

## Report from Germany by Rainer Apel

### Christian Democrats join 'new wave'

*Hard economic realities won't allow the Christian Democrats to stick to their new program.*

The April 10-11 national party convention of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Essen marks a watershed, not only because it put an official end to more than a quarter-century of leadership dominated by former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. As head of the party during 1973-98, and under party chairman Wolfgang Schäuble, who came in after Kohl's election defeat in September 1998, Kohl maintained control over party affairs. Schäuble stepped down as party chair this February, after three months of party-funding scandals and related media witch-hunts against him.

In Essen, the CDU elected party manager Angela Merkel as its new, and first-ever, chairwoman. The 96% of the vote she received was impressive, and it shows that the party expects her to do a lot: for example, to restore the combative spirit which the CDU had until November 1999, when the bad economic performance of Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and a series of SPD corruption scandals ended with the SPD losing six state elections in a row, during Fall 1999.

The Schröder government in Berlin was close to collapse, and the CDU to re-entering the government. But, from late November on, scandals and the media buried the CDU in a tide of problems from which it found no escape. Now, with the leadership made up of a younger generation of Christian Democrats in their late 40s and early 50s who are not involved in scandals, the CDU sees a chance to rebuild itself as a strong opposition to the Schröder government.

The best thing for the CDU would

be to adopt a strategy of rallying the many victims of "globalization," such as those who lose their jobs because of the banking and corporate mergers, which are promoted by the SPD. The latter's rejoining of Blair's "Third Way social monetarism" (see last week's *EIR*) is certain to chase voters away from the SPD.

Edmund Stoiber, chairman of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the autonomous Bavarian state section of the CDU, has been on the right track, profiling himself and his party as fighters for social protections. Stoiber has forced the issue to be taken up by the CDU, where his support for labor and the *Mittelstand*, i.e., smaller manufacturing firms, against the big banks and insurance companies, has been backed by several CDU leaders. That side of CDU developments looks promising.

But the new party platform (the "Essen Declaration") which the CDU passed, gives reason for concern: Too much reference is made to the "new wave," "new economy" outlook, which gives it the look of a CDU version of Schröder's "new SPD" policy. Where it should address hard economic and social realities, it has too many environmentalist and information-age sound-bites.

The CDU platform promotes "stake-holding for everyone" as the main thread of the "new politics in the 21st century." Under the misleading slogan "more individualism and less state," it calls for a greater individual role in securing a job, a pension, health care, and the like. What it implies, is that citizens should opt out of the traditional social welfare state which has so far protected them from economic

hardships, and secure their living, or at least a considerable part of it, in the free market, including buying shares in private pension funds and so on. The declaration does not say how the citizen is to protect himself against market crashes, or how a global economy which is hit with such erratic and destructive developments as are witnessed today, is to function.

The Essen Declaration also calls for the "knowledge society," which defines knowledge mostly in terms of the "information society." "The digital revolution will determine the political agenda of the 21st century," it says.

Alleged overpopulation and ecology rank high on the new CDU agenda, which calls for measures to ensure that a world population of 10 billion or more in this century does not consume all the so-called limited resources. "Ecologically compatible" energy resources are to be promoted—no mention is made of nuclear power.

Support for nuclear power was one of the CDU's few points of controversy with the SPD over the past 20 years. If that Essen Declaration is the last word of the CDU on the issue, the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BüSo) party, affiliated with U.S. Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, is left, along with the CSU of Stoiber, the only political force endorsing nuclear technology (which is actually the energy resource that is *best* for the environment!).

The hard economic realities have not gone away. A few big corporate or banking defaults, heavy shareholder losses on the markets, or an increase of unemployment, will confront not only the government, but also the opposition with the need to formulate convincing remedies. Should the SPD and the CDU remain on their present course, they will make the LaRouche movement the decisive factor.