

Brandt versus Schmidt

The West German Social Democracy's chairman is at the core of the transatlantic plot to dump the Chancellor, reports Renée Sigerson.

A former Mayor of West Berlin now living in New York City, where he runs the German Social Democracy's Friedrich Ebert Foundation, detailed in a private discussion with American researchers how the clique around former Chancellor Willy Brandt aims to drive Helmut Schmidt out of office by no later than September. Dieter Stobbe, West Berlin Mayor from 1977 to 1979 and an intimate associate of Brandt's since 1960 when he worked in Brandt's own mayoralty campaign, documented no less than eight critical developments scheduled to occur between now and September, "each of which is significant enough to produce a change of government."

The goal of the Brandt faction, Stobbe indicated, is to hand Germany over to a right-wing government and yank the Social Democrats (SPD) back into the position of being an impotent opposition party. This would allow Brandt to reorganize the SPD as a party representing the peace and environmentalist movements, not the alliance of trade unions and regional industry groups which has emerged during Schmidt's eight years in office.

Stobbe is also a listed associate of the German Marshall Fund, the elite U.S.-German association run by the same Lower Manhattan-London investment banking houses which administered the postwar military occupation of Germany. As previous issues of *EIR* have documented, the Marshall Fund is coordinating the gameplan to dump Schmidt.

On March 15 Schmidt launched a new effort aimed at thwarting his opponents, giving preliminary announcement to the press that he intends to run for re-election in 1984. A formal declaration of the re-election bid will be made at the April 20 SPD Congress in Munich. Schmidt may be able to use the announcement there to counter maneuvers already planned by Brandt to turn the Congress into a test of Schmidt's strength. The night before the proceedings begin, the peace movement has announced, it will hold a mass rally in the city. Brandt has stated he wants to speak at the rally, and according to Stobbe, thus far Schmidt has ordered Brandt not to, on the grounds that since Brandt chairs the SPD, his presence would give legitimacy to transformation of the

SPD into a party of peaceniks and other radicals.

Genscher's sabotage move

Stobbe described how the peace movement in Germany came into existence. It began in 1979, he stated, as a direct response to "certain changes in American foreign policy." Asked whether Germany's increasingly grave economic problems and rising unemployment were perhaps adding to unrest in the population, Stobbe vehemently insisted that Schmidt had made a fatal blunder by making economic policy the central issue of his administration. "The problems in American foreign policy, more than any other issue, is the central concern for the German population today," he proclaimed.

President Reagan, he added, was distrusted by the German electorate. Reagan's scheduled visit to Bonn in June for the NATO summit meeting, has now become the most dangerous political showdown facing Schmidt in the coming months—and in the course of his pronouncements, Stobbe revealed that it was Schmidt's Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who set the trap for Schmidt to convince Reagan to come to Bonn in June for an event which could permanently tarnish Schmidt's government.

The NATO summit was originally set to occur in Brussels. During Schmidt's January visit to Washington, a proposal was presented to change the site to Bonn, to allow Schmidt to show Reagan an act of friendship. As soon as the change of location was made public, the German peace movement declared it would hold mass, hundred-thousand-strong demonstrations across the country when Reagan arrived. There is a serious danger that the violent fringe minority in the peace movement will launch civil disturbances on that day, threatening Reagan's security. Asked why Schmidt didn't just allow the meeting to be held in Brussels, Stobbe blurted out, "That was Genscher's idea. . . . He did it to gain more maneuvering room around his efforts to get a new coalition going."

The fact that Genscher is involved in maneuvers against Schmidt is publicly recognized. As chairman of

the Free Democrats, the small swing party, Genscher has openly courted the opposition Christian Democrats for the formation of a new government. This is the first time, however, that Genscher has been named as the source of the decision to bring Reagan to Bonn.

It documents that the Free Democrats are not merely keeping open the option of a change of government, but are actively involved in dangerous maneuvers to drive Schmidt out. "Schmidt doesn't want to resign," Stobbe noted at one point, "and it isn't an easy matter to replace a German government. . . ."

The pending showdowns

Leading the chronological list of political showdowns facing the Chancellor before September is the March 20 regional election in Lower Saxony. There the SPD is in opposition, and the Christian Democrats govern on the basis of an absolute majority.

The test for Schmidt is whether the SPD will lose even more votes than it did in the last election. Some polls have warned that the SPD might even dip below 40 percent, which would be disastrous for Schmidt.

The final days before the Lower Saxony election, however, shed light on how German politics is far more complex than is generally appreciated by international observers, and how Schmidt's base of regional trade union and industrial layers is much more resilient, as well as hostile, toward Brandt's circle than is admitted, particularly in the U.S. press.

Lower Saxony is governed by Christian Democrat Ernst Albrecht, the protégé of a patrician family, the Bahlsens. Owners of Germany's leading baked goods firm, the Bahlsens are intimates of a generations-old Quaker-Church of England clan, which also includes the Cadbury family of England, a clan which formed around colonial policies in countries which produce sugar and cocoa. Sometimes nicknamed the "Prince," Albrecht has Chancellorship ambitions and until recently was operating on the assumption that he would win a new landslide victory.

Suddenly his chances have dimmed. Recognizing that Albrecht is a key personality in the cross-party circle which has put Schmidt under attack, Schmidt supporters from different regions of Germany have gone into motion around Lower Saxony to prevent Albrecht from getting a landslide, thereby aiming to shatter his national ambitions, and mark a defeat for an anti-Schmidt protagonist.

One form this momentum appears to have taken, ironically, has been maneuvers to get more votes into Genscher's Free Democratic Party (FDP). In the last election, the FDP swing party did so poorly in the Lower Saxony regional election that it failed to get the necessary 5 percent required for representation in Parliament. In the final days before the election, reports

have come out that the FDP may recoup and force Albrecht to enter into a coalition. The speculations smack of a complex deal: according to some press accounts, the FDP has made formation of a coalition dependent upon a promise from Albrecht that the Lower Saxony delegation to the Upper House of Parliament will support Schmidt on a critical vote scheduled to come up in April on raising the Value-Added Tax.

According to Stobbe's and other scenarios, Schmidt is supposed to lose this vote to the Christian Democratic majority in the Upper House. If he does lose, this will produce a crisis in his cabinet over how to finance a 4 billion deutschemark emergency employment budget Schmidt rammed through the Bundestag last year.

Another scheduled development cited by Stobbe as a trap for Schmidt, which has now assumed complex dimensions, is the upcoming Parliamentary vote on German contributions to the construction of NATO nuclear missile sites in Sicily, Italy. In an effort to keep channels of communication open to Washington, Schmidt conceded to NATO demands that Germany assume financial obligations toward the buildup of NATO's Euromissile nuclear arsenal. The sitings in Sicily are an emotional symbol within the hard core of the peace movement, and the parliamentary sessions on these allocations are now a target for whipping up peace movement activism.

As the session approaches, however, it has become publicly known that no less a controversial figure than Libyan President Col. Muammar Qaddafi is working with peace movement leaders on planning civil disturbances to protest the Sicilian Euromissile project. The fact that Qaddafi has made public his contacts to German radicals has begun to lift the lid on a Pandora's box of new, intense controversies.

Just as in the United States, Qaddafi is viewed by the majority of the German electorate with greatest abhorrence. His admission of friendship with German radicals is reopening an old fight in Schmidt's cabinet which could backfire on the maneuvers to bring down Schmidt's government.

Within the Free Democratic Party, there is a "leftist" clique, supported by Interior Minister Gerhard Baum, which has been lobbying for Qaddafi to be brought to Germany for a series of public appearances. The powerful Baum oversees police functions and the secret services.

For the first time since his appointment, Baum's sympathetic relationship to terrorist operatives like Qaddafi has emerged as a topic of debate in the press and political circles. In mid-March, for example, the daily *Die Welt* questioned Baum's competence in fighting terrorism, while some CDU'ers have publicly asked whether Baum tarnishes the FDP as a potential coalition partner should Schmidt be brought down.