

Bonn Majority Bids Erhard to Step Down

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BONN, Nov. 8 —A majority of the West German Bundestag today asked Chancellor Erhard, in effect, to resign.

By a vote of 255 to 244, the Bundestag (Lower House of Parliament) approved a Social Democratic resolution demanding that Erhard seek a Parliamentary vote of confidence—even though he had already refused to do so and declared just before the vote this morning that he would ignore the resolution.

"I refuse to take part in a show trial," he said.

The main purpose of the resolution was to demonstrate to the country that Erhard lacks a Parliamentary majority. It has no binding legal force, as under the constitution only the Chancellor can ask a simple confidence vote.

The real importance of today's vote, however, was not constitutional but political. In the end, the resolution was supported unanimously by the pivotal Free Democratic party, which had been wavering until late last night.

Union With Socialists

The Free Democrats precipitated the current crisis by withdrawing from Erhard's coalition government a fortnight ago, but have been undecided on what to do now. A few Party leaders would like to reconstitute the old conservative coalition, others think the party should stay out of any government. But it now appears that the strongest group wishes the FDP to form a new "socialist-liberal" coalition.

Today's vote was thus an



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West German Chancellor Erhard addresses Parliament.

important step toward forging an actual alliance between the Social Democrats, who together have the Bundestag votes to pass a "constructive no-confidence vote" which would remove Erhard and simultaneously elect a new Chancellor. The new Chancellor in that event, would almost certainly be the Social Democratic Chairman and Mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt. In today's Bundestag debate, Herbert Wehner of the Social Democrats declared that if Erhard's ruling Christian Democratic Union continued to block a resolution of the crisis, his party was prepared to introduce a constructive no-confidence vote on the basis of today's majority—in other words, a Socialist-Free Democrat alliance.

Awaits Barvaria

It is generally believed, however, that none of the three parties is as yet prepared to move swiftly toward such a showdown. The Free Democrats in particular are inclined to await the results of the Bavarian state election Nov. 20.

Nevertheless, a Bundestag budget debate Thursday, as well as almost continuous meetings of the party leadership, might yet break the deadlock before the Bavarian vote.

The pressure now appears strongest on the CDU, which fears an alliance of the other two. The CDU National Committee, including prominent state as well as federal leaders, tonight urged the party's Parliamentary caucus to reach a decision, this week if possible, among four men: Parliamentary Leader Rainer Barzel, Parliamentary President Eugen Gerstenmaier, Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister-President Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, and Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder.

There is as yet no clear majority for any of the four. The state committee of the party's semiautonomous Bavarian branch, the Christian Social Union led by Franz-Josef Strauss, meets in Munich Wednesday and is expected to make an endorsement of its own, with Gerstenmaier viewed as the likeliest choice.