

Dutch government coalition falls

by Our Correspondent

Following a vote of no-confidence on May 2, the Netherlands right-of-center government of Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers fell. The crisis was precipitated by a split in the ruling coalition of the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties. Queen Beatrice has called for new elections on Sept. 6, opening up the possibility of a "Grand Coalition" between the Labor Party and the Christian Democrats.

On the surface, the current crisis was initiated by the Liberal Party, the junior coalition partner, over a proposed tax increase to finance an ambitious environmental program proposed by the Lubbers government. But, as one European observer said, "You don't bring down a government over the issue of auto pollution." The more fundamental issues involve the realities of Europe since the signing of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, the move toward American disengagement from Europe, Gorbachov's "Common House of Europe" propaganda drive, and the "Europe 1992" integration scheme.

Prior to the dissolution of the government, conservative and pro-NATO circles in The Hague were attempting to grapple with a post-INF political climate that saw the United States pushing West Germany onto the path of neutralism, as the issue of short-range missile modernization erupted. In fact Lubbers, who still heads a caretaker government, arrived in Washington, D.C. on May 8, and held talks with President Bush, hoping to play the role of mediator in the Lance missile controversy. The view of such circles is that the specter of a German coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the Greens would present Europe with a disaster, the prospect of a Grand Coalition only less so. The prospect of a neutralist West Germany without U.S. troops is something to be avoided at all costs.

As one of the more stable, conservative-leaning coalition governments in Europe, the Lubbers government was oriented to status quo policies. But now, with the prospect of a Grand Coalition emerging in September, all that has changed.

Weak coalitions

This would conform to the trend throughout Europe toward weak coalition governments that serve to undermine any institutional resistance to a "New Yalta" policy, the current operational policy of the Kissinger crowd in Washington, on the one hand, and the "Europe 1992" hardliners who

seek the destruction of all strong national institutions throughout Western Europe, on the other. In this respect, the Dutch government follows that of Belgium, where the Christian Democrats are in a coalition with the Socialists.

This trend was expressed by a European member of the secretive Bilderberg Society, who ridiculed the NATO missile modernization debate as "very stupid, a fixation on tactical ends." "Let's think on the grand strategic plane," he said. "The issue is, we have won the Cold War . . . who can win the peace?" Quoting from the memoirs of the late European federalist Jean Monnet on the importance of transcending the nation-state and moving toward "the organized world of tomorrow," the source added, "What Gorbachov has done to Europe, and what some people in Washington don't understand, is that the long-term plan has become possible. Status quo politics have become totally insufficient." He cited George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and Lloyd Cutler as three U.S. co-thinkers.

The above assessment is currently embraced by not a few Liberal Party members. One Liberal Party member, Jan Derk Blaauw of the Foreign Affairs Commission, while quick to deny that foreign policy questions had anything to do with the government crisis was quick to agree with the above assessment. "I agree," he said. "The Cold War is over. In fact, I helped draft the Liberal Democratic Reform Caucus Policy for the European Parliamentary Elections, calling for the inclusion of the French and English independent nuclear deterrents in arms negotiations." Inclusion of the French and British nuclear forces in East-West talks would strip the last figleaf from the idea that a credible European nuclear deterrent exists.

The Dutch Liberal Party is part of the Liberal International of which the German Free Democratic Party (FDP), a principal promoter of Gorbachov's "Common House of Europe," is a member. Although the Dutch Liberals are considered to be to the right of their German colleagues, the gap appears to be closing and it is known that the FDP's Hans-Dietrich Genscher, West German foreign minister and a proponent of Gorbachov's "Common House of Europe," has good relations with many of his Dutch colleagues.

The other issue under the surface is Europe 1992. The Liberal Party's decision to bring down the government is said to have been the result of a rift between the parliamentary caucus and the Liberal ministers in the cabinet who were accused of doing everything the Christian Democrats asked of them. One of those was Minister of Transport Neelie Smit-Kroes, who has voiced reservations on the effect of the proposed Europe 1992 deregulation on the Dutch transport sector.

New party programs will not be forthcoming until after the June 15 elections for the European Parliament. A left-of-center government between the Christian Democrats and the Labor Party is a real possibility, while also a Labor Party-Liberal coalition cannot be ruled out.