

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Scandals target Kissinger's friends

*Senior political figures from several parties are exposed for corruption and ties to organized crime.*

Several friends and associates of Henry A. Kissinger are under fire for corruption here, with the shrapnel flying across the political spectrum. Who benefits? It's still hard to say, but the sensational scandals certainly do have the effect of distracting attention from the most important policy issues: the war in the Balkans and the economic crisis.

First on the target list is Oskar Lafontaine, vice chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and state governor of Saarland.

The Jan. 18 issue of the weekly *Der Spiegel* had a report on alleged mob contacts of Lafontaine and his longtime friend Reinhard Klimmt, contacts that could be traced back to the mid-1970s when Lafontaine became mayor of Saarbrücken, the state capital. It seems that Lafontaine used to frequent an exclusive night club, "Le Cascade," which was owned by the French mobster Hugo Lacour.

Lacour's escape from a Saarland prison in 1987, the sudden acquittal of one of his girlfriends in a trial a year later, and the fact that one of Lafontaine's bodyguards was one of Lacour's men, raise many questions for the SPD leaders.

In 1992, one of the leading issues on the agenda of the SPD was that of decriminalization of drug use and trafficking by addicts and "small-time dealers." Now people are asking whether SPD links to organized crime could be the driving element behind that dope legalization campaign.

These questions had better be answered before Germany enters the campaign for the 1994 parliamentary elections, and before influential poli-

cymakers in the United States who have considered Lafontaine as a political challenge to the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl feel tempted to invest in this "political alternative," as they did in the election campaign of 1990 (which saw Lafontaine's defeat).

Among those who have kept close contact with Lafontaine are those he met during his April 1992 tour of the United States: former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State James Baker, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.).

During that visit, Lafontaine addressed select audiences at the American Council on Germany and Stanford University.

Two other German politicians have been involved in scandals that are also important for the United States. Matthias Wissmann, the young Christian Democrat who became new minister of research and technology in Chancellor Kohl's January cabinet reshuffle, is on the court record as a convicted tax evader in an affair dating from 1980.

His tax evasion became known in Bonn a week after Wissmann was sworn in as cabinet minister, but evasion was played down by Kohl's press spokesman as "a sin of adolescence." But it will certainly add to voters' impression that corruption and violations of law are part of the biography of many, if not most, senior politicians in the country.

Moreover, the scandal discredits a man who is viewed as one of Kohl's prime envoys to the new Clinton team, because Wissmann knows many of its members personally, mostly in the

economic and technology spheres.

Questions are also emerging around the new minister of economics, Günter Rexroth, a senior member of the Free Democratic Party. Instrumental in his appointment was FDP party chairman Otto Count Lambsdorff, a member of the Trilateral Commission and close acquaintance of its chairman, Paul A. Volcker. (Henry Kissinger was a former chairman.) Lambsdorff, chairman of the European section of the Trilateral Commission, had been forced to resign as federal economics minister in 1984 over scandals that involved his role as party treasurer.

Rexroth, minister of economics in the municipal administration of West Berlin from 1985 to 1989, became a member of the board of Citibank in June 1989, and took over the bank's German branch in Frankfurt in January 1990. In the reshuffle at the Berlin Treuhand agency after the assassination of Treuhand head Detlev Rohwedder (April 1991), Rexroth became one of the agency's vice chairmen, assigned to the control of the relics of the former East German arms-smuggling, money-laundering empire of Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski which did business with Ollie North's cabal. Rexroth's testimony still is to be heard before the Bonn parliamentary committee that is investigating that "Schalck" complex.

According to sources, Rexroth also used U.S. connections developed during his time at Citibank, in the background of several Treuhand decisions in 1991 and 1992, which gave preference for the sale of attractive Berlin real estate to such murky U.S. "investors" as Mark Palmer, Ronald Lauder, and others of the Center for European Development Corp.

Most of these matters haven't been looked into seriously yet. But a few more revelations will make very bad headlines for senior politicians soon.