

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The missing secret files

All looks quiet on the surface, but beneath the calm a debate is raging about "lost" files.

Much of the paralysis in German politics today can be traced to the fact that politicians are increasingly engaged in covering up old scandals, which absorbs a good deal of their energy. The scene is reminiscent of the last two years of the Bush administration, and Bonn is facing national elections in October 1994.

Under a seeming calm, the scene is so explosive that the career of Economics Minister Jürgen Moellemann, vice chairman of the Free Democratic Party (SPD), was ended over a ridiculously minor scandal two months ago.

The end of that affair was interesting in two ways. First, the man who replaced him, Günter Rexroth, came from the Treuhand agency, where he headed the section dealing with the remains of firms which were part of the East German arms and drug-peddling empire run by assistant minister Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski (who also was an officer in the foreign intelligence of East Germany until late 1989). At least one of these "firms," IMES, had business with the Richard Secord-Oliver North operation known as the "arms-for-hostage" deal between George Bush and the Iranians. Most of the original East German files on secret talks between IMES and the CIA are allegedly missing, and it is not known which of these shadowy East-West "business relations" have lived on after the collapse of the East German state in 1990.

Was Rexroth made minister of economics because he did a "good job" at the Treuhand, administering the IMES heritage? The fact that he

was selected for that cabinet post by FDP chairman Otto Count Lambsdorff, a key player in transatlantic relations and, since May 1992, head of the Trilateral Commission's European section, points in this direction. Lambsdorff is also the man who maneuvered Rexroth into his post at the Treuhand in August 1991.

Second, was that Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel replaced him as vice chancellor in the cabinet, and was also nominated the chief candidate to replace Lambsdorff as chair of the FDP at the party's next convention in June. Becoming chairman after only three years of party membership, as Kinkel would be, is very unusual in German politics, to put it mildly.

Before joining the party, Kinkel worked as deputy minister of justice, with Wolfgang Schäuble, state minister of the Bonn chancellery at that time, on sorting out and removing, in the weeks before the October 1990 unification of the two Germanys, sensitive files of the East German foreign intelligence apparatus (Stasi). "Sensitive" usually is a category for files that contain secret information identifying operations and personnel that are "still in business."

Two other persons helped in this file-sorting: a ministerial official of Wolfgang Schäuble's, Eckart Werthebach, and former Stasi Maj. Gen. Erhard Braun.

After the elections for the first all-German parliament in December 1990, Kinkel became minister of justice and Werthebach was made director of the Federal Agency for Consti-

tutional Protection. Then, in May 1992, Kinkel replaced Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who had been foreign minister for 18 years, and whose resignation was rumored to be related to "sensitive" Stasi files.

"Sensitive"? Well, Genscher played a key mediating role in the 1980 arms-for-hostages talks; some of the secret talks even took place at his home near Bonn. The director of the West German foreign intelligence agency during that period was Kinkel, and he had been one of Genscher's closest aides for several years.

So, a small, inner circle of politicians keeps the lid on some of the darkest intelligence affairs of the post-war period. And as the key persons have the most important posts in politics, all those affairs seem to be pretty much under control.

But beneath this calm, things are boiling. For example, on March 4, the parliament committee probing the IMES complex and related questions heard testimony from Philipp Jenninger, then head of the Bonn chancellery, on his 1982-85 secret talks with Schalck-Golodkowski. One of the issues being discussed between Bonn and East Berlin at that time was a joint venture of both German foreign intelligence agencies for various secret international transactions that would operate from Zürich, Switzerland.

Jenninger said that he could not recall all the details, but there were minutes at the chancellery on that period. Schäuble, however, testified that there were either no such files, or they had disappeared. This riddle remains unsolved, but thanks to Jenninger, it is now on the record that such minutes did indeed exist. The hint about Jenninger's talks about the Zürich joint venture came from Stasi files that ostensibly "escaped" the file-sorting operations of 1990, which may mean there is more to come.