

Ungovernability in Bonn to open the way for a Strauss coup?

by Rainer Apel, Bonn Bureau Chief

The advent of Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl as the new Chancellor of West Germany on Oct. 1 forebodes the rapid disintegration of political and economic life in the Federal Republic. Kohl, who will head a coalition with the tiny Free Democratic Party after it deserted the Social Democratic (SPD)-led government on Sept. 17, won a vote of no confidence against Helmut Schmidt, but has no capacity to actually govern the country. The chief of the Christian Democrats' sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), Franz-Josef Strauss, is ready to stab Kohl in the back; the new government is unlikely to last until Christmas.

Helmut Schmidt departed from Bonn with a "statesman-like" posture of rising above the fray and waiting for his countrymen to recall him after the CDU and FDP have aggravated the present crises. He left behind a crew of petty-minded, complacent Christian Democratic mediocrities and a discredited Free Democratic Party, who chiefly agree with each other that there should be brutal austerity and March elections to confirm their coalition should be dodged. Despite earlier rhetoric that elections might occur in March or sooner, the Free Democrats know that they would probably gain a vote lower than the 5 percent required for parliamentary representation, and the Christian Democrats, after their disappointing showing in the Hesse state elections on Sept. 26, rightly conclude that they have little to gain from a national balloting, either.

Political maneuvers

The unholy Bavarian Strauss, who is openly referring to the new government as "transitional" and rubbing in Kohl's face the fact that his new partner, the FDP, is detested, intends to pick up the chips when the Kohl chancellorship disintegrates. Meanwhile, the cabinet is expected to retain FDPers Otto Graf Lambsdorff as Economic Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher as Foreign Minister, and Josef Ertl as Agriculture Minister, while the Finance Ministry post goes to Gerhard Stoltenberg, CDU governor of Schleswig-Holstein; the maniacal CDUer Manfred Wörner becomes De-

fense Minister, and Strauss's man Friedrich Zimmerman of the CSU takes over the crucial Interior Ministry.

While a bitter fight has broken out in the SPD between the partisans of the "Green" ecologists and the pro-labor, pro-industry Kanalarbeiter grouping, the FDP is divided over the prudence and morality of having collapsed the Schmidt government. Mr. Kohl knows the risks involved in allying with the collapsing FDP, but, under attack within the CDU for lack of leadership and vision, he decided that now was his only chance of becoming the chancellor, before one of his CDU rivals builds himself up. Strauss's criticism of the liberals has driven the whole coalition to the right at the expense of the "progressive" wing of the FDP, whose main spokesman has been former Interior Minister Gerhard Baum. The fact that Baum and his policy are not represented in the new coalition might lead to a split of the FDP; Genscher, the FDP chairman, had problems in getting his liberal votes together for the vote of no confidence required to oust Schmidt. In a statement on West German TV on Sept. 27, Genscher said that "the tasks we are facing require quick decisions, and therefore we cannot pay attention to those who object to these decisions"—in other words, Genscher would sacrifice his left wing if that meant that the FDP could save its skin in the coalition with Kohl.

This kind of panicked policy by Genscher has intensified the public rage about his machinations to stay in power, no matter with what government or coalition. What smashed the FDP in the Hesse elections, and also, by the way, smashed the hopes of the CDU in the same elections, was the rather successful campaign of the SPD and Chancellor Schmidt, accusing the liberals of "treason in Bonn," and both the FDP and CDU of mounting a cold coup to topple Schmidt and avoid new elections by forming an austerity coalition in Bonn.

The Hesse state election result deserves attention: intersecting the distribution of about 400,000 leaflets and other material by the European Labor Party calling for support to Schmidt, the SPD started distributing 1 million leaflets during the last week of the election campaign denouncing the

liberals "treason in Bonn". While all the poll-makers had predicted a vote of 52 percent for the CDU, of below 40 percent for the SPD and of around 4 percent for the FDP, the actual result on Sept. 26, was a shock for the CDU and FDP: the FDP went down to 3.1 percent, the CDU to 45 percent, and the SPD did unexpectedly well with 42.8 percent. However, the Green Party got into the parliament with 8 percent of the total vote.

The austerity question

The basic factor of instability in the new government in Bonn is its incompetence in economics: the common denominator between the three coalition partners is a mixed bag of conservative, monetarist recipes which prescribe harsh austerity as the only remedy against the depression. As in Britain, this kind of policy will drive unemployment rates drastically up to 3 or more million, will ruin most of the medium-sized and small industries, and will disrupt the system of social peace in West Germany which has been an important factor of post-war stability in this country. Economic chaos will be added to the already existing chaos on the political party front: three of West Germany's states are now governed by minority caretaker governments.

But the Hesse election results have created a shock among all those moving into power in Bonn, and have especially shocked the oligarchy of the "southern tier group," especially, because one of the accompanying effects of the combined election campaigns of the European Labor Party and Social Democratic Party has been that labor leaders and the labor base of the SPD have started to mobilize against austerity as such, and have forced the SPD to reconsider the ideology of "share the burden," the Social Democratic version of austerity which characterized the last phase of the SPD-FDP coalition in Bonn before Sept. 17. This labor mobilization bears the potential of turning against austerity, and of making policy difficult for the coming coalition.

Why Schmidt fell now

Watching this threatening development, the oligarchy behind Strauss's CSU decided to go ahead with the Oct. 1 vote of no confidence, in order to topple Schmidt before the labor-base revolt could position their own plans. Fully aware of the transitional character of the Kohl-led government, the oligarchy of the southern tier is already making plans for an authoritarian regime in a situation which would feature major economic collapse, social unrest, and ungovernability in Bonn. While the intellectual opponent of the oligarchy, the European Labor Party, which has led many campaigns in the past against "Greenies and Counts" (*Gegen Grüne und Gräfen*) and against Strauss and the oligarchy behind him, the mass resistance against austerity lies in the SPD and especially in its labor base. In order to confine or ruin the risks embedded in the coming erosion of public trust in the CDU/CSU, due to the worsening economic crisis, and in the

strengthening of the SPD and the labor movement, the oligarchy of the southern tier group has unleashed its favored submarine in the SPD, party manager Peter Glotz, and his like, to rally support behind party chairman Willy Brandt's plans to turn the SPD into a ecologist-alternative left-wing party while in the opposition in the parliament. This Brandt policy, according to his own terminology "the search of a new majority in this country," which would be at the expense of the SPD's labor base, will split the SPD into two hostile wings: labor versus ecologists.

The oligarchy's calculation is that by paralyzing the SPD in this way, plans for installing an authoritarian regime in the midst of financial collapse, economic and social upheavals, and paralysis in the political party system will create an environment for their coup d'état in Bonn; and it would not be surprising to see Strauss, who has abstained from the Kohl "transitional regime," emerging as the new strongman in

Helmut Kohl is definitely a "transitional" Chancellor. The southern European oligarchy intends to impose crushing austerity on West Germany, and render the Social Democratic opposition incapable of countering, while social chaos paves the way for an authoritarian government supplanting the Christian Democratic-Free Democratic coalition arrangement.

Bonn, like a phoenix from the ashes. Herr Strauss himself has never left any doubts as to his conviction that only a chaotic situation would pave the way for him to take power. The same thing already happened once in Germany of course: in 1933, when the political and social chaos of the Weimar Republic was exploited by a certain Hitler and his "authoritarian movement," the origins of which lay in Bavaria, and in the southern tier group.

While the situation in the Bonn of October 1982 cannot be compared to the situation in Weimar of September 1932, the signs on the wall are, however, visible enough to impel a labor-based campaign for the defense of living standards, and for new elections to preempt a Strauss coup in Bonn.