

SPD Chairman and Chancellor Candidate Erich Ollenhauer Campaigns in the Ruhr Valley (August/September 1957)

Abstract

With the death of party chairman and parliamentary faction leader Kurt Schumacher on August 20, 1952, the SPD lost its unchallenged and virtually irreplaceable leader. At its party congress in Dortmund, the SPD elected Schumacher's former deputy, Erich Ollenhauer, as its new chair. A month later, he also became the head of the party's Bundestag faction. At first, Ollenhauer essentially advanced Schumacher's programmatic goals, but he did so without any of his predecessor's charisma. With Ollenhauer as its leader and candidate for chancellor, the SPD only won 28.8 percent of the vote in the Bundestag elections in 1953 and 31.8 percent in 1957 while the Union under Adenauer not only won both of these elections handily, but also achieved an absolute majority in 1957.

Nonetheless, as a unifying figure for the SPD, Ollenhauer succeeded in safeguarding the previously controversial programmatic re-organization of the party prescribed in the Godesberg Program (1959). As a kind of transitional chairman, he paved the way for the rise of a younger generation of SPD politicians, especially Herbert Wehner and Willy Brandt. Brandt was the party's candidate for chancellor for the first time in 1961.

Source



Source: Federal election campaign 1957 of the SPD. The SPD chairman and candidate for chancellor Erich Ollenhauer during the election campaign in the Ruhr area August / September 1957. Photo: Benno Wundshammer.

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