



## German 'war of the chancellors'

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**The Christian Democrat (CDU) headquarters still has a big picture on its side of Angela Merkel promising a new future: but at the moment there is no sign of a future for any government.**

In a funny way the German voting system has worked far too well: it is an accurate reflection of the uncertainty and confusion in the minds of many Germany voters.

The German people started the campaign fed up with Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, but he proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was the more accomplished, more polished politician than Mrs Merkel.

And she did not sell her ambitious reforms well to a nervous public. It seems so obvious to the outside that a grand coalition would be a horrible messy compromise that I'm surprised how many Germans told me that was exactly what they wanted.

It is the sort of "why can't they all get on and work together" spirit that one sometimes encounters in Britain, but is not encouraged by our voting system.

### Crisis

The German approach to politics is not the British approach. Although one newspaper rightly talks of "the war of the chancellors" it is more ironic than angry.

I have not heard anybody here talk of a crisis, although that is exactly what it is.

For business it's a double whammy. They wanted the reforms Mrs Merkel promised, which would have removed many benefits and protection from workers and made it easier for enterprise to thrive. So they probably lose that.

But worse the markets and investors hate uncertainty. And if uncertainty was a commodity on sale in the open market Germany would be rich these days.

Big business will notice one other factor, unmentioned by most commentators: the rise of the left.

The new Left is an amalgamation of the party formed by the old East German communists and SPD dissidents fed up with the drift to the right by their party.

**People are casting around for unlikely alliances, but here's the rub: all options have been ruled out**

To listen to them is an exercise in nostalgia. Not just their declaration, which would be common to anyone on the left, that the market is not enough, but their demand that every worker should have a job for life in the same town, and same factory from the time they start work to when they retire. It is, they say, necessary for social stability.

One out of four people in the old East Germany voted for this.

### **Swallowing pride**

Germans are waiting for their politicians to commit an unnatural act.

The big problem is that the two obvious coalitions - the governing SPD plus Greens, or the Christian Democrats with the pro-business Free Democrats - cannot form a winning majority.

That means people are casting around for unlikely alliances, but here's the rub: all options have been ruled out.

No one will talk to the Left party. The Free Democrats and Greens say they will not abandon their natural allies and Mr Schroeder and Mrs Merkel have ruled out working with each other.

And there are no other options.

Clearly someone will have to break their promises, swallow their pride and abandon principles for power.

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