# The FDP is Courted and Weighs its Options (September 30, 1969)

## Abstract

Despite the FDP's poor performance in the September elections, the party was a coveted coalition partner. In the transcript that follows, FDP party leaders summarize their recent talks with SPD and CDU politicians and discuss the conditions under which their party could best distinguish itself in a coalition government.

## Source

### Excerpts from the Transcript of the Session of the FDP Federal Executive Committee on September 30, 1969

[…]

Genscher: On election night, Mr. Friderichs notified us that Mr. Kohl wanted to speak with us. Then he called again later and suggested that Mr. Scheel and an FDP delegation should come to the chancellor's bungalow. Gathered there were the federal chancellor himself, Mr. Dufhues, Mr. Heck, and, if I have been informed correctly, Mr. Barzel, too — either that or his presence had been promised. The CDU was prepared to conclude some kind of coalition agreement with us that very night. I talked about it with Mr. Scheel as well, and we agreed that there was no reason to hold such negotiations on election night. I shared the results of our conversation with Mr. Kohl in the Rhineland-Palatinate bureau. I said: We will have our committees together on Tuesday; government negotiations cannot be held before then.

(Chair[man] Scheel: Did Mr. Kohl make any substantive statements during this first conversation?)

He only said that they were very ready to enter into a coalition with the Free Democratic Party, and that such a coalition would have far-reaching consequences for state politics as well, and that it would involve a generous distribution of cabinet positions that would heal existing wounds. He said: Of course, you will be treated very generously! — And I said: Now is not the time to talk about such issues — without having discussed details in any way.

Chairman Scheel: May I ask Mr. Müller to expand on that insofar as he also received information from the CDU. Then we will have all the CDU information together.

Dr. Müller: As FDP chairman in the state of Baden-Württemberg, I was at the press and television headquarters in the state parliament [*Landtag*] on election night. All of the party chairs had been officially invited there, along with the representatives of the state governments as well. I spent the entire evening there. All of the party chairs made joint radio declarations.

As the election results became clear over the course of the evening, I was asked to receive Mr. Ehmke, who was also there. He told me that even with a slim majority, the SPD was prepared to form a coalition with us. I said: I take note of that and will communicate it to our committees. I did so by telephone.

Second: The chairman of the CDU in Baden-Württemberg, Mr. Klaus Scheufelen, who, as you know, is rather influential in the party, told me on election night on behalf of the federal chancellor — so that I, as a member of the executive committee, would pass it on — that the CDU was determined to form a

coalition with us. I merely took note of that, too.

At 7:30 this morning, Mr. Scheufelen called me again here in my hotel in Bonn. Mr. Scheufelen told me on behalf of the federal chancellor that the CDU was going to make generous offers. He said that Mr. Scheel had already said that we might not be able to meet for negotiations until after today's committees have met, but he wanted me to relay to these committees that the chancellor had told him to tell me that they will make generous offers, including long-term federal and state-level coalition agreements that will extend beyond this legislative period. And [he said] that Mr. Chancellor was prepared to receive me today at 9:00 am. I said: Mr. Scheufelen, I have taken note of your message and will relay it to our committees. The chancellor does not need to confirm this for me, because I believe you when you say that he asked you to tell me this. And that was the end of the conversation.

Chairman Scheel: I will continue to have people report on matters, but perhaps we should first clarify whether we should officially appoint someone to make such contact with the CDU, so that information that will also be of importance for our deliberations can be passed on in an official manner. Now Mr. Mischnick will report on his conversation with members of the SPD.

Mischnick: Between 10:00 and 10:30 pm on election night, when I returned to the parliament building [*Bundeshaus*] from Bonner Talweg and was talking with my colleagues Rubin and Hoppe about what would happen now, Mr. Wischnewski came and asked if he could talk with me. I spoke with Mr. Wischnewski. He asked if anyone, it didn't matter who, was prepared to go to Mr. Möller to discuss the situation. So I informed the party chairman and asked him what he thought about it and whether he himself wanted to come along. — The party chairman said no, he would advise me to hold the conversation alone, perhaps together with Genscher if he could be reached. But he couldn't be reached. So I went there with my colleagues Rubin and Hoppe. Gathered there were Mr. Möller, Mr. Wischnewski, and Mr. Kühn. They explained that the SPD wanted to nominate the federal chancellor and that the party was prepared to step up and negotiate with us. But they wanted to let us know ahead of time to see if we had any reservations about such a thing being said at all.

I tried to contact the party chairman, but unfortunately I couldn't, because the line was busy. Afterwards I learned that Mr. Brandt was calling the party chairman at that moment to tell him that he intended to say the very same thing. — That happened during our conversation. — The three representatives of the SPD made it known that they were not only prepared but willing to form a coalition with us if it proved possible to find common ground; they were of the opinion that continuing the Grand Coalition wasn't an option after these election results, and they regarded it as politically precarious. Therefore: They would step up and it was up to us whether we were prepared to step up, too. — That was the conversation with the SPD on election night.

Chairman Scheel: I would like to add that the federal party headquarters was informed by telephone of the SPD party chairman's intention to announce on television that he was prepared or determined to try to form a government with the FDP.

Ertl: I have a question about that. Can I interpret your answer to mean that you did not speak with Mr. Brandt on the phone that evening?

Chairman Scheel: Mr. Brandt called that night and gave me this information, but only this one message. He said: I intend to say that. — I said: I have made note of it. — That was all!

Dr. Achenbach: May I add something so that the information is complete! — I had a visit yesterday from Mr. Diehl, whom I know from back in the day because he worked for me in France. He said he had just spoken with the federal chancellor, who said that he placed great value on forming a coalition with us. — When I asked him what he was offering he said: Everything but the chancellorship!

(Laughter. — Chairman Scheel: “A typical Diehl way of putting it!”)

Secondly, I got a call this morning from Mr. Wischnewski, who requested a conversation with me in Mr. Möller’s antechamber. I just wanted to mention that here.

Chairman Scheel: You were invited by Mr. Wischnewski? — Good, that’s fine. — I already mentioned this, but perhaps it wasn’t understood entirely clearly. The CDU sent us a telephone message yesterday and sent the same message today as a telegram, requesting that the party chairman and members of the executive committee meet with the CDU for negotiations. — I answered: Wait until after today’s meeting, then we’ll decide on this.

Zoglmann: I have a question. Is the report on all conversations complete?

(Chairman Scheel: “We’re still missing one!”)

— Before and after? — Is what has been reported here the basis for our discussion afterward? Are you of the opinion that this is sufficient?

Chairman Scheel: Yes. — We’re only missing one conversation. Colleague Hoppe will report on a conversation from yesterday evening — one that, I believe, offered the most in terms of substance.

Hoppe: On election night, Willy Brandt called to ask me to come to a meeting yesterday at 3:00 pm in the Baracke.[1] At the start of this conversation yesterday at 3:00 pm, he noted that the executive committee of the SPD had once again made the entire election process and election results, together with the conclusions to be drawn, the topic of an in-depth consultation, also giving consideration to the critical remarks Wehner made about the FDP on election night, and that the committee had unanimously decided to pursue an SPD-FDP coalition. He told me in this conversation that the SPD wants to take the plunge and enter into this coalition, with all its consequences, in order to make clear that it wants to take full advantage of this opportunity — which had not been seized in 1966, leading to accusations that the SPD had missed a chance to change German politics. He said it was the unanimous will of the SPD to go this route. Therefore, in the conversation at 3 pm, he asked me, in view of the importance of the FDP’s decision as the corresponding party, to arrange an informational meeting between him and our party chairman prior to the negotiations in the FDP executive committees, since he was of the opinion that it was important for Scheel, that it was important for the FDP, to be fully informed by the SPD beforehand.

So then I contacted Mr. Scheel in Düsseldorf and brought the two gentlemen together yesterday afternoon in the Berlin office. In the Berlin office, in a three-way conversation, the SPD party chairman again informed Mr. Scheel officially of this position, this decision by the SPD leadership. He explained that the coalition the SPD is striving to achieve should, in the SPD’s opinion, be pursued and prepared by setting up negotiation committees — the SPD’s had already been formed and we were told the names of the members right then and there — that would quickly try to come to an agreement on a substantive program for joint government work. Mr. Brandt specifically indicated that the undoubtedly difficult and crucial issue of economic and financial policy would have to be subject to particularly thorough discussions, so that a solid, well-prepared, joint work-program would prevent difficulties from arising later during practical cooperation. Such difficulties would have to be ruled out through solid preparation in the form of a discussion of substantive issues.

Additionally, they hinted that should an agreement be reached on substantive issues — and based on the declarations we made in our election campaign and on the SPD’s ideas, the SPD had no doubt that the process of arriving at a solid common platform would go smoothly — the personnel merger would have to involve the FDP chairman moving to the Foreign Office as vice chancellor. Furthermore, they deem it necessary to reduce the number of ministries through a reform of the cabinet. Additionally, all other personnel questions should be decided by the two party chairmen after the substantive issues have been

dealt with.

That was the essence of the informational meeting in the Berlin office. That is how the conversation with the comprehensive information from Mr. Brandt proceeded.

For the sake of the good old days in Berlin, I also had a conversation — I can say this here — with Mr. Spangenberg, the undersecretary in the office of the federal president, and I took advantage of the opportunity to see the federal president himself, too, and talked with him. He told me and reported to me that Mr. Kiesinger had just been there to see him at 4:30 pm, and he asked me how I would assess the FDP's level of unity and its capacity to act. Mr. Kiesinger had just revealed to him in conversation that he had great expectations of becoming chancellor, since the FDP was a very fragile party, and that he could assume with certainty that there was enough support for him, Kiesinger, as chancellor within the FDP. — In response to his question, I told Mr. President that I thought I knew the FDP better than Mr. Kiesinger did and that Mr. Kiesinger should not engage in such speculation; I said that the CDU had lost that gamble in the past.

That is all I can add to the report.

Chairman Scheel: In the interim, Willi Weyer has arrived. — We just heard the reports from the gentlemen who have had contact [i.e., with various representatives of the SPD and CDU]. I mentioned briefly that you had contact with [Heinz] Kühn. Perhaps it would be useful if you also reported on your contact with him, so we have this as a basis for discussion.

Weyer: I was in contact not only with Mr. Kühn, but of course also with Mr. Scheufelen, who has been making efforts for days, and I also talked with him before the election. He has tried it through all kinds of contacts, starting with Alphons Horten and then through the Federal Chancellery.

(Chairman Scheel: "I also talked with Mr. Scheufelen before the election. He is very active!")

I can only repeat what was already hinted at. Scheufelen, of course, said that the CDU was offering all sorts of things, but it still wasn't working and so forth — just as with Hermann Müller.

Now to yesterday evening's conversation with Heinz Kühn. As Günter Hoppe also reported, the SPD's unanimous resolutions are known. — One thing seems important to me, Walter [Scheel]: if we intend to do it, then we should not go on questioning it for weeks or else we'll be left out in the cold. We have to make a decision soon. We have to start the substantive negotiations soon.

Second, we should be moderate when it comes to our personnel expectations. The lists that I saw today in the newspaper are horrendous. If, after such a disastrous defeat, we start with five or six ministers, it will pull us down; then we're out of the picture. Then the gentlemen who enter the cabinet might be able to say, well okay, we got to be ministers for a few more years — but the party is finished!

If we want to take advantage of an opportunity to recover politically, then we have to act quickly. In so doing, we have to take into account — and, on this point, I am in agreement with Mr. Kühn — that we will in fact also need a reform of the cabinet at the beginning of our cooperation with the SPD, that is, a reduction in the number of ministries, a consolidation, and so forth, which will enable us to realize some of the spectacular plans of the FDP.

(Chairman Scheel: "We have not started the discussion yet!")

— I just want to say what I discussed with Kühn, where we agree. These are ideas that Kühn and I discussed. […]

**NOTES**

[1] *Baracke* refers to the SPD headquarters in Bonn—trans.

Source: Stenographischen Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Bundesvorstandes der FDP am 30. September 1969, 10:00 Uhr in Bonn, ADL (Archiv des Deutschen Liberalismus, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, Gummersbach), File 153; reprinted as Document 5 in Daniel Hofmann, “Verdächtige Eile. Der Weg der Koalition aus SPD und FDP nach der Bundestagswahl vom 28. September 1969,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Jahrgang 48 (2000) Heft 3, pp. 548–52. Available online at: https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/2000_3.pdf

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