

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Bush dumping Kohl to help Gorbachov?

The Bush administration is backing the Social Democrats to halt the movement for German reunification.

A new joint public opinion poll conducted by the London *Economist* and the *Los Angeles Tribune* documented that a vast majority of Americans support a policy of reunifying Germany. Some 61% of all Americans are for and only 13% are against German unity.

But official Washington has a different opinion. An opinion poll conducted at the State Department or at the White House these days would probably show 61% against, and only 13% for German unity.

As far as the Germany policy of the Bush administration is concerned, there is deep disappointment among the policymaking circles around Chancellor Helmut Kohl here in Bonn. The hand-shaking of Secretary of State James Baker with the communist SED regime of Hans Modrow in East Berlin a few days after the Malta summit of Bush and Gorbachov, was, as a Bonn diplomat put it politely, "more than inappropriate, if not to say, an embarrassment for us."

Baker assured Modrow and his regime of U.S. support for their efforts to keep their system stable. Many in West Germany were reminded of the bitter fact that during the first phase of the East German crisis in September-October 1989, the U.S. Embassy in East Berlin turned East German mothers and children seeking asylum at the embassy building over to the SED regime's police.

George Bush's remarks at the Malta summit, that reunification of Germany should not come that fast, signaled that his administration was out to throw bigger roadblocks in the way of Chancellor Kohl's German unity program at the next-best occasion.

The occasion was offered with the Saarland state elections in West Germany Jan. 28. Oskar Lafontaine, the governor of the state and national vice chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), scored a big election victory which enabled him to boost his chances for becoming chancellor candidate of his party against incumbent Chancellor Kohl. Lafontaine capitalized on the fact that the chancellor, deeply involved in difficult diplomacy around the situation in East Germany, paid little attention to the ongoing election campaign.

Lafontaine launched a demagogic back-stabbing campaign against Kohl around the nonexistent threat of East German emigrés who would flood West Germany and exhaust the social welfare system. In tandem with similar scare stories in the largely left-wing West German media, he succeeded in winning an absolute majority of 55% of the vote. The 800,000 voters of the small Saarland state are only 2.5% of the national electorate, but the public relations effect of Lafontaine's election victory was immense.

Lafontaine's campaign style cohered with his often-stated view that there should be two sovereign German states, and no reunification. After the East German crisis broke out into the open, and the SED regime of Erich Honecker was replaced under the pressure of ever-growing mass rallies, Lafontaine was among those who declared that there was no reason for refugees coming west after the situation in East Germany had allegedly changed "completely."

Lafontaine's SPD has always been closer to the communist SED regime

than to the opposition, and has pursued an official dialogue with the SED on a party-to-party level since the spring of 1984. The immorality of this policy was shown in June 1989 when, a few days after the Chinese Communists had massacred the democracy movement, Lafontaine hosted a senior SED party delegation led by Politburo member Egon Krenz, who publicly declared his support for the Red Chinese regime.

When mass rallies in East German cities began to issue calls for German reunification in late October 1989, Lafontaine and other SPD politicians went around saying that "reunification is a self-betrayal."

But Lafontaine and his ilk are walking on thin ice. Asked by an interviewer on West German television in December 1989 why the SPD was silent on the human rights violations under the SED regime in East Germany, Lafontaine flew into a fit of rage, threatening to break off the interview, should the interviewer dare to ask another such question.

But questions have to be asked also about Bush's policy. Immediately after Lafontaine's Saarland election victory, a close adviser to Bush at the White House told journalists that Lafontaine was "more in line with the views of the administration than Chancellor Kohl's emotion-tainted policy" on the German question. Word is out in Washington that Lafontaine might well be the "next Chancellor in Bonn," and that Bush and Baker intend to make direct contact with him before the December 1990 elections for West German parliament.

The U.S. backing of Lafontaine is mirrored by Moscow's efforts to build up a Social Democratic option to govern East Germany after the March 18 elections. Secret Malta summit agreements of Bush and Gorbachov are apparently operational.