

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Will Kohl break the stalemate?

The Chancellor's friends are going after Genscher on the issue of the SDI, but time is running out.

A Bonn Christian Democrat described the deadlock in the debate here on European participation in the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative: "We want to take part—in spite of all the questions which still have to be solved. But we can't do what we would like to.

"We Germans have to be on good terms with the French, and here is the main problem—the French government is against the SDI. But since many French military-industrial companies are already contacting the Americans, I believe that the French will get on board sooner or later. As a matter of fact, the real problem lies across the Channel—the English prefer to have their special game with the Americans, as they always did. And furthermore, we have certain troubles inside the government coalition, you know."

These troubles have increased since Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democrats lost the May 12 elections in the crucial state of North Rhine-Westphalia, while the opposition Social Democrats polled 52%. Now the Social Democrats have escalated their campaign against the SDI, knowing that Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Free Democrats could be counted upon to do their utmost to undermine the Chancellor's support for the American defense program.

Genscher is making an open bid to gain political capital at the expense of the Christian Democrats. Just two days after the May 12 elections, in a parliamentary debate on foreign policy,

Genscher insisted that there was still a long way to go before something like an "official position on the SDI" could be formulated. "What is bad for the French cannot be good for us Germans," he said. The other argument that Genscher routinely employs, is that Bonn "must always take Moscow's own safety needs into consideration."

The Social Democratic Party is using almost identical verbiage. Willy Brandt, the SPD chairman and president of the Socialist International, went to Paris May 21 to meet with the leaders of the French Socialist Party, and Egon Bahr, the SPD's "little Kissinger," explained the purpose of this meeting in an essay published in the May 20 issue of the German weekly *Der Spiegel*. Bahr wrote that Europe should stay out of the SDI and work on the basis of the French "Eureka" program, instead. Brandt was to discuss this in Paris, and then in an end-of-May meeting in Moscow with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov.

It has not escaped Chancellor Kohl's attention that Genscher's Free Democrats—his erstwhile coalition partners—have more now in common with the Social Democrats than with his own Christian Democrats. The threat of a rupture in the governing coalition, and the formation of a Free Democratic-Social Democratic alliance, is emerging, and many a Christian Democrat fears that once Genscher comes to the conclusion that he can't prevent Kohl from supporting the SDI, he will switch partners.

This situation has pushed Kohl into one retreat after another. The last was the Chancellor's address to the North Atlantic Assembly in Stuttgart on May 19, in which he called the SDI "an opportunity—as well as a risk."

But the fight is still on: German military-industrialists are clamoring for official German participation in the SDI. This gives the Chancellor a vital bargaining chip against Genscher, and although he continues to avoid direct confrontation with his foreign minister, Kohl's non-Cabinet-member associates are shooting back.

Jürgen Todenhöfer, defense and arms control policy expert of the Christian Democrats, reiterated on May 21 the basic commitment of the Federal Republic to take part in the SDI research program. Another staunch supporter of Kohl on the SDI question is Alfred Dregger, the chairman of the Christian Democratic caucus in parliament. On May 21 Dregger said, "All that discussion on common European positions is good and fine, but it mustn't lead to the postponement of necessary decisions."

Dregger emphasized that his party stands by the position which Kohl first expounded on Feb. 9, at a meeting of the Wehrkunde Society in Munich. This was the first public announcement by the Chancellor that Germany would respond positively to the American offer to participate in the SDI. Genscher has been trying to avoid the issue of this speech in all his public statements ever since.

But this battle will not be decided by proxies of the Chancellor like Todenhöfer and Dregger. Kohl is going to have to take the knives out himself, and take the case to the country directly. Despite all the troubles for the Christian Democrats as a party, Kohl's popularity is still higher than that of either Genscher or the Social Democrats.