

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Weinberger keeps the Germans buzzing

The U.S. Defense Secretary's outspoken proclamations on the importance of strategic defense have driven opponents into the minority.

Official Bonn is probably more afraid of Caspar Weinberger these days than of the Red Army. While the government would prefer to swim around in happy illusions about a new détente and “shining prospects” for the upcoming Shultz-Gromyko meeting, Weinberger’s almost daily statements on the importance of the defensive beam-weapons program—the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—and his public assurances that President Reagan is committed to the program irrespective of Soviet threats and arms-control proposals have rudely introduced reality.

Weinberger’s SDI campaign has forced the administration faction fight between the Defense and State departments out into the open. So, the “arms control” pope of Bonn, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, can no longer refer to “the American administration” when he means George Shultz. Genscher’s sabotage of the SDI is now conspicuously sabotage of official U.S. policy—because Weinberger speaks up.

This change of atmosphere in Bonn began on Nov. 7, one day after Reagan’s re-election, when Weinberger authored an article in the leading conservative daily, *Die Welt*, to offer participation in the SDI to the Germans. Then, at the beginning of December, *Die Welt* ran an interview with Gen. James Abrahamson, the head of the program, and a series on how the research on the project is proceeding at Livermore Laboratory.

The government, and Minister

Genscher most of all, still try to voice skepticism and reluctance, and most of the leading military men stick to the “pact of silence” imposed upon them, but several Christian Democratic deputies have decided to break out and voice their support for the SDI. This has included, most prominently, Jürgen Todenhöfer, the Christian Democracy’s arms-control and foreign-affairs spokesman. In several newspaper articles, Todenhöfer backed German and European-wide participation in the SDI for strategic, technological, and economic spin-off reasons.

Todenhöfer is a ranking member of the parliament’s foreign-relations committee. His voice has some weight in Bonn. When George Shultz met with Chancellor Helmut Kohl to give him assurances that the Washington arms-control mafia was still in control, Todenhöfer chose the same day to issue a call for Europeans “not to miss the train of technological development” and to “join the American efforts which offer a viable option for a system which can destroy Soviet missiles and make them an obsolete weapon.”

Still, after the Shultz-Kohl meeting, the media and the government acted on a deal to portray President Reagan as just about to slow down the SDI. The media cited “the [Bonn] government’s conviction that the U.S. Congress might cut the program by one-third,” and that Britain’s Maggie Thatcher would “voice Europe’s skepticism over space weapons” during her U.S. visit.

Well, it didn’t work. Reality forced its way into Bonn and into the political rumor mill as well. Although still silent toward the public, several ranking military men in Bonn, retired and active, stated in private discussions that Weinberger’s statements “sounded familiar”—reminding them of the years-long campaign this magazine and Lyndon LaRouche have waged in favor of strategic defense.

“I agree with everything you’re saying on the Soviet threat, but space-based defense is music of the future, is science fiction,” was a typical response in Bonn in the past. When President Reagan made his famous March 23, 1983 “Star Wars” address, West German officials still said: “That is just a statement; it won’t work.” Later, the same people argued: “Maybe it works for the U.S.A., but it’s no good for us Europeans”—meaning that the Iron Curtain was somehow impenetrable by beam weapons. Others were “absolutely certain” that the SDI would fall victim to the arms-control mafia.

I recall many heated and sometimes amusing discussions with parliamentarians, officials of the Defense Ministry, and active and retired military men in Bonn. The debate over the “pros” and “cons” is still going on in this city, but, under Caspar Weinberger’s artillery barrage, the cons are becoming a minority.

There is another aspect to the debate now: The West German “military-industrial complex” is sensing that the SDI offers access to new technologies which can be of use in space research, in satellite communications, and on Earth as well. Although there are undoubtedly many who just want to be on “the train of technological development” to see where it is going, there is a kind of pressure building which can’t be ignored by the government much longer.