

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Lothar Spaeth's Moscow trip

Spaeth's chancellorship ambitions have found plenty of support among the Soviet leaders.

When Lothar Spaeth, the Christian Democratic governor of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, arrived in Moscow for a five-day visit on Feb. 7, he stepped on a broad red carpet. The high point of his visit was a meeting of more than two hours with Gorbachov on Feb. 9, in the prestigious Catherine's Chamber at the Kremlin. Foreign guests are not often received in this section of the Kremlin.

Soviet media played up Spaeth, with *Literaturnaya Gazeta* taking the lead Feb. 3, portraying him in a half-page feature as "one who is openly mentioned in Germany as a future chancellor." The journal presented the German politician as a "technocrat and fanatic supporter of scientific-technical progress," as a "pioneer of economic cooperation." *Pravda* emphasized that Spaeth had played a "key role" in rallying German support to the INF deal.

Lothar Spaeth's third trip to Moscow, after earlier ones in 1983 and 1985 had, because of its timing, a very special character.

The invitation to meet Gorbachov was demonstratively conveyed to him in Bonn by Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze on Jan. 19, a few hours after the Soviet diplomat had told Chancellor Kohl bluntly that Gorbachov had "no time" to see him. Moscow's gesture toward Kohl's main rival was intended to signal that Lothar Spaeth is the Kremlin's preferred choice for next German chancellor.

In accepting this demonstrative invitation to Moscow, Lothar Spaeth delivered a heavy blow against Kohl, and the affair was viewed as an "open

scandal" by many here in Germany.

On Jan. 19, the same day that Spaeth received the Soviet invitation, he had conferred with leading industrial and banking managers at his palace in Stuttgart, to discuss "the need for a change of policy in Bonn." Attendees at the gathering leaked that more than just a "change of policy" had been discussed: As the press was told, "Overthrows of ruling chancellors in Germany have always occurred in the context of mounting economic problems." The "ruling chancellor" is Kohl, whose economic policy reputation among industry and banks is the lowest since he took power in 1982.

Under strong attack both from industry and labor, Kohl is also facing chilly winds from Moscow. This is tantamount to a personal political disaster for the German chancellor, who has invested considerable prestige in supporting Gorbachov's INF diplomacy, visibly distancing himself from SDI and nuclear weapons generally. Kohl should have known better, but he is embittered that he, who has done so much for Gorbachov, is kicked in the face now. The fact that Spaeth offered to probe in Moscow for a meeting between Kohl and Gorbachov, only added to the chancellor's humiliation.

The way in which Spaeth's Moscow visit proceeded, indicated that should Gorbachov ever decide to "grant" Kohl a date for a personal encounter, it would happen only with the deepest concessions from the German side. After Spaeth's big kowtows, the Kremlin would open its doors to Kohl only if he came crawling on his knees.

Lothar Spaeth's first official dis-

cussion partner was Deputy Minister President Frikryat Tabeyev, ambassador to Soviet-occupied Afghanistan from 1979 to 1986. The encounter on Feb. 8 was characterized as "very cordial," shedding additional light on the immoral quality of the sister-state partnership signed between Spaeth's state of Baden-Württemberg and the Soviet province of Tadjikistan in March 1985.

Tadjikistan borders on Afghanistan's north and plays a key role in Moscow's genocidal war against the Afghan civilian population of the Hindu Kush region. Among other motives rooted deeply in Moscow's traditional imperial racism, there is a strategic aspect in the Red Army's Afghan war: Tadjikistan's state capital, Dushanbe, hosts a giant new laser radar base for tracking objects orbiting in space.

Thus, when Spaeth offered extended high-tech cooperation with the Soviets; he may have spoken of plans for delivering sensitive electronic parts from Baden-Württemberg to the Dushanbe radar complex. Spaeth's bag of special high-tech offers included computers, electronics, machines, and consequently, he ridiculed the Co-Com ban on technology transfer in his talks with the Soviet leaders.

Topping it off completely, Spaeth assured Eduard Shevardnadze on Feb. 8 that the new Franco-German military cooperation accord was "no cause for irritation whatsoever, a symbolic gesture rather than a step of military importance." Far more important than the planned stationing of a joint Franco-German combat brigade in Baden-Württemberg, he stated, was the INF-mandated withdrawal of all U.S. Pershing II missiles from the same state. With appropriate sarcasm, Shevardnadze replied that under such conditions, he could only agree with Spaeth.