

SPD Faces Tight Race in West German State Elections

Orchestrated labor disputes and "environmentalist" actions against industrial investment pose the two most insidious internal threats to the survival of the government of Helmut Schmidt this year. Although there is little danger that these will cause any dramatic political turns on a national scale, they could help shape a climate in which the effect of Schmidt's industrial growth policies would become nil.

WEST GERMANY

In southwest Germany, there are still no signs of a conclusion to the wage dispute between the German Metalworkers Trade Union and their employers, most of whom are in the auto and electronics industry. The past two weeks of selective strikes and lockouts has put between 100,000 and 250,000 workers out of work each day, with economic effects already being felt in Belgium and Scandinavia. Original fears of an immediate expansion of the strike into the critical Ruhr steel industry have not come true, but metalworkers union head Eugen Loderer has regularly stressed that "the situation may get out of control."

According to a recent study by the German Federation of Industry (BDI), 9.4 billion deutschemarks of domestic nuclear power investment is currently being held up by antitechnology "Citizens Initiative" groups, not to mention their blockage of various other infrastructural improvement programs. West German industry has made it clear to the government that it will not be able to maintain its aggressive nuclear technology-export policies for long if this is allowed to continue. The cumulative successes of environmentalist groups could seriously damage West Germany's ability to help foster industrial growth worldwide.

These challenges to the Schmidt government will come to a head in several state elections coming up in June and October of this year. In practice, the danger will be posed in the form of an alliance between local environmentalist groupings and the parliamentary opposition party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which could cause electoral defeats for Schmidt's Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Herbert Wehner, the chairman of the SPD faction in the federal parliament, the Bundestag, clearly warned of the danger of a CDU attack on the SPD state machines in an article in the April issue of his party's monthly, *Neue Gesellschaft*. Wehner wrote that the "Federal Republic of Germany is in danger," because there is a current in

the CDU out to make an effective coup against the government of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt by gaining an unbeatable majority in the 1978 state elections. If the CDU controls a majority of the state governments in West Germany, it then also controls the Federal Senate, and could block Schmidt's legislation by controlling the Federal Senate's veto power. If the CDU wins a majority in the State elections, Wehner warned, "its aim is to pull the Federal Republic back to the cold war period of the 1950s."

Although Wehner clearly outlined the CDU threats against the Schmidt government, he ignored a danger just as great from the SPD's own ranks: the self-styled "left-wing" student and environmentalist layers who are threatening to cross party lines and vote for various anti-nuclear "Green" election slates supported by the country's environmentalist Citizens Initiatives groupings. This split in the SPD has already caused the party to lose Munich's municipal elections, to the CDU, when the SPD's traditional working-class base, which is strongly in favor of nuclear energy development, chose to cross party lines rather than vote for an environmentalist SPD candidate.

Coming up are two more important elections that will test the SPD's cohesiveness. The traditionally Social Democratic city-state of Hamburg and the state of Lower Saxony will hold elections for a new state parliament on June 4. Then another traditional SPD stronghold, the state of Hessen, will go to the polls in October, while at the same time, Christian Democrats in the state of Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU), are expected to keep their traditional majority in that state.

The Green Machine

Although the SPD and the CDU both privately admit that Schmidt is irreplaceable as Chancellor, the local and state SPD machines that provide the bulk of Schmidt's support are the object of working-class disenchantment because they lack the political courage to discipline the anarchistic environmentalists in their own ranks. In addition, SPD leaders have failed to attack the zero-growth Citizens Initiatives, who have already succeeded in organizing some SPD "lefts" to join them in everything from antinuclear riots at the Brokdorf and Grohnde nuclear power plants, to voting against a new Bavarian power plant.

One of the main reasons why the environmentalists have succeeded with these tactics inside the SPD is that they are being protected by a string of SPD officials, stretching from SPD chairman Willy Brandt to strategically placed antinuclear trade union operatives.

Chancellor Schmidt, on the other hand, has been counting on the pronuclear Action Circle for Energy, a trade-union group that fully backs his energy program of expanding both nuclear and coal power plants. However, Heinz Brandt, a national committee member of the huge Metal Workers Union (IGM), has been counter-organizing against Schmidt's allies by establishing an Action Circle for Life, which will support the "green" election slates. In conjunction, the vice-chairman of the SPD, Hans Koschnik, the mayor of Bremen, has even allowed the SPD chairman in Bremen, Henning Scherf, to organize national support for four SPD parliamentarians, nicknamed the "Gang of Four," who have consistently joined with the CDU in opposing Schmidt's energy legislation.

Thus, the CDU is thoroughly optimistic about facing an opponent as divided as the SPD. The logic is that if the party does not win protest votes from SPD members angry at the depression in West Germany industry and its one million unemployed, it will win protest votes from SPD members disgusted with their party's refusal to control its own environmentalist fringes.

The clearest handwriting on the wall was in the March 5 Munich city election. Although Munich is the capital of the conservative state of Bavaria, it has always been an SPD working-class stronghold with an SPD mayor and city council majority. But on March 5, this working-class base crossed party lines and gave the CSU their first Munich victory in the post-war period.

Even more ominous for the SPD urban machines is that Munich is the third "socialist stronghold" that has fallen to the CDU in the past year. Last year the CDU also gained control of Frankfurt and Stuttgart for the first time since World War II.

In the Munich city elections, the voters had a choice between CSU candidate Erich Kiesl, 48, who ran an American-style campaign of maximum exposure and minimum commitment, and SPD candidate Max von Heckel, the incumbent City Treasurer, who voted against Munich's participation in Bavaria's latest nuclear reactor.

The Munich SPD actually had a much better candidate than von Heckel in the incumbent SPD mayor, Georg Kronawitter, but Kronawitter's entire faction was defeated at the last Munich SPD city conference by the group of SPD leftists and zero-growthers backing von Heckel. In a fit of disgust at not getting his own party's nomination, Kronawitter, a popular mayor, formed his own splinter party, which further contributed to the SPD's March 5th loss.

Understandably, the Citizens Initiatives have been quiet about their allies' defeat in Munich, and instead point to SPD local victories in the state of Schleswig-Holstein on March 5 as proof that the SPD will become an environmentalist party. In that campaign, the local SPD "waved the bloody shirt" over the earlier antinuclear riot at the Brokdorf nuclear plant, broken up by police acting under the orders of CDU Minister-President Gerhard Stoltenberg. Using this pitch to appeal to students and liberals, the SPD gained 5 percent, bringing its share of the local electorate up to 40 percent, while the CDU dropped from 53 percent to 50 percent.

Such a victory is less than pyrrhic for the SPD as a national party. An environmentalist SPD state govern-

ment for Schleswig-Holstein would stop construction of the Brokdorf reactor, which is supported by both Schmidt and Stoltenberg, and would force many CDU industrialists now backing Schmidt to have second thoughts about Schmidt's ability to keep his own party in line. Understandably, the environmentalist take-over of the local SPD machines has so enraged the SPD working-class base that Herr Schwalback, the head of the Public Service Employees union (OETV) in the state, has supported Stoltenberg and called for "more union representation in elections and party committees, in order to end the reign of the so-called intellectuals."

Localist Chaos

The crucial test for the SPD will be the elections in Hamburg and Lower Saxony June 4. Hamburg, like the country as a whole, is presently governed by a coalition between the SPD and the Free Democrats (FDP); it is also Schmidt's home town. But the FDP in Hamburg is so close to the environmentalists that it is hampering SPD efforts to increase energy investments in the port of Hamburg, West Germany's largest, and Schmidt has decided that the SPD will try to win the election without the Free Democrats.

The SPD is also facing a challenge from a unified environmentalist slate, called "Defend Yourself," a motley crew ranging from the Maoist Socialist Bureau faction to such liberal splinter parties as the European Federalist Party, which has joined the slate to give it dubious respectability.

Both the FDP and the "Defend Yourself" slate will be running with the same purpose: to take enough liberal votes from the SPD, and to drive enough working class votes to the CDU, to either give the election to the CDU or force the SPD to ask for environmentalist support in an anti-CDU coalition. The CDU has wisely allowed the SPD and its zero-growth opponents to slug it out, and is instead concentrating on exposing minor corruption scandals in the SPD-FDP city government.

The SPD faces an even more debilitating situation in Lower Saxony. It allowed itself to be kicked out of the state government last year when several state parliamentarians in the SPD-FDP state coalition secretly supported the CDU in a state parliamentary vote, and it has not yet located the political traitors responsible. The left-wing SPD in the state, controlled by state chairman Peter von Oertzen, has made its major theme, the alleged right-wing revival in West Germany, citing the (staged) street battles between fascist right-wing fringe groups and their equally fascist left-wing counterparts. To add credibility to the atmosphere of fear, a rash of anti-Semitic incidents have gone unpunished. Finally, the SPD base in the state's large steel, chemical, and auto factories is facing a strike over contract negotiations.

The SPD's final test will be in the Hessen elections in October, which will be heavily influenced by what occurs in Hamburg and Lower Saxony. The CDU has already gained city hall in Frankfurt, the major city in Hessen, and chalked up impressive victories in elections last year through a local backlash against an SPD-directed reform of municipalities. The FDP suffered such severe losses in that election that it is now considering splitting from its present coalition with the SPD.

—James Cleary