

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

CDU meets: cosmetics, but no policy

The Christian Democratic Union party convention in Mainz marks the loss of the conservative profile.

Four years after Chancellor Helmut Kohl took power in Bonn (October 1982), his Christian Democratic Party (CDU) held its party convention in Mainz Oct. 6-8, to prepare for the coming national elections on Jan. 25, 1987, and review the four years of CDU rule in Bonn.

The four-year record of Kohl is not a good one: He has abandoned all of the CDU's traditional views on foreign policy, defense, and domestic security, leaving central areas of government policy to his liberal coalition partner, the Free Democrats (FDP). Kohl has handed over these areas of policy to the Free Democratic Party's Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Thus, foreign policy and defense have been replaced by pro-Soviet appeasement and arms-control initiatives, and domestic security by even more liberalization of the justice system.

Step by step, Kohl and his CDU lost votes from their conservative constituencies in all past sub-national elections, to the opposition Social Democrats (SPD). The latest such election debacle took place on Sunday, Oct. 5, two days before the Mainz convention began officially, when municipal elections in the state of Lower Saxony yielded another average loss of 4% for the CDU. This means that German conservatives continue to abstain from voting CDU. Also the FDP, Kohl's minor coalition partner in Bonn, lost votes. But neither Kohl, nor the CDU leadership, decided to take notice of this vote. Instead, they resorted to propaganda,

telling the delegates to the Mainz convention that this Oct. 5 vote was "a remarkable success."

This kind of re-interpreting of reality has become a hallmark of the CDU and Chancellor Kohl. Faced with a national unemployment rate that won't fall (and can't, because of the government's budgetary austerity policy), the CDU leadership told the delegates that Kohl's economic policy record was "excellent," and went so far as to speak of "the second German Economic Miracle."

As for his government's record on foreign policy and defense, Chancellor Kohl himself tried to convince the Mainz convention in his keynote address that without his own "steadfastness," there would not have been the past Geneva and the coming Reykjavik summits between Reagan and Gorbachov. Amazed delegates and the press were making jokes after Kohl's address, calling him the "father of Reykjavik."

It was also interesting to note, that the Mainz convention did not deal with the question of the Soviet military buildup, nor with the threat of terrorism, nor with the AIDS issue. All of these controversial items were kept out of the debate. Instead, CDU party manager Heiner Geissler, the party's "strong man," whom many say has the party and the chancellor under tight control, streamlined the convention along "social issues." The CDU will not attack the opposition Social Democrats on their pro-Soviet policy profile, but will use the 100 days from now to election day on Jan. 25, to

campaign on problems of the family, of health (keeping out the AIDS issue, however), social care, and the "entry into the information society."

This means that Geissler has made a pre-election deal with Foreign Minister Genscher, to have his party campaign on foreign and arms control, defense and security issues. This will help the FDP, which most recent opinion polls are giving less than the 5% of the vote needed to qualify for seats in parliament, back into the parliament and the government coalition.

It was observed at the Mainz party convention that party manager Geissler got more applause than party chairman Kohl. Geissler's control of the party is so tight that Geissler was also able to make a deal with Franz-Josef Strauss, the chairman of the Bavarian state section of the Christian Democracy, the Christian Social Union (CSU). Strauss had been the only prominent leader to attack the policy of Foreign Minister Genscher and to demand that the CDU and the chancellor regain the reins of the government's foreign and defense policy. Strauss has charged the CDU and Chancellor Kohl with giving away precious votes by liberal policies which scared away the conservative constituencies. Strauss's CSU, insisting on this policy reform, has consequently refused to sign a joint election campaign platform with the CDU for 1987.

The delegates in Mainz were eager, therefore, to learn from Strauss's address on Oct. 7 what he thought was wrong with the CDU. But Strauss's appearance was a big letdown. He did not reiterate his critique of the CDU, nor of the FDP and Genscher. Instead, he joined Geissler's and Kohl's "confidence propaganda" among the delegates. This means that, for the remaining 100 days until the coming elections, cosmetics will replace politics.