

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### The Soviets capitalize on paralysis

*Kohl appears incapable of resolving the troubles he has now, let alone the troubles Richard Burt would bring.*

The four days between June 13 and June 17 marked a drastic change of the political climate in Bonn. On June 13, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's official spokesman, Peter Böhnisch, resigned from his post because of ongoing investigations into his tax declaration of three years past. On June 16, one of the most prominent arms-control experts of the Christian Democrats, Alois Mertes, serving the foreign ministry as an assistant secretary, died of a stroke. Chancellor Kohl was suddenly missing two of his most important advisors and confidants.

The need to find replacements for Böhnisch and Mertes provoked new tensions within the government coalition. Kohl named Friedhelm Ost, one of the country's best known television economics commentators, to be his new spokesman. The Free Democrats complained they had not been consulted; the Christian Social Union (CSU) demanded a spokesman representing them, since the Free Democrats already have the other spokesman, Jürgen Sudhoff.

The CSU, providing the more conservative part of the government, insists on this "third man" because they want tighter restraints on the public activities of the Free Democrats. Too often, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher has used an official government newsletter to propagate his policy against that of Chancellor Kohl. The most recent example was Genscher's letter to all German embassies abroad, which contradicted Kohl's public support for President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.

But the brawl over the government

spokesmen's posts is nothing compared to the expected struggle over the successor to Alois Mertes. The CSU demands that the new assistant secretary should be more pro-American than Mertes was, providing a counterweight to Genscher's anti-Americanism, which is just barely disguised behind "European concerns."

The best solution would be, naturally, to replace Genscher himself, but Kohl does not give the impression that he is inclined to risk a fight with the Free Democrats on that.

The paralysis of the government, which translates into fights over posts and secondary issues, rather than a fight over policy essentials, is being exploited by the Soviet Union. Running short of scandals in Bonn which could be used against Kohl, they have chosen to make use of the agreements reached with Willy Brandt's Social Democrats (SPD) in Moscow recently. The agreements between Brandt and Gorbachov aimed at tighter coordination of anti-defense mobilizations in West Germany. Now, three operations have been launched at once.

On Friday, June 14, the SPD made known that Hermann Axen, politburo member of the East German Socialists (SED), would give a press conference in Bonn on June 19. On Monday, June 17, Egon Bahr, one of the four SPD members who accompanied Brandt to Moscow, questioned West Germany's membership in the Western Alliance. Said Bahr, "Partition of Germany and membership in NATO are like Siamese twins." What made Bahr's statement important was not simply that it resembled propaganda

frequently heard on Radio Moscow, but the date on which it was said: All of West Germany was commemorating the failed rebellion of East German workers against the Communist regime on June 17, 1953.

Bahr's statement delivered a signal to Moscow, which had all its propaganda channels begin blasting against the "threat of revanchism in West Germany," and against Kohl's support for the SDI and the stationing of American nuclear weapons on West German soil. The director of Kohl's chancellery, Wolfgang Schaeuble, commented that this had to be "taken very seriously, because the SPD is providing the cues for Soviet propaganda."

Then, a third anti-government flank was activated: A strategy session of the anti-defense ("peace") movement over the same June 16-17 weekend in Cologne, decided to drop all anti-defense actions for this coming autumn, and instead support labor strikes against the government's austerity policy. This decision made the hand of Moscow and the German Communist Party visible. They pushed for "alliance between the movement and the workers."

In the midst of these troubles, the Reagan administration announced that Richard Burt would be its nominee as the next ambassador to West Germany. Remarkably, the Kohl government decided to agree to Burt's nomination—while his official confirmation by the U.S. Senate is very much up in the air. The decision came despite much protest by conservatives in Bonn against the appointment of this SPD-supporter and, if it need be shown, Soviet agent-of-influence.

Kohl appears incapable of resolving the troubles he has now. Things look very bleak for West Germany's survival, given the troubles Richard Burt would bring.