

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Kohl government under siege

Economics Minister Lambsdorff's head is on the chopping block, and the FDP may pull out of the cabinet.

The Bonn parliament voted unanimously on Dec. 2 to lift the parliamentary immunity of Economics Minister Count Otto von Lambsdorff. He will now be put on trial for bribery and laundering of funds from the giant Flick holding company into his Free Democratic Party's coffers. Under investigation will be the transfer of funds through secret Swiss bank accounts—including one suspected to belong to the count.

The scandal involves more than 720 cases of illegal money transfer, 520 of them implicating the Free Democratic Party (FDP). This is the first such case in West Germany's post-war history, and it hits the country at a time of great domestic destabilization around the "Euromissile" issue, of increasing industrial unemployment, and massive Soviet political pressure.

The Flick affair could bring down the government, plunging the country into ungovernability and emergency rule or ushering in a new government of the Social Democrats—the party which is about to demand that West Germany leave NATO.

The forces involved in blowing the Lambsdorff affair are led by the subversive Hamburg weekly *Der Spiegel*, which began to leak the scandal two years ago. The editor of the magazine, Rudolf Augstein, who was caught in Sicily three years ago trying to smuggle hashish through the customs, serves as a mouthpiece for the international drug-pop-rock lobby as well as for Soviet "peace movement" disinformation.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced in an interview with *The New York Times* on Dec. 2 that there was "no question" but that Lambsdorff would resign his government post if indicted. The economics ministry then would be up for grabs, and rumors are proliferating that Franz-Josef Strauss of Bavaria's Christian Social Union (CSU) will make a bid to replace the count.

The FDP has made it clear that if this happens, it will pull out of Christian Democrat Kohl's government, depriving him of his parliamentary majority. FDP spokesman Wolfgang Mischnik declared this week that the FDP's control of the economics ministry is part of the agreement which established the FDP-Christian Democratic Union (CDU) coalition last March, and that if forced to give up its fiefdom, the FDP "would have to leave the coalition."

The CSU shot back that no government post could be considered "hereditary," and that if Lambsdorff resigned, all posts would have to be renegotiated.

The FDP, while staking its claim on the ministry, is also carefully distancing itself from the CDU on major policy issues, hinting at a possible switch in alliances. In the Saarland this week, the FDP's Werner Klumpp declared that while the party backs the installation of U.S. "Euromissiles" in the Federal Republic, still "The FDP is part of the peace movement," and the Bonn government does not exist "to carry out the desires of the Reagan administration."

The FDP is also preparing trouble for Kohl in case the coalition remains intact. The party's economic spokesman announced this week that Kohl must now move to implement the "next phase" of the coalition agreement: massive budget cuts, particularly in the "excessive social welfare budgets. . . . It is high time that we get to the necessary job of cutting the subsidies to the old industries," that is, to steel, ship-building, textiles, and construction, he said.

The trigger for a government crisis will most likely be pulled by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which will call for the dismissal of Count Lambsdorff in a formal motion to the parliament. This motion will be coupled with the SPD's and Green Party's planned rejection of the federal budget, and the SPD might, if the vote against Lambsdorff fails, even mount a formal vote of no confidence against Chancellor Kohl within the next few weeks.

If the SPD wins out, it will begin to pull the Federal Republic out of NATO. This is the recommendation of Georgetown University professor Norman Birnbaum, an American citizen who maintains close connections to the SPD leadership, the Greens, and the "peace movement" generally.

Birnbaum argued in an op-ed in *The New York Times* Dec. 1 that the neutralization and reunification of Germany is now on the agenda. "Controlled and gradual steps toward neutralization of the two Germanies would reduce the dangers of superpower confrontation," he wrote. "If the superpowers insist on remaining in Central Europe, catastrophe will ensue as their positions in the Germanies grow increasingly insecure. Much is changing. It is in our interest (and the Soviet Union's) to begin to think of the very large gains a neutralized and reunified Germany can bring about."