

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Unprepared for the turbulence of 1994

Some of the "old guard" are speaking up, but the elites haven't yet any idea how to deal with the coming crises.

Finally, the "taboo word" made it into the media: Shortly before Christmas, Rüdiger Altmann, who is well-known for his role in the "social market economy" wing of the Christian Democracy, became the first senior figure of the political establishment to stop that nonsensical talk about the "economic recession that will be over soon," and to address the fact that there is a "devastating international depression."

In an essay in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* daily on Dec. 21, Altmann warned that by subscribing to the single, integrated European market in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty (which he called a "balloon without propulsion"), Germany was unfit to deal with the turbulences of 1994, especially those from the East. In its national interest, he wrote, Germany should stop waiting for others to produce new ideas and rather orient toward the economic reconstruction of eastern Europe in order to overcome the depression at home as well as in the East.

Germany should direct productive credits to eastern European countries, he said, limited to consumer goods and productive investments, instead of today's practice of giving credits merely for monetary stabilization programs that do little to improve industry.

"Overcoming the international depression" and granting "support that is indispensable for eastern Europe" is one and the same task, Altmann wrote. The main problem is that the policymaking elites are not up to that challenge: in view of the "economic depression in Germany" and the

"most extensive and far-reaching world economic crisis since the '20s," the lack of competence and authority in the Parliament, for example, is "alarming."

The elites could be characterized by three words, "decay, decline, and disgust," Altmann wrote, warning that without an in-depth reform of the basic policymaking structures, German society and the political system as the world has known it during the postwar period, would perish. The society as a whole, he wrote, is in a "phase of disintegration," and in danger of being swept away by developments it lost control of, which was a process that began long before the East European revolution of 1989, but has been accelerated by the events of that year.

A catalyst in the elimination of the middle class, which has been the backbone of the three main postwar parties (Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and liberal Free Democrats), has been the "economic depression" that has hit Germany in a depth not known since the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s. In that sense, the low vote for these parties in recent elections can be considered a reaction by the victims of the depression.

Instead of trying to "fight paralysis with crutches and wheelchairs," he wrote, one should work on a profound "restoration of German politics" as a whole. He recommended that this restoration begin with a cultural and education policy that would break with the "so-called education reforms of the past decades," stop the decline of education and the loss of values

among the youth, and create sound values that could form the basis of a revitalized national identity.

Altmann's essay is, to date, the only comprehensive document published outside the LaRouche movement that has addressed some of the basic ailments of today's society and policymaking establishment. Does this indicate that something is about to change in German politics? It is a sign of hope, no doubt, but more proof of a change is required.

There are other signs. For example, an interview Dec. 20 by former chancellor Helmut Schmidt in the *Die Welt* daily. He said that it is a big mistake not to make use of high-tech inventions made in Germany, like the Transrapid maglev train system, or the safe nuclear power plants developed by German engineers. The statement is the more remarkable, because during his chancellorship, neither of the two technologies received much government support, and were even the target of bureaucratic sabotage, with Schmidt's tacit consent.

Even more surprising were remarks Dec. 19 by Count Otto Lambsdorff, past party chairman of the "free market" Free Democrats and head of the Trilateral Commission's European branch, who said it was deplorable that there were government funds for nearly everything, but not for the one technology that was unique and had good chances on the world market, the Transrapid.

What is worrisome is the fact that Lambsdorff, Schmidt, and Altmann are of the first postwar generation of politicians, the "old guard" who are now in their 70s. The second and third generation, those who are in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and occupy most of the positions of power in the country, don't seem to be much concerned about the degeneration of society and state, and the dangerous strategic situation.