

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Big German crisis brewing for autumn

*The scandals and rumors about the coming fall of Chancellor Kohl may be symptoms of western intelligence agency blackmail.*

When Helmut Kohl returned from March 21-22 talks in the United States with President Bush, he tried to brush off all criticism of his economic policy performance at home and declared that he was "more than confident that the approach of the current German government to the problems in east Germany is the right one."

"Mark my words," the chancellor said, in what reminded many of Bush's "read my lips" statement, "we'll all celebrate the existence of the first blossoming economic regions in the east of Germany on my birthday April 3, 1994," his 64th birthday. Kohl's statements came as international and domestic criticism of his policy was building up. The April 5 elections in two of the 16 German states were still ahead. The elections were seen as a "litmus test" of the strength the government and the opposition had. Apparently, Kohl was overconfident as usual that all would go well for him and his Christian Democrats.

Today in Bonn, newspaper commentaries are dealing with the debacle of Kohl's CDU party in the April 5 elections; the government has entered a huge shakeup after three cabinet ministers resigned; and major sections of the 24 million in the work force of the 11 west German states have begun a protracted wave of strikes against the effects of new government austerity measures. Three million employees of the public sector, the postal services, and the railways, have just concluded two weeks of strike actions. Four million metal workers, 1.5 million construction workers, 2.7 million em-

ployees in commerce, retail and department stores, may walk out by early June along with 275,000 printing workers and 600,000 chemical workers. The just-concluded public sector strike were the biggest in Germany's postwar history; the potential new strike wave is going far beyond anything that caused trouble for previous governments and had even contributed to their overthrow in 1969 and 1974. It is unsure that Kohl can outlast this wave of protest.

The change of mood may best be described with the legion of press commentaries predicting Kohl's early fall. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* was the first among the big dailies to openly voice doubts April 29 that the chancellor "would last for much longer," two days after Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher made public his decision to resign.

The circumstances under which Genscher decided to step down after 18 years as foreign minister, remained in the dark: He resigned on the eve of a slew of international meetings in the May-July period that are to shape the foreign policies of the western nations at the NATO and European Community levels, at the U.N., the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and in the midst of an expanding Balkans war. There were only vague hints, that Genscher had been forced out of office preemptively, in anticipation of scandals which would discredit his foreign policy and thereby the government and Chancellor Kohl, his bigger coalition partner for the past 10 years. The hints said that there was

something big implicating Genscher in files of the former East German foreign intelligence, the Stasi. It may have to do with espionage, with that ominous KGB-Stasi source operating under the cover name "Topaz" at NATO for the past 10 or more years.

It may also involve the most recently unraveling scandals around secret CIA arms deals with East Germany in the early and mid-1980s—the era of the Secord-North "Iran-Contra" operation. Genscher, many will recall, played a crucial role in the release of the U.S. hostages from Teheran, and his main Iranian discussion partner, Sadegh Tabatabai, was also involved in top-secret Iranian talks with the arms salesman of Ollie North.

The transfer of arms was handled through East German ports like Rostock. The secrecy under which this operation was carried out was built through using many special channels from the West to the East, ironically, protected by the partition of the world into "East" and "West." These and other delicate things were in the Stasi's files, many of which, reliable sources say, were sold by ex-agents of the agency to western intelligence agencies eager to add new material on politicians in Bonn to their own older files.

The way aspects of these deals of the 1980s have become a subject of public debates in Germany, indicates that the "blackmail game" is on against the Bonn government. *Stern* magazine and *Der Spiegel*, scandal-mongering weeklies with close ties to western intelligence agencies, have taken the lead in this round of revelations about Germany's role in the Iran-Contra affair. This media network has been campaigning against Chancellor Kohl throughout the 1980s. Given the nationwide loss of confidence in Kohl, they may succeed in forcing him out of office in the next weeks. He may celebrate his 64th birthday alone.