

Report and Recommendations of the SPD "Members' Party Working Group"

Headed by Kurt Beck

Introduction

Low new member figures for political parties in Germany are evidence that party-political commitment is retrogressive, although there are tangible signs of improvement. From a poll of new members in 2004 we know that activists in other clubs and associations are more keenly interested in working within the SPD than people who are not involved in inter-community activities. It makes good sense to harness this interest and to increase our efforts in this direction.

Disaffection with politics and political parties is a much-discussed topic in the public domain. Journalists love to report on misdemeanours by politicians, negative poll data, waves of party membership resignations and so on and such news is always bound to attract interest in the media.

The other side of the coin is that the honorary commitment and work by many thousands of men and women in local politics, in the democratic parties and in clubs and associations, barely gets a mention. A vigorous and democratic sense of community would be impossible to imagine without the work of these men and women.

In the past two years we have lost a great many - too many - members. The reasons for this are well known, and the number of new members has not replaced the old ones. Nevertheless, we should at least acknowledge the fact that also in the difficult years of 2003 and 2004 we welcomed about 20,000 new members.

Despite the increase in the number of new members we must face the fact that politics as such and consequently the political parties are facing considerable rejection and a crisis of trust. Such a judgement may be unfair and over-generalised, especially for those people who are highly motivated, perform well and invest a great deal of time and effort in the cause. We must nevertheless take this situation seriously.

The SPD is and remains a party of its members. We want our roots to be in society, we want to create trust, address people's wishes, hopes and concerns and we want to convert this into political action.

Since the beginning of 2004, this working group's work has been carried on with the aim of developing contributions towards an evolving "modern member-based party". We don't want to reinvent the wheel; we want to find ways of making the party more attractive and more capable of fighting campaigns.

A member-based party thrives on an active and committed membership. For that reason, it is important for us to be an attractive party. That means offering the sort of infrastructure which encourages involvement and makes the party accessible and open for engagement.

To achieve this goal, we should undertake organisations reforms which include, among others, the following central elements:

- Introduction of guest membership.
- Opening up the party by a generous interpretation of the residency principle.

- Improvement of services for members and branches.
- Minimising bureaucracy and pruning the constitution and election regulations.

2. The "Members' Party" working group

The assigned tasks of the SPD's working group on the future of the party as a member organisation were the followings ones:

- Further development of modern organisational forms of the SPD as a people's and members' party.
- Suggestions for intensification of target-group work.
- Expansion of qualification measures for honorary officers, mandate holders and full-time staff.
- Proposals for modernisation of political communication at all levels of party work.
- Implementation of the principle of gender mainstreaming in work and communication structures of the party.
- The concept should include an overhaul of the party's constitution.

An active stake holder society sets new tasks for political parties, which should become mediators between general and individual interests. They are and remain an important element in the political opinion-forming process.

The nature of modern stake holder society requires a different understanding of society and consequently of political and civil commitment. The transfer of state responsibility to civil society equally has consequences just as does the voluntary acceptance of tasks by citizens and self-organisation to tackle them for the common good. The model of the "activating state", a redistribution of responsibilities borne by the state and society, is coming to the forefront. There are many people in our society who are committed to the good of the community. For others, however, the concept of solidarity and common good has taken a back seat and has allowed individualism and a selfish outlook to take hold.

The hallmark of today's society is increasing mobility. For many people, the place where they work is no longer the centre of their daily lives. Parents, and mothers in particular, increasingly have less time alongside family and work commitments, to devote time to voluntary engagement. This makes it more difficult also for the parties to entice people to work for them.

Traditional social structures are disappearing and people's needs are changing. The willingness to get involved has not generally decreased; but disaffection with party politics and a distancing from party-political orientation has meant that changing attitudes have not necessarily had a positive effect for the political parties.

Party-political loyalty has become considerably weaker and highly flexible. A shift in attitudes towards party-political commitment has taken place. The political parties are faced with even more competition from other time-limited commitments beyond the party spectrum. Social change harbours certain risks for the political parties - as well as opportunities.

Citizens now use their free time in a different manner to former times. They can choose from far more choices than hitherto. Pressure at work has increased for many people and the willingness to get involved in politics often suffers as a result.

People have more time on their hands at certain times in their lives. These phases can be used to make a party-political commitment, while for those periods when people are more in demand from family or work, the party needs to develop ways in which a partial commitment can be secured.

These developments and the consequent requirements need to be taken into account in further developing party structures and the party's services and its work. We do know that there is a great willingness for social commitment. We need to address and harness this potential for party-political commitment. Recruiting efforts are therefore particularly promising among those people already active in clubs, associations and political initiatives.

The discussion about whether we want to be a members' and people's party or an election association/network party for professionals and mandate holders is nothing new.

What we have realised is that in the cause of social democracy there is simply no alternative to the principle of a members' and people's party.

Politics at a federal level continues to recruit people mainly from local politics. The local base is absolutely essential for the development of political staff. At the same time, preparation for holding a political mandate needs to be further developed. It is especially important to encourage women to become active in politics. The availability of training via the Sozialdemokratische Kommunalakademie (social democratic local politics academy) and its many regional satellites is especially important for encouraging young talent.

3. The party member and its expectations

The working group's major suggestions and recommendations are the followings ones:

- Offer guest membership, a limited commitment
- Offer project and forum work within the different sections of the SPD
- Offer exclusive information and discussion opportunities including those via the party website spd-online.de
- Internal party training: increase the "value" of membership through further training and expansion of competences (qualification campaign) for party offices and political mandates, as well as for personal areas of life.
- Create offers related to leisure activities
- React to the greater level of people's professional and private mobility
- Make the residency principle more flexible
- Encourage a culture of recognition for honorary and voluntary involvement
- Expand members' involvement and implement a more proactive approach to the motions passed in Wiesbaden in 1993 by means of primary elections, polling of members and member decisions
- Develop more target-group-oriented new member campaigns

Member expectations

Men and women join the SPD because they have expectations of the party. There is an interesting difference, according to surveys, between new members and those who have been party members for a long time.

Some of our members do not wish to be active; they wish to support the party only through their membership. That is perfectly legitimate and is a positive motive for becoming a member. The majority of members, however, are very willing to play an active role in the party.

One very significant fact is that a great many members wish to learn more about and discuss the history and core values of the party and how to maintain these.

The continuing expectation of new members of becoming "politically better informed" by joining the SPD is of special significance for the party. This has become more difficult in the era of mass media, because the media is so fast at delivering much factual information. That is why it is important for the party to offer exclusive information and discussion channels where members can obtain more background and in-depth information.

The drafting and dissemination of critical analyses, especially for distribution via the internet, is an especially important instrument in this regard. The same applies to the exclusive internet service available at spd-online.de, which is being used by more and more members as a result of people's changed information and communication habits.

However, these services must not be a one-way channel. Since members want to participate in discussions and opinion-forming processes, such services need to be interactive. We should assess how we can open up members' access to modern communication channels so that they can use them to participate in the discussion process and decision-making.

Member training can be a decisive instrument for the future in order to ally people with the party. At a time when all large organisations are losing members it is important to increase the benefits of membership of a political party.

If membership offers, among other things, the opportunity to gain qualifications in the field of political topics and to learn or improve on work techniques, public speaking skills etc, the party will benefit because it can then expect that suitable training sessions will produce skilled members who can fill party jobs and political mandates with good candidates. Conversely, members too can benefit by using what they have learned in other spheres, such as at school, in their studies and at work.

The SPD offers specific training at all levels including city local, constituency and district level. Political mentoring programmes, seminars for new members and provision of basic party work procedures have proved very useful in practice. When it comes to planning seminars and other activities the different pressures experienced by men and women with regard to work and family need to be taken into account more than has hitherto been the case.

The political party at local level is known with good reason as the "local party" because the designation suggests social interaction and the convivial meeting place we wish to be. We want to be the sort of party which is not always "highly political"; we also want to be a place where people can get together and do interesting things together. Events like an evening of cards or skittles, a country hike, visits to the theatre or a film evening are by no means an old-fashioned concept; they are still up-to-date, attractive and popular.

People are willing and able to participate at different levels of activity during different phases of their lives. The party needs to be aware of this and to react accordingly. Expansion of project-related work in recent years was a sensible move in this context. Other significant elements are working parties and member participation in the discussion processes, which can be brought to a conclusion within a fixed time limit.

To date, the SPD is losing too many members as a result of moving on. Since society expects its citizens to be very mobile, the SPD also needs to develop concepts for securing the continuity of the engagement of qualified, experienced members when they move from one place to another. The SPD has found it difficult in many locations to reintegrate members into the activities in their new location's local party.

We want to recognise honorary commitment more than was the case to date. It should take a pivotal role. We need a culture of recognition for honorary work and voluntary participation in the workings of our society. This also applies to political commitment, which is an important

element. Democracy cannot function without honorary commitment. It is necessary to highlight this point in a self-assured manner.

Honouring members' commitment after 10, 25, 40, 50 and more years in the party is of pivotal significance. Such anniversaries should be celebrated with a suitable event at local or regional level on a date close to the anniversary. Full-time SPD staff should support this by making sure that such anniversaries are not forgotten. It is also necessary that services rendered by party members in an honorary capacity should be suitably acknowledged by the party. This important recognition all too often fails to materialise, when it could so easily be dealt with by means of a "thank-you", a congratulatory letter or a complimentary mention. Certificates are available in cases of special services rendered, and there is also the possibility of awarding the Willy Brandt Medal. Such special events should be marked at the regional level.

Participation

The "SPD 2000" Reform plan of 1993 expanded the opportunities for member participation. Since that time, primary elections have been made possible; member referendum and petition have both been enshrined in the organisational statutes.

In many places, the plenary principle for nomination of candidates at regional and federal level was established, which meant that each and every member of the party had a say in SPD personnel decisions. Candidates at local level are nearly always nominated at a special meeting to which the entire local membership is invited, so that all the members have the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process.

Local party executives and the local membership assembly are authorised to submit motions to all SPD party conferences. This means that even "normal" party members have the opportunity to influence the programme and the central political orientation of the party. The SPD therefore has no lack of means of participation, but there is no doubt a deficit among members in the awareness of these opportunities for participation. That means that we must strive to improve the way we present the opportunities for participating in the SPD and exerting influence at a political and personnel level.

We propose making much more proactive use of instruments like member involvement and member surveys (internal opinion polls).

Target-group-oriented new member campaign

The work of the working parties¹, and in particular their ability to appeal to the most diverse of levels and groups within society, should be exploited far more intensively than before.

This applies in particular to the process of soliciting new members. We know from surveys carried out among new members that people who are already involved in clubs and associations are the most willing to join the party. It is therefore logical to launch a new member campaign which is target-group-orientated. The working parties with their skills and contacts will play an important role here.

¹ The SPD has various "working parties". They look after special areas and groups and put their topics and views on the agenda. Non-members also have the opportunity to be involved in the working parties in order to become familiar with the work of the SPD aimed at specific groups within the membership: the Jusos (young socialists); AfA (the working party for employee issues); ASF (the social democratic women's working party); SPD 60 plus (the working party for senior citizens within the SPD); ASG (the working party on health); AfB (the working party for education); ASJ (the working party for social democratic lawyers); AGS (the working party for the self-employed) and AvS (the working party on erstwhile persecuted social democrats).

One of the especially important target groups is young employees. The new member survey has shown that ever fewer young people in this group (including trainees) are joining the party. This is a threat to the traditional grassroots base of social democracy among employees. We therefore need concerted action by as many party groups as possible in order to regain ground in the work-place related sectors of social life.

One approach to young school-leavers embarking on their working lives could be for the whole party to stage a "youth day" with campaigns and events to attract new young members at the beginning of the study or trainee period (before young people start work or vocational training). The party needs to improve its overall profile as a representative and advisory institution in this connection. We should look at working with the trades unions on this and seek to benefit from their experience in this field.

Young academics and university politics constitute another target group which is important for the SPD. We need to develop a network among young academics in order to be able to benefit from future opinion-leaders in the field.

In order to achieve this, the party must encourage scientific discourse and link this into the party organisation. Study groups and debating clubs at universities - in connection with the existing Young Socialists (Juso) university groups - should encourage social democratic debate. In the run-up to the federal elections in 2006 we therefore recommend launching a corresponding new member campaign aimed specially at various target groups.

4. The local party

The working group's major suggestions and recommendations are the followings ones:

- The local party is and remains the basis for social democracy
- Local parties are not just a location where local politics is made; they are also a discussion and information forum for all other political issues
- The local party should be a location where men and women of different ages and from diverse social groups can meet - a mirror of society itself
- The local party should be a place for social encounters and exchange of views
- Local executive members should get more assistance and backing from the party's main offices (practical help and suggestions with annual budgets etc).
- Local party should be an educational site
- Stronger implementation of personal skills in local parties, involvement and information

The local party as the basis for social democracy

The local parties are and remain the grassroots base and the "heartbeat" of social democracy. All members belong to a local party where they can participate in discussions and events and where there is a direct, passive and usually also an active right to vote/stand for the party officers within the local party, local electoral posts and to elect delegates for higher echelons within the party.

Local parties are not just a place where local politics is organised; they are also a discussion and information forum for all other political issues. Local parties play a central role within the party.

The numerous tasks of a local party should include:

- Organisation of an attractive programme of social events,
- Involvement in local political consensus,

- Provision of information for members and the population at large,
- Involvement in internal party debate of issues and programmes,
- networking within the community
- Participation in local community life,
- approaching important target groups,
- Press and PR,
- monitoring of a local party web page,
- Development of measures to attract new members and ensure loyalty of existing members.

Many of these tasks demand a high level of activity from a local party and can only be fulfilled if the work is distributed over as many shoulders as possible.

However: more than 1000 local SPD parties have fewer than ten members. Where such structures function thanks to the enormous commitment of individual comrades², there is no need for action. Where the necessary work can simply no longer be delivered, regional and local parties should work together in order to improve the situation. Merging two or more small units could be a way of solving the problem. There is however no ideal size for a local party. Nevertheless, the working group does recommend more cooperation than before among local parties when it comes to new members' meetings, evening seminars and other events.

The local party principle remains to this day a great opportunity for German social democracy. Even in the era of mass media, the majority of voters, just like potential party members, arrive at their ultimate decision as a result of a personal contact.

A strong local party is one of the few places within society where people of different ages and from different social groups can come together in order to discuss politics, to constitute political processes and to make a mutual commitment to a cause. That is why it is desirable to develop local parties as a mirror image of the social fabric of a suburb or community.

Member involvement at local party level is - as already described - laid down in the party constitution. The extent to which that involvement is exploited depends however on how often the local party meets. In our sample constitution we suggest monthly members' meetings. It would seem sensible in any case to lay down in the organisational statutes that a members' meeting should take place at least twice a year. Such meetings should then be complemented by other events (social events, get-togethers, discussions with local councillors etc.).

Local party planning

Successful work at local party level requires harnessing the skills of as many members as possible, acknowledging the differences in time and effort that individuals can invest. It is helpful to draw up an annual plan of action. The local party can always revert to this plan, while at the same time reacting as required to current political events or questions which arise in the course of a year.

Every year, the SPD party executive drafts a "sample" plan of action meant to serve as a basis for annual local planning. For instance, anniversaries or commemorations recalling important happenings in the course of German social democracy can serve as the trigger for planned events. At the same time, social functions which also encourage contact with other associations and initiatives in the local community should not be neglected. A New Year's Ball

² While the term is looked upon by many members of New Labour as outmoded, "comrade" is still used among the traditional wing of the British Labour Party and "Genosse", its equivalent in German, is still widely used within the SPD

or a May Day celebration are ideal examples. Long-term SPD members can be honoured at special events such as Christmas parties or receptions.

Important current political topics should of course also play a role meetings and events.

We do recommend planning a calendar of events based on concrete goals.

This could include for example:

- increasing the number of SPD members by a certain figure,
- carrying through a fixed number of events,
- intensifying contact with certain groups or
- achieving a certain number of press and PR publications in the course of one year.

A great deal can be achieved in an SPD local party if all the available opportunities and energy reserves are brought into play. The question "Do I know my members well?" is therefore of special importance for the chairman of any local party. This applies in particular to professional abilities, political interests, political experience, social contacts and involvement in clubs and associations.

A telephone campaign can serve to canvass local party members about their knowledge. At the same time, this can be an opportunity to ask people whether they are willing to help in certain areas or to inform them about individual projects.

Once the skills and interests of many SPD members are known, the local party's programme can be drawn up accordingly. Such topics which interest a lot of people and form the basis of a successful event should be addressed because there is a certainty that many members will participate.

Member participation in the local party

As already described, our members have joined the party with different expectations and this is something which the local party must take into account. Every local party has specialists for certain tasks and experts who are versed in specific topics. It is of special importance however to delegate tasks - in some cases beyond the local party - and to provide those members interested with the information they require.

The significance of the internet as a means of communication and a channel for information will continue to grow since it offers the opportunity to quickly and cheaply reach many members and the media via e-mail. This makes regular press and PR work even easier to conduct. We recommend creating theme-based e-mail distribution lists for members and those interested, to whom invitations to events and information sheets can be forwarded.

The Willy Brandt House³ produces a weekly flyer on a specific political topic. In addition, more detailed information on all the important political issues is updated regularly on the SPD member network spd-online.de. It is recommended that members be regularly reminded that they are always welcome at the local party's events and meetings. We think it very sensible that members should have the opportunity as often as possible to be involved in decision-making.

Project work as a means of participation

Many members do not wish to get involved in a local party's political organisation work on a long-term basis and are therefore unwilling to stand as candidates for the executive. At the same time, they are usually interested in making a contribution to the party according to their

³ Willy Brandt Haus is the name of the SPD National Secretariat in Berlin, similar to "Victoria Street" in the UK.

ability to do so. Such members can be encouraged to get involved by placing a time or scope limit on projects.

Examples of projects are:

- drawing up a programme (e.g. a local election campaign plan),
- organising an event (e.g. discussion, a summer party),
- (regular) compiling of a ward newspaper,
- looking after the web page.

5. Target group work

The working group's major suggestions and recommendations in this area are the followings ones:

- Maintain the diversity of the target group work
- More time-limited offers and project work
- Target-group work is traditionally a central element of the SPD's political work. This not only facilitates a dialogue and contact with various social groups; it is a way of researching people's knowledge and skills for all sorts of political topics. The input from this field is indispensable for the party's work.
- Target-group work also serves to help us find new SPD members. Without target-group work, the party would simply not occupy a focal point in society.
- The working parties as an integral part of the party as a whole support this work. Within the framework of the working parties there is the opportunity of making a more active approach towards people. Project work, participation by outside experts, the creation of networks and close cooperation with associated organisations have long been an integral part of the working parties' procedures. We must use that contribution constructively in our work.

Openness

"Life" in the working parties is part of the lifeblood of the SPD. It is a diversified life, marked by a number of different ways of working, and results in a wide range of activities.

In addition to classical work forms, there exist other forums at almost all regional and local parties, where work proceeds: these are often in the classical fields of the arts, science and the "one-world" spectrum as well as in the sporting field.

Social democratic forums are a window for interested groups on the member party. They create an important network for encounters, exchange of views and local initiatives. They bring together various interest groups from intellectual or cultural backgrounds with suitable representatives and members of the party as well as friends of social democracy. These forums are open to non-members and the procedure is tailored to changing participation needs according to the individual themes and projects addressed, with an eye to achieving success.

As a result, innovative questions are submitted to the party from outside. Conversely, social democratic ideas and concepts can be better communicated to an informed audience and people associated with the subject in such forum events. Forums have long since been accepted as an integral element of modern media communication with significance for social democracy's profile and public image.

Especially in difficult times, the forums also act as stabilising instruments for both members

and sympathisers who may not agree with every political decision of the party (or its government), but who identify in principle with the basic tenets of social democracy.

In the five new (eastern) German states especially there are many specialist committees working together informally with their regional parliamentarian groups, supplying all manner of ideas and impetus and therefore often functioning as a sort of advisory committee. We need to harness the potential in these committees and the productive groundwork delivered by experts from among our ranks. The party benefits from expert knowledge and that applies also to the working parties. It is therefore desirable to make greater use of limited-time involvement and project work, because this sort of cooperation can lead to an increased feeling of loyalty and member stability.

The party needs, more than ever before, to integrate the working parties into its overall strategy and the development of its plans.

Allocation

Crucial to the viability of the working parties is the clear allocation of members at all levels. Clarity must be a declared goal. Members belong automatically to the Jusos (young socialists), the ASF (association of women socialists) and the AG 60plus (senior SPD citizens) provided one fits the age or gender profile.

Allocation within other working groups is more complicated. People participate in them generally by announcing an interest in getting involved or if they can be identified by their membership profile (professional connection for instance). New members need to be informed in a constructive way of the existence of these working groups and their contacts, so that they in turn can offer to get involved if they wish. We should look into whether it is feasible to develop an (online) form via which members can indicate their interest in joining a working party.

In line with the various structures within local parties, there are also different procedures when it comes to electing executive committees and involving members in executive processes at various levels. There is no uniform structure for working parties within the SPD, and it is consequently unreasonable to expect there to be uniform expectations and goals. Even the ASF and 60plus - especially in eastern Germany - are often constituted according to the plenary principle. This applies most especially to small, thematic working parties who invite their specific "interested parties" to the corresponding meetings.

Experience shows that working parties are of primary significance as important executors of party work.

Target-group work is an important part of member-based party work and should therefore be paid increased attention.

6. Changes to the Constitution

The "member-based party" working group was given the task of taking also the modernisation, streamlining, harmonising and debureaucratising of the party constitution into account. In order to address this important and complex topic, a "constitutional reform" sub-committee was formed whose expert recommendations would be discussed and evaluated in detail by the working group at a number of meetings.

The members of the working group are of the opinion that the party's constitution requires fundamental modernisation, especially since the last fundamental constitutional reform took place back in 1977. The aim is to take account of changed social realities as well as today's

organisational realities within the structure of German social democracy.

It is high time to establish more clarity in the application of the constitution in party life. Frequently encountered problems of interpretation requiring intervention by an arbitration commission have hitherto required knowledge of legal terminology, but could be avoided by clarifications at the draft stage. The statutes need to be streamlined and made more readable. Superfluous repetition and empty phrases must be deleted.

7. Inner-party training

Social democracy is partly rooted in the worker training associations. From member surveys we know that 90% of new members are interested in the party's training courses. Increasingly, these courses represent a "utility value" for members, a commodity which the SPD can deliver exclusively. Members expect to be able to use what they learn also in their professional and private lives.

As a result, inner-party training is constantly gaining in significance. It is also becoming important justification for approaching potential new members and as an element in securing member loyalty. The working group recommends continuation of those measures already implemented in the field of inner-party education.

As a members' party, the SPD must develop a sustained, continued plan to create a personnel and programmatic base. At all levels the party has the obligation to make a concerted effort to nurture new talent and to train its top-ranking staff as well as its broader membership.

The aim of our training plan must be to increasingly prepare members to take on functions within the party and political mandates. There must be more scope for passing on experience, mentoring and training for tasks or even just the opportunity to get help when it is needed. We must constantly encourage our leaders and their successors within the party; offer them the skills to develop further and to learn more.

Inner-party training is not about how to present a resolution and cannot be a simple process of passing on knowledge. Inner-party training is meant to produce a concept for learning which is focussed on active, independent development of knowledge and skills based on one's own experience. Such training should be a way of transforming knowledge and skills into political action.

The "Political Education Network" remains an indispensable element within the social democratic framework. This is the social democratic trainers' forum for coordination and debate.

We want to be able to provide the desired training and education courses to meet the enormous interest expressed by members, especially new members. It is therefore desirable if district parties offer new member seminars at regular intervals. The courses (evening seminars) should cover the history of social democracy, the present-day validity of our core values, information about the organisational principle and the structure of the party as well as getting to know the internal democratic workings of the party. In addition, the working group deems it important that party officers should also be offered training in party work. Such courses should not be offered on a centralised basis. The aim must be to improve the attractiveness of the party and its campaigning skills.

The working party recommends that the party executive should draw up an outline plan of training courses for all levels of the party.

8. An energetic party - ideas and examples

SPD is awarding a prize for exemplary local branch and constituency party activities, the "Wilhelm Dröscher Prize". The following examples are drawn among the best applications to the prize under the header "Embedded in society":

Rodenbach local branch:

1st prize, project title: *De Roderich - the village bus*

Project description: a free village bus service, initiated by the SPD, will carry village residents between 9.00 am and 6.00 pm within the village. The idea came into being when shopping facilities for the village disappeared to the periphery. The bus is also used for travelling to celebrations, elections and events like theatre visits in Kaiserslautern. The 15 drivers offer their services on an honorary basis, and the costs of the bus and fuel are covered by sponsors. A new bus was bought this year using the prize money and sponsorship.

Noteworthy/election result: 64.6% at the local elections in 2004

Wattenbach local branch

Project title: "70 per cent plus"

Project description: Thanks to continual grassroots work, the local party (65 members) has established a presence in clubs and initiated sports competitions resulting in very good election results since the 1990s. Wattenbach local party has set itself a goal of improving the election result from over 60% to over 70%.

Noteworthy/election result: 75% at the regional elections in 2002

Kassel-West local branch

Project title: "The Network Party is alive and well"

Project description: The first local community conference took place in June 2000, aimed at bringing people together for an exchange of experiences. Non-party working parties worked on tangible problem solving aimed at implementing a professional municipal management system. In the meanwhile a district newspaper has been published. An Arts and Culture working party has taken up its work.

Noteworthy/Election result: 12% increase in this local community at the local elections compared with the average in Kassel.

Hamburg Billstedt Division 1 - Central

Project title: "We are back - activating local party work"

Project description: In Billstedt, a former stronghold of social democracy, people hardly took any notice of the SPD after we lost the local elections in 2001. It was decided to establish a new attractive SPD in Billstedt. The project was based on networking, cooperation with clubs and associations. The number of members rose from 94 to 130. A membership drive organised by the Jusos signed up new members throughout Hamburg.

Noteworthy/Election result: Number of new members increased to 136 comrades, those who have been in the party for 20+ years are leaving the party; new members are equal to those leaving and losses through death. 35.7% at the local elections in 2004 compared with 30.5% throughout Hamburg. The group's new project in 2005: Job Café I Billstedt. The division has 68,000 inhabitants with a 22.5% share of foreign inhabitants; 9.7% are unemployed and

14.2% are on benefits. It is planned to bring such people together to exchange experiences and to benefit from contact with local activists.

Auenkirchen local branch

Project title: "Banking with the SPD"

Project description: A really nice little project which has delighted people in need of relaxation. Benches (Bank in German) donated by the local party over the course of 25 years were overhauled and refurbished (in the wake of vandalism and general ageing) for the local people. A video was filmed in cooperation with the local grammar school showing bench scenes.

Noteworthy/Election result: Members renewed their membership - Recruitment of new members equal to lost members.

Bonn city association

Project title: Taking care of and integrating new members

New member offensive (MOff) working group.

Project description: It's good to recruit new party members, but on the other hand how can new members be encouraged to stay in the party? That was the initial question posed in April 2002 in the MOff group in Bonn, where the established new member seminar was put to good use. Participants at the annual seminar were encouraged to get involved in the working group and to share their experiences - a stroke of luck both for the working group and for the newly active members. Working together with the local chairman and a few local "elder statesmen", members helped to develop various plans aimed at contacting new members and establishing contacts.

Neuwied-Altенkirchen constituency (200)

Project title: Choice of a (female) federal parliament candidate in a member-friendly, procedure selection process open to the electorate

Project description: After the MP Ludwig Eich had made it clear that he would not stand again as a candidate, the SPD district parties in Neuwied and Altенkirchen decided unanimously to initiate a member-friendly selection process open to a wider public to choose a new federal parliament candidate. The idea was to involve as many members and other citizens in the process without infringing formal law or restricting the legitimate rights of the members, officers and delegates of the constituency party.

Both district parties agreed on the following nomination procedure: the hustings were conducted according to a uniform, less formal process agreed beforehand. In addition to the candidates' manifestos, all those attending received a questionnaire which included the following questions: How did you like the course of the event? Was there one candidate today who you particularly liked? The majority of those who attended the hustings did in fact fill out the questionnaire and place it in the box designated for that purpose after the event. Together with the candidates, members of a working group specially co-opted for the purpose and designated as advisors and partners to all the candidates, evaluated the questionnaires. The results were primarily meant to help them gauge their own appraisal and were not published. The number of people who attended the four hustings was extremely high. All of the events were attended by over 100 people, which is highly unusual for a mainly rural community. Members who otherwise never attended meetings turned up along with non-members, and they too were able to complete the questionnaire. A surprising number of young members also took part. The press feedback was on the whole positive. Finally, 26-year-old Sabine Bätzing was chosen at the constituency hustings. It was interesting to note that she was usually the front runner in the questionnaire answers.

Noteworthy/Election result: Sabine Bätzing won outright the usually CDU-dominated constituency seat despite the negative mood at federal level at the time. One factor which she benefited from was her high profile as a result of the hustings.

The constituency associations decided not to insist on a preliminary decision to choose a candidate at their individual party levels. The final decision was to be made at their joint constituency meeting on October 23, 2001. In preparation for this decision however it was decided to implement a sort of model procedure which included public participation from the outset in which candidates themselves could offer their views to the decision-makers (delegates). The idea was to give as many suitable candidates as possible the opportunity to put themselves forward. Consequently, local parties were encouraged to nominate candidates. The idea was to show the general public how much potential the SPD has.

It was envisaged that as a side effect candidates would raise their own profiles through their manifestos. Ultimately, there were 8 candidates (six women, two men). Four large-scale hustings were staged, all equally distributed over the two constituencies' areas. All members and inhabitants of the area were invited to attend.

9. Willy-Brandt-Haus at the heart of the Party

SPD headquarters offers a whole range of services in support of honorary members' work.

These include:

- A member's file for each new member
- Welcome letter from the Secretary General to all newly elected chairs of local branches
- Training courses for all new local branch chairs
- New internet page at www.mitmachen.spd.de
- Canvassing of potential new members and conference (September 2005)
- Training for organisational advisers to support local branches
- Invitation for nominations and a new concept for the Wilhelm Dröscher Prize
- Weekly flyer and Willy-Brandt-Haus material for all local branch chairs and subscribers
- www.spd-online.de, the member network, providing all the important information.

Translation: Janet & Michael Berridge