

## Germany enters worst crisis in 18 years

by Nora Hamerman

The Federal Republic of Germany entered its gravest political crisis in 18 years with the sudden resignation on April 27 of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who has been deputy chancellor and foreign minister in every Bonn government since 1974. Genscher's abrupt departure leaves a vacuum in German foreign policy which can only be compared to the turmoil that followed the sudden death of Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann in 1929, under the Weimar Republic.

Although Genscher's departure is still unexplained, the turbulence which has broken out inside his Free Democratic Party indicates that it was a hasty and not a long-prepared move on his part. On the other hand, the frenzied activities of FDP chairman Otto Count Lambsdorff, who recently became the official representative for Europe of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, suggest that the Anglo-American elites knew what was afoot before it happened, and indeed may have been planning it to destabilize the government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

Foreign Minister Genscher has been associated since 1989 with the Bonn coalition government's effort to take leadership in an independent European policy which would not slavishly follow the orders issued by the Anglo-American elites, who have made no secret of their enmity to the prospect of a strong Germany at the heart of continental Europe. This began with Genscher's insistence on the rapid reunification of the two Germanys after the fall of the Berlin Wall, against the "prudence" of London and Washington, and in 1991, with the leading role of Bonn in recognizing Croatia and Slovenia as nations independent of Serbian domination in the breakup of communist-ruled Yugoslavia.

Now, Germany will go into a crucial series of summits in late spring and early summer, without the experienced diplomat in the government. These summits are likely to

decide on a merger of the functions of NATO, the Western European Union, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE); a new task orientation for NATO toward a "rapid deployment force concept"; and the Group of Seven summit in Munich in July.

Germany will also face without Genscher the remaining two months before Britain, its fiercest opponent, takes over the chairmanship of the European Community for the next half-year. Indeed several leading German newspapers have expressed doubts that Helmut Kohl, who had expected to ride out the next 20 months without an election while implementing harsh austerity measures, can survive this latest in a series of visible losses in the cohesion and public confidence of the Bonn government.

### The underlying economic crisis

The Genscher resignation was preceded by more than a month of cabinet shakeups, electoral upheaval, and accelerating scandals, starting with Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg's departure under the shadow of scandal on March 30. But the real backdrop to the political crisis is an economic crisis which was merely made official by the release of statistics in the middle of March showing Germany to be in an economic recession.

The response of the Kohl government has been to turn its back on its labor and industry constituents, enter into rotten compromises which continue to destroy the economy of the former East Germany, and to pledge a total commitment to the austerity measures demanded by the British oligarchy's International Monetary Fund. Indeed, on the very same day that Genscher made his bombshell announcement, Germany was hit by the largest strike wave since the end of World War II.

On April 23, German Finance Minister Theo Waigel had

thrown down the gauntlet by announcing the government's refusal to grant the request by public sector, postal, and railway workers for a 5.4% wage increase. For political reasons of "principle," Waigel said, Germany will only grant a 4.8% increase. On April 25, the railway workers voted 96.6% to strike, police union members 90.1%, public service workers 88.9%, and white collar employees 74.8%. On April 27, some 75,000 transport workers were on strike in Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart, Mainz, and at some of the key sluices of the industrial canals in the west and north of Germany. Several million commuters in these cities arrived late to work.

The next day, 130,000 public sector workers and employees walked out, mainly in North Rhine-Westphalia, the state where Bonn is located, together with most of the federal administration. By April 29, close to 300,000 public sector and metal industry workers took part in labor walkouts, and 1.5 million construction workers entered the last mediation stage of talks which could also result in strikes by mid-May at the latest. While the metal workers were only carrying out warning strikes in support of their public sector brethren so far, this may well escalate.

The showdown had been building since March. Speaking in Orwellian code-language (in hopes of not unduly alarming voters headed for the polls on April 5 in two states), Labor Minister Norbert Blüm of Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) called for "regaining the social balance." Finance Minister Waigel urged "fighting misuse of social funds." Lambsdorff of the FDP called for a "special law to secure the budget" which would work—if it can be called that—like the Gramm-Rudman act in the United States and facilitate deep cuts in federal subsidies to farming and heavy industry as well as in social programs and health. Even the budget experts of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD) got into the act, with calls for deep budget cuts primarily in such areas as defense, aerospace, and nuclear research.

### **Incompetent policies**

Economics Minister Jürgen Moellemann came out on April 2 with a call for "concerted action" among government, industry, and trade unions to negotiate a major austerity pact. In content, the Moellemann proposal is corporatism, the prototype of a fascist austerity policy and the destruction of democratic institutions to rule it, as the Mussolini regime pioneered this in the 1920s, with well-known historical consequences. Not only should there be a drastic measures to counteract the galloping public debt, Moellemann stated, but jobs creation programs in the new German states (formerly under the East German communist dictatorship) must be abolished as "inefficient" and "too costly."

Moellemann's proposals, which dovetail with the legislative project of his Free Democratic Party's Trilateralist chairman Count Lambsdorff, would be so devastating to eastern Germany that the Christian Democratic-linked labor organization CDA called for his resignation, and the former CDU

general secretary termed him the "political ozone hole" in Bonn. Indeed, the lunacy of Moellemann's proposal is highlighted by the simple fact that eastern Germany's productive work force employed in mining and productive industries was reduced by one-half during the course of 1991 alone.

Nor was the Bonn coalition deterred by the results of the state elections on April 5 in Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Wuerttemberg, where the respective ruling parties, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, took heavy losses of votes in the range of 8-12%. The balloting was marked—as in the U.S. primaries and recent cantonal elections in France—by high abstention (30%) and a substantial protest vote going to right-wing populist parties.

The British elite and their American stooges did everything possible to fan the flames of social conflict in Germany. In his late-March trip to the United States, Chancellor Kohl was ordered to impose IMF conditionalities at home and even to pressure France to swallow the bitter pill of British free trade, in the form of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). On April 16, U.S. Treasury Secretary Nicolas Brady met with his British counterpart, Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont. The London *Daily Telegraph* reported that Brady would demand a "tighter German fiscal policy" so as to bring down European interest rates, to stimulate world economic growth and, presumably, U.S. exports.

### **Stench of Trilateral Commission**

Lambsdorff cut short his participation at the Trilateral Commission's conference in Lisbon, flying back to Bonn to chair a party leadership crisis meeting on the "Genscher question."

There are also other indications that Lambsdorff, who only recently became the Trilateral Commission's official representative for Europe, knew more about the Genscher affair than has come into public view. Since mid-February, Lambsdorff has been drawing parallels between the present government of Kohl and that of Helmut Schmidt, during its final days in 1982. Leaks of these views have followed the Count's visits with Trilateral Commissioners Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller, and Paul Volcker in mid-February. Back in 1982, Lambsdorff was one of the most vocal advocates of a "changing of the guard," and was in large part responsible for the fact that for months, Chancellor Schmidt's social-liberal coalition was impotent to act.

It is also noteworthy that the same left-wing Social Democrat, the Saarland's Oskar Lafontaine, who during the 1982 period played an essential role in undermining Schmidt's position, is now wending his way to the United States, in order to meet with Henry Kissinger and others. During the 1990 elections, some among the Anglo-American establishment were quite open about their preference for a Lafontaine victory over Kohl. Count Lambsdorff ought to be put under careful scrutiny, for he is representing those who are destabilizing the heart of Europe.