

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Pathfinder sparks cultural optimism

*While the government sticks to its budget-cutting axioms, others are calling for high-technology projects to create jobs.*

The landing of the Pathfinder mission on Mars on July 4, has provided a boost for the continued funding of space technology projects in Germany. The austerity-minded government in Bonn is desperately looking for budgets that can be cut, especially those that are “not producing an immediate benefit.” The budgets for space technology development and space research are in this category, in the government’s view, and all projects that have to do with manned space missions are threatened with deep budget cuts or elimination.

When Pathfinder arrived on Mars, it became known that the engineering teams in Germany that contributed to this mission, are to be “phased out.” Moon and Mars projects, and even the international space station, whose construction begins in less than a year, are light-years away for a government that can’t even tell whether it will have a budget in FY 1998.

The Pathfinder mission has been welcomed with a lot of enthusiasm in the German population, especially by the youth—as one can surmise from the number of Internet link-ups with NASA. In stark contrast to the views of the government, there is a strong interest in space projects. The problem, as Jesco von Puttkamer, a German-born staff member on the space station project in the NASA Office of Space Flight in Washington, stated recently, is the bureaucrats. Since his book, *Mars: The Millennium Project*, was published a year ago, Puttkamer has toured Germany for presentations, meetings, and interviews. In an interview with the *Berliner Morgenpost* daily on June 28-29, he attacked the budget-cutters and

bureaucrats in very harsh terms. He spoke of “those that doubt the value of space travel and call the necessity to send humans into space into question,” as a problem that he has met “predominantly in Germany.”

This technological pessimism shows “a sleepy, idiotic uninformedness,” said Puttkamer, who criticized politicians for opting out of the know-how that Germany once had developed for manned space missions. Since 1991, research task forces have been dismantled, industrial facilities closed, almost 25,000 engineers have been fired—30% of the space sector workforce. No more than 4,000 engineers are employed today, compared to 7,000 in 1990. “Germany has deserted the front row seat which it once occupied,” he said.

The narrow-minded adversaries of space technology overlook the fact, he said, that every \$1 invested in the space sector has generated \$2 in terms of spin-off products—30,000 altogether, which embody a sales volume of \$77 billion. In the year 2000, it will be \$121 billion.

What Germany needs, he said, is a national space program of its own, not just shares in international projects, especially because of the employment it will bring to the productive *Mittelstand*, i.e., small and medium-size industry. He reiterated his belief that if the right commitment is there, manned missions can land on Mars in about 2020. The fact that this “politically incorrect” interview was published by one of Germany’s leading news dailies, reflects a broader debate about high-tech among the population that has developed over the last few

months. It also reflects the fact that all the post-industrial concepts that are being pursued by the elites, have not halted the rise of unemployment. For the first time in Germany, unemployment is increasing during the summer.

All opinion polls show that concerns about the future of German industry on the world market, and about jobs, rank far above concerns about the environment that the media and the government prefer to sell as “reality.” And while Chancellor Helmut Kohl spent most of his time at the United Nations in New York three weeks ago talking about the rain forests, Gerhard Schroeder, who may be the opposition Social Democrats’ next candidate for chancellor against Kohl, launched a frontal attack on the ecologists. He said that if he, as state governor of Lower Saxony, had listened to Greenpeace and the radical ecologists and vetoed a number of infrastructure projects in that state, he would have killed even more jobs.

Only a few years ago, Schroeder was among the radical ecologists in the Social Democracy. Whether his change of mind is real, or has only to do with the fact that he wants to become chancellor, is irrelevant, to the extent that he sensed clearly, that the majority of the electorate is against ecology, if it means sacrificing jobs. (Germany is heading for the “official” 5 million jobless threshold this winter.)

One has to keep in mind that Kohl’s biggest rival among his own Christian Democrats, is Edmund Stoiber, state governor of Bavaria, the state with the biggest concentration of aerospace firms. Joint protests of managers and workers of the aerospace sector there recently forced Bonn to give funding guarantees for the jetfighter project JF 90, and the 18,000 jobs which it will create over the next 15 years. The wind is beginning to shift, from ecology toward technology.