

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Disturbing green signals from Germany

Flirtations with the ecologists will limit the options for the new German government.

Germany's new chancellor is the old one—Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl, who was re-elected by a majority of only one vote in the parliament on Nov. 15. This one-vote affair shows that it will be difficult for Kohl to govern, and many insiders here think that the new government will either die of erosion or even fall by a no-confidence vote amid economic turmoil or scandals before the end of 1996.

Kohl won't be able to pass the FY 1995 budget, for example, if the one vote that made him chancellor is missing when the budget vote comes up. The erosion is shown in the Oct. 16 elections for national parliament which gave Kohl's three-party coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), and Free Democratic Party (FDP) a meager majority of 10 seats over the three opposition parties (Social Democrats, SPD; Greens; Socialists, PDS). A rising percentage of the electorate is fed up with the government's monetarist economics, characterized by proclamations of "up-swings," while jobless and bankruptcy figures zoom.

The erosion is also visible in the fact that numerically, 3 of the 341 votes which the government coalition controls in parliament did not vote for Kohl in the re-election: He received only 338 out of the 672 votes. As these were secret ballots, the votes of individual parliament members won't be published. It may even be that more than three CDU, CSU, or FDP members voted against Kohl, and a few votes from opposition party members contributed to his thin majority.

One or several of the Green party's members may have voted for the CDU's Kohl: indeed, a number of them have endorsed coalitions or alliances—on single issues—between Greens and Christian Democrats. Such a single-issue alliance surfaced in the first of the newly elected state parliaments in Berlin on Nov. 10, when CDU votes surprisingly made Green party member Antje Vollmer deputy speaker. The Greens could have returned that favor in the Nov. 15 voting on Kohl.

Both developments are a novelty, but there are other signs, from both sides, of developing options for replacing the ailing FDP, Kohl's minor coalition partner.

The FDP has been in a crisis ever since its longtime chairman, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, quit the chairmanship and the dual post of foreign minister and vice chancellor two years ago, depriving the party of its foremost "voter magnet."

The party has also suffered from the fact that the consequences of liberal free market economics (the trademark of the FDP throughout the post-war period) are visible in Germany's five eastern states, which have seen a dramatic rise in joblessness, along with the "privatization" of the former East German regime's state-sector industry. Even in the western states, Kohl's minister of economics (named in the January 1993 reshuffle), FDP member Günter Rexrodt, has become one of the most hated politicians of small and middle-sized businesses, which have suffered a 40% increase in corporate bankruptcies from Rexrodt's privatization drive. Rexrodt

was formerly a director at the same Berlin Treuhand agency that is running the draconian privatization and deindustrialization of the former state-sector economy in the east.

The FDP has been voted out of 9 of the 16 state parliaments in Germany over the past two years and is expected to leave the remaining 7 parliaments in the next two years. This bodes ill for Chancellor Kohl's plans to run a full four-year term until the elections of 1998.

Wolfgang Schäuble, the manager of the Christian Democrats' parliamentary group, sent probes a few weeks ago into the Green party camp. Also, numerous senior members of the CDU party organization, from Parliament Speaker Rita Süßmuth to cabinet ministers Norbert Blüm (labor) and Klaus Töpfer (environment), have publicly endorsed a "black-green" political cooperation with the Greens, along with Klaus Escher, the new chairman of the CDU youth organization. Many young Christian Democrats who want to be the "party of the post-Kohl era" are in favor of ecologism. Prominent Greens, among them the spokesman of the eastern German Greens, Werner Schulz, have called for cooperation with the CDU as well. Following the municipal elections in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia on Oct. 16, such "black-green" coalitions have been formed to run the administrations of two bigger cities of that state, Gladbeck and Mülheim.

This implies that not much can be expected to develop from that passage in the policy platform of the new Kohl cabinet which pledges the government to make "the construction of new nuclear power plants possible," and to realize such high-tech projects as the envisioned maglev train between the two biggest German cities, Hamburg and Berlin. Both are rabidly opposed by the Greens.