not too far from the podium, as if to show support for Mrs. Merkel.

But not on this Monday. As soon as the presidium was over, the black Mercedes that had brought the state premiers to Berlin disappeared into the warm September sun.

Mrs. Merkel was left to field questions, flanked only by the spokesman for the Christian Democrats. Volker Kauder, the party's secretary general, was the only senior party official in sight.

According to [Germany's](#) Basic Law, the newly elected Parliament has 30 days to hold its first meeting, at which presumably it would elect a chancellor. Theoretically, the main candidate is nominated by the president of the Federal Republic, but customarily the president chooses the person who has already been able to get majority support through negotiations with other parties.

Parliament then votes on the candidate. If the candidate fails to win a majority, there must be a second vote. If that vote also turns up no majority, then the president can essentially select a minority candidate to be chancellor, or he can dissolve Parliament and call for new elections.

But there has never been a case in postwar German history where it came to a third vote in Parliament.

Until Parliament chooses a chancellor, or is dissolved by the president, the former government continues in power, meaning in this instance, Mr. Schröder and his partners in the Green Party.

Even for political experts, it was difficult to predict how events might unfold from here.

"It's a power game going on right now," said Peter Lösche, a professor of political science at Göttingen University. "You don't know who's bluffing and who means what they say seriously. But sometimes strange bedfellows wake up in the morning and find themselves in a coalition."

Meanwhile, a great deal of speculation was being devoted to Mr. Schröder's aim in insisting on remaining chancellor in a coalition with the Christian Democrats, even though his party trailed in the vote.

"Yesterday, he was incredible," said Klaus von Beyme, a political science professor at Heidelberg University. He was referring to a television appearance Mr. Schröder made with Mrs. Merkel and other leaders in which he first voiced his insistence that he remain as chancellor.

One interpretation of Mr. Schröder's actions is that he is aiming ultimately at a compromise in which both he and Mrs. Merkel would step down, leaving the way for a compromise chancellor, presumably a Christian Democrat.

"I can imagine a deal in which Schröder has to withdraw and, maybe in exchange for that, the Social Democrats ask the C.D.U. to give up Merkel," Mr. Beyme said.

"The Bavarians are ready to accept such a deal," he continued, referring to the leaders of the Christian Democratic Union's sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union. "And some of the C.D.U. prime ministers of the states would also accept such a deal, because they are not loyal to Merkel, who committed too many blunders and has no charisma. And normally in the C.D.U., there is a rule that somebody who fails has to leave."

Judy Dempsey reported from Berlin for The International Herald Tribune.