

Surprising Shifts In German Politics

by Rainer Apel

Over the past two years, a transformation has been going on in the political parties in Germany. The most spectacular aspect of this process has been the fact that, as in Italy, “conservative” politicians and organizations are emerging as some of the most outspoken critics of the neo-liberal free-market policies of the governing “red-green” coalition of the “left-wing” Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens.

The Christian Social Union (CSU), the autonomous Bavarian state branch of the Christian Democrats, and its party chairman, Bavarian Gov. Edmund Stoiber, have been given the ironic media label “leftist,” for their harsh criticism of the red-green government’s monetarism. In contrast to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the bigger of the two Christian Democratic parties, the CSU has repeatedly come out in defense of lower-income wage earners against the government’s tax policies, or in defense of smaller firms against the big banks and insurance companies. The CSU’s views have had a mobilizing impact also on the national Christian Labor Movement (CDA), where a revolt has emerged, not only against the red-green government, but also against the neo-liberal policy of the CDU itself.

That policy has been implemented by the new CDU party chairwoman, Angela Merkel, under the irritating term, “new social market economy.” Fifteen months ahead of the next scheduled national elections, the question of which policy the Christian Democrats should adopt, in order to throw up a serious challenge to the red-green alliance, is moving into the center of debate. Close to two-thirds of Christian Democrats oppose a Merkel candidacy against SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and slightly more than 50% favor a candidacy of Governor Stoiber. In Germany, candidates are not selected in primaries, but by the party executives. Stoiber has not declared his mind on the issue, so the question of the candidacy remains open for the time being. But the ongoing unrest within the Christian Labor Movement may shift the balance away from Merkel and in favor of either Stoiber or yet another CDU politician with a less neo-liberal profile.

Revolt Against Free-Market Economics

The CDU neo-liberals suffered their first big defeat in the May 20 municipal referendum in Düsseldorf, against plans of the CDU Mayor of that city of more than 600,000 inhabitants, to sell off the public utilities to private investors. The referendum delivered a clear “no” to the Mayor’s plans, and

the CDA, his own fellow CDU members, were an integral part of the weeks-long campaign against the privatization. The referendum consolidated the position of those in the CDA, and in the CDU party organization, who want to put an end to their party’s arrangement with the neo-liberal party leadership, and who want a vigorous policy campaign against the red-green national government.

The national convention of the CDA, held in Bonn on June 9, illustrated this ferment of revolt: Notably, the newly elected chairman of the CDA, Hermann-Josef Arentz, attacked the CDU leaders’ ideology as representing an “inner-capitalism repair shop.” Christian policy today, under conditions of the many threats posed by globalization, “must be more than just an ambulance service for the crises caused by capitalism,” Arentz said in his convention speech. And in an interview with the *Rheinischer Merkur* weekly, published the day before the CDA convention began, Arentz remarked that the CDU leadership, though nominally “Christian,” had mostly taken no notice yet of the fact that Pope John Paul II “has been a vehement critic of globalization.”

The CDA convention passed a Bonn Declaration, which contained rather harsh statements on neo-liberalism and globalization. Under the headline, “Putting Man First, the Market Second,” the declaration stated that any policy “must be measured by the principle of service to mankind and to the common good,” and “the state is the guardian of the common good. It has to secure the peace, domestically as well as abroad. It has to promote the welfare of man.” The state and its leading politicians have an obligation to defend the common good against its enemies, the declaration said: “The market economy and the social *Rechtstaat* [state according to the rule of law] are one and the same. Without the social *Rechtstaat*, the market economy degenerates into casino or mafia capitalism.” And in another passage: “Labor is a freedom right. The right to have work is more important than property.”

On a global scale, Christian policies must ensure that regulations that exist can contain the threats posed by globalization, the CDA recommended. “In the emerging and developing-sector countries, globalization often leads to grave social perturbations. In many cases, the social consequences of economic and technological decisions are not being thought through well enough, and are not responded to sufficiently. . . . We need transparent and controlled financial markets everywhere in the world. To achieve that, the position of central banks and of the control boards must be strengthened against the players on the financial markets.”

Granted, this is not yet the call for a New Bretton Woods of the kind that nominally “conservative” politicians in Italy have issued, repeatedly, in recent months. But the CDA apparently is moving toward such positions. And it was no accident that the CDA and the LaRouche organization collaborated, along with others, in the campaign to stop the privatization of the Düsseldorf utilities.