

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Social Democrats offer no solutions

Their program was stolen from the Greens, and their chancellor candidate sounds just like Helmut Kohl.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) convention, held Nov. 16-19 in Wiesbaden, gave voters little reason to hope that the biggest opposition party will have anything useful to offer the country in the October 1994 elections to the Bundestag, the national parliament.

The London *Times* aptly summed up the convention, and the SPD's chancellor candidate, Rudolf Scharping: "The policy positions marked out yesterday were not so very different from those of the Christian Democrats and more and more observers are noting the personal similarity between Mr. Kohl and his SPD rival. Mr. Scharping is prime minister of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, the chancellor's old job. He sits in Kohl's former office, uses similar phrases, speaks with the same accent."

Indeed, Scharping gives the impression of styling himself as a younger version of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, ostensibly to appeal to the mainstream constituencies that are, in the deepening economic depression and political disarray, turning their backs on Kohl.

Does Scharping have the potential to become chancellor? And what program will he and his associates run on in the 17 different campaigns of the "mammoth election year of 1994"?

First, Scharping seems to have doubts that he is fit to run Germany. In his keynote address to the convention, he said there was no question about the SPD's being better than Kohl's governing Christian Democrats, but there was the question whether the SPD was

"in the appropriate condition to deal with the big challenges of our time."

The SPD (and Scharping's remarks on the party's economic policy platform for 1994 made this strikingly clear) is not fit to deal with the economic depression. He called on Germany to become the number-one producer and exporter of environmental technologies, and his priority list of "future-oriented high-technology sectors" did not mention 1) nuclear power; 2) the Transrapid maglev train; or 3) new projects in aerospace. Not one big job-creating industrial or infrastructure project is listed in the SPD's program, and it is claimed that new jobs would not be created by the growth of industrial output, but rather, through a sharing of available work—what Scharping called "intelligent organization of the work."

The SPD platform for the campaigns next year will endorse a mix of tax breaks and state incentives for industrial firms that invest in "ecology-compatible" technologies and projects which, in the energy sector, would imply massive funding of "alternate energy sources" such as solar, geothermal, and wind, and modernizing coal power plants.

Special taxes against pollution and on the consumption (corporate and private) of energy, and budget-saving measures in the defense sector primarily, are to secure increased tax revenue for the state at a time when the tax base of productive industries is shrinking. This "taxation plus fiscal austerity" approach is, the SPD claims, to provide "maneuvering

room" for a lowering of interest rates.

This is basically a radical ecologist program, and the Green party has repeatedly charged the SPD with stealing from their programs. But the SPD is a party quite different than it once was even in the late 1960s, when its Fabian-leftist policies were still labor oriented. The SPD of chancellor candidate Scharping looks like a clone from Green party "genetic" material not only to this author, but also to many other analysts.

This author was among those who, in the crisis after the oil shock of 1973, joined the LaRouche movement in Germany in the May 1974 election campaign in the state of Lower Saxony, which was run by Social Democrats. The LaRouche campaign for a new world economic order used the slogan "The SPD Needs a Head," attacking the lack of any concept to solve the deep, post-1973 recession.

The slogan was formulated in direct response to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD) who, when presented with the LaRouche programmatic proposals, admitted, "My head is too small for that!"

Almost 20 years later, the SPD needs more than just a head. What it needs most of all, is to keep in touch with the reality of a deepening world depression, and with the urgency of revitalizing productive industries and creating millions of new, productive industrial jobs. It needs a policy for dealing with the imminent danger of a banking crash.

At the convention, this author talked to the SPD's chief expert on monetary and budget policies, Mrs. Ingrid Matthäus-Maier. It turned out that she was not even aware that the financial derivatives issue is a topic of heated debate in the U.S. Congress; she would not even consider this a priority issue. It seems that her head was too small for that.