

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Second German Republic at twilight

Buried in scandals, the political establishment may not survive 1994: Germany today looks like Italy did a year ago.

Kohl is finished, he has exhausted himself psychically and physically," a senior, anonymous member of the CDU (Christian Democratic) party was quoted as saying about the German chancellor, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Dec. 1. "A Christmas recess is urgently required. Kohl needs time to think things over, to gather new strength and develop a concept how to get through the next year," the politician said.

The article in the daily, which has close ties to the Bonn policymaking establishment, shed light on the alarming reality behind Kohl's façade of "everything is all right." The surprise Nov. 25 pull-out of the Saxonian Christian Democrat Steffen Heitmann, Kohl's personal choice for federal President for the May 1994 elections, and the surprise resignation of the CDU-led state government of Saxe-Anhalt on Nov. 29, have hurt the chancellor more than he or his close aides admit.

Heitmann quit when he realized that his own party was not willing to counter the media-run defamation campaign that portrayed him as a quasi-Nazi because he endorsed conservative values against the liberal *Zeitgeist*. Since the CDU leaders never wanted to challenge the *Zeitgeist*, they sank Heitmann's chance of running a serious campaign. To many conservative-minded CDU members and voters, the fact that their party will now be forced to rally behind a liberal candidate, will be another reason to turn their backs on the CDU.

The second big blow against Kohl

and the CDU, the resignation of the Saxe-Anhalt cabinet, came at the peak of new revelations about over-paid cabinet members and administration officials. This was designed as a last-minute effort to preempt a no-confidence motion launched by the opposition SPD, and to preserve the CDU coalition government with the liberal Free Democrats (FDP). But CDU tactics made things worse: The ex-cabinet members face trial on corruption charges, and the FDP wants early elections anyway; the SPD no-confidence motion which may lead to early elections as well, will be voted on in mid-December.

The CDU, trying to cover up the Saxe-Anhalt mess for months by saying "let them all bark, we're safe," the CDU there has lost the initiative, and is sure to lose everything—the role as the biggest determining group in the state parliament, the government, and its reputation among voters. Polls indicate that the CDU may even end up with 11-12% of the vote in early elections, less than a third of what it had in October 1990.

A few weeks before the "mammoth election year" of 1994, with 17 different campaigns on the federal, state, municipal, and European level, the Saxe-Anhalt crisis is a writing on the wall for Kohl and his party.

The fact that the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) are also in trouble over various scandals, does not help Kohl and the CDU, but is indicative of the deep crisis that has hit the political party establishment. In many ways, the scene in Germany resembles Italy

about a year ago, shortly before that country stumbled into its latest crisis and saw the Christian Democrats vanish as a major political factor in the Nov. 21 municipal elections in big cities.

As for the SPD scandals, they reveal a moribund opposition party incapable of drawing major benefit from the CDU's crisis. For example, the SPD in the city-state of Hamburg had to hold early elections in September, because a court ruled that manipulated selection of candidates in 1991 invalidated that year's elections; it lost its absolute majority and has still not found a coalition partner with which to form a government. The Hamburg SPD senator in charge of urban development, Traute Mueller, resigned on Nov. 25, when her lover, Karl Wand, was uncovered as a longtime spy for the former East German foreign intelligence.

Then, evidence piled up throughout November that a part, if not all, of the SPD leadership in the state of Schleswig-Holstein had been involved, or at least knew about an intelligence-style dirty tricks and slander operation that overthrew Gov. Uwe Barschel (CDU) in October 1987. Days later, Barschel was found dead in the bathtub of a Geneva hotel room, in what was hastily officially ruled a "suicide."

Such revelations may soon topple the SPD-led government of Schleswig-Holstein, and will not leave Rudolf Scharping, the SPD challenger to Kohl in the October 1994 elections for national parliament and for chancellor, unscathed. He may hope to at least have enough votes to replace Kohl simply by becoming chancellor of a "grand coalition" with the CDU. The depth of the crisis may put an abrupt end to the careers of many politicians that seem safe now. It is likely that Kohl will go; it is not at all certain that Scharping will come.