

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### The beginning of the end of Genscher

*His Free Democrats failed to qualify for seats in the European parliament, and the predicted party revolt has begun.*

Amidst all the sad news on the outcome of the European parliamentary elections from all of Western Europe, there was one piece of good news: The Free Democrats of Henry Kissinger's junior partner in Bonn, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, fell short of the 5% threshold required to qualify for seats in the next European Parliament. That is a good piece of bad news for those wanting to "decouple" Europe from the U.S.A.

Hans-Dietrich Genscher has been the European point-man for Kissinger's policy of "decoupling." He has also been the leading European opponent of President Reagan's beam-weapon defense initiative, portraying it as an anti-European defense policy and, therefore, all the more reason Europe should decouple, beginning with statements prior to last December's NATO foreign ministers meeting.

The catastrophic dimension of the meager 4.8% the Free Democrats polled on election day can only be grasped if one takes into account that at least 1.5-2.0% of even that total was due to "sympathy votes" from among the Christian Democratic constituency. That is the way the Christian Democrats of Chancellor Helmut Kohl helped the Free Democrats survive in the national elections of March 6, 1983, in an atmosphere of general public rage at party chairman Genscher's betrayal of the SPD coalition government in September 1982.

Christian Democrats helped Genscher and his liberals to live on, but the public rage also lived on. In

every state-level election since, the Free Democrats have missed by 1-2% the mandatory 5% threshold required for parliamentary seats under German election law. This meant that Chancellor Kohl, in forming a coalition with Genscher's party, had coupled himself to a corpse. It did, however, permit Hans-Dietrich Genscher to continue at the foreign ministry in his decoupling plot with Henry Kissinger.

However, the situation has changed drastically for Genscher in recent weeks. Public opinion polls and the low public interest in the Free Democratic campaign indicated ahead of time that election day, June 17, would become a disaster mark. In addition, the expected trial of his liberal cabinet colleague, Economics Minister Otto Count Lambsdorff, on charges of bribe-taking, tax evasion, and illegal party funding practices, prompted Genscher to propose an amnesty for all party-funding cases. Calculating that the Christian Democrats, many of whom might be on trial on similar charges soon, would be interested in such an amnesty, Genscher made an attempt to force the amnesty package through parliament in order to get Lambsdorff off the hook.

But this was not to be. Free Democrats noticed that a new storm of public rage was brewing against the amnesty project, and thus against the party as a whole. All party sections vowed to oppose and halt the plan; Genscher was forced to dump the initiative.

In addition, he felt compelled to announce that he would resign the par-

ty chairmanship by no later than spring 1986 in order to ensure his re-election at the party's convention June 1. Again, Genscher underestimated the shift of opinion in the party membership, for he was re-elected with an unprecedentedly low 61% of the vote.

Ironically, his operation to maintain the chairmanship clearly signaled to the public that Genscher's political days are now numbered. That is what makes the vote against the Free Democrats on June 17 the beginning of the end for him. The Free Democrats did not have to look for a scapegoat for the election debacle: It was clear to everyone that the disaster's name was "Genscher." The evening of election day, the word was already going out that he might not be able to remain party chairman into 1986, that he even might not be staying at the foreign ministry much longer.

On June 18, two of the 16 Free Democratic Party sections' leaders (Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein), issued public statements that Genscher should draw the appropriate conclusions from the election disaster, and resign the chairmanship by the end of 1984.

The Free Democrats of Germany are not the smartest of politicians, and more than 500 cases of illegal party funding, tax evasion, and bribery under investigation by the German courts concern this party alone. The party has campaigned for legalization of "soft" drugs, has defended terrorists and violent demonstrators from public prosecution, and has shown other trademarks of organized crime influence. But if the party succeeded in getting rid of Genscher, they would do a great service to Germany and to the Western Alliance as a whole. Getting rid of Hans-Dietrich Genscher would have inevitable repercussions for Kissinger himself.