

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Haunted by the ghosts of the 1980s

George Bush's Iran-Contra scandal left a trail of bodies that still overshadows politics in Germany.

It may well be that the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) will be catapulted out of the parliament in the mid-October elections. Latest opinion polls indicate that the FDP will have big problems in garnering 5% of the vote, which is the minimum needed for a seat in the national parliament. Recent elections on the municipal and state levels have placed the FDP below 5%.

The party has entered a process of accelerated decline since the chairmanship was turned over from Hans-Dietrich Genscher to Klaus Kinkel two years ago. Should the FDP fail to reenter the parliament, it would imply that some of the party's leaders who occupied influential government posts during the 1980s, will be hit by the renewed interest in the "Iran-Contra" affair, which the Bush team hoped would remain buried.

Under German law, politicians who have no government post have no immunity, implying that once the investigation into the Iran-Contra affair from the 1980s turns to Germany's prominent role, questions will be posed, for example, to political figures who were involved or had privileged information about those deals. Genscher, foreign minister at that time, and Kinkel, head of the foreign intelligence agency during the crucial months in 1980 when the "arms for hostages" deal between the U.S. and Iran was, to a significant extent, negotiated on German soil, will have to tell what was going on at that time.

There are more figures involved, including some who did not survive the 1980s. There is the spectacular

case of Uwe Barschel, the Christian Democratic governor of the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, who had numerous secret diplomatic contacts with East German agencies such as IMES that were also involved in the "arms for hostages" deal.

Barschel, who survived a suspicious air crash in May 1987, was assassinated in a Geneva hotel room in October; the German government, which had to have known better, insisted that it was a "suicide."

Uwe Barschel's cousin Bernd Barschel, a leading employee of the Zeiss-Jena plant in East Germany that was involved in a number of illegal, secret transfers of dual-use high-technology products from the West to the East, died of a heart attack in late 1990.

Another politician who had contacts with the people in East Germany that ran that IMES operation, such as East German foreign intelligence Col. Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, was Franz Josef Strauss, the Christian Democratic governor of the state of Bavaria—his plane nearly crashed on his way back from Bulgaria in August 1988, and he died several weeks later of a mysterious heart attack. Strauss's wife Marianne had died in a suspicious car crash four years earlier.

Shortly after the untimely death of Strauss, another German politician, Philipp Jenninger, was victimized by a chain of mysterious events. In his role as head of the chancellor's office, Jenninger was engaged in secret talks in the early 1980s with Schalck-Golodkowski over a number of sensitive East-West affairs, including intelli-

gence matters and monetary and other preparations for a potential reunification of the two Germanys in case of expected economic and political emergencies in the East in the 1990s. Later, he was ousted as speaker of the parliament in a black propaganda operation over an allegedly anti-Semitic speech he gave in November 1988 on the 50th anniversary of the Nazi pogroms against the Jews in Germany (which Jenninger denounced). Although the charges were clearly phony, he was instantly replaced—a "political death" that had no precedent in postwar German history.

Jenninger survived his "political death" and serves Germany as ambassador to Austria, but all government files on his secret talks with the East Germans have "disappeared"—this at least is the official line.

Next is Detley Rohwedder, chairman of the West German Hoesch Steel Corp. which, together with a Swiss-East German "special" firm called Intrac, ran a joint venture in another East German high-tech firm, FUBA, in the 1980s. Intrac and FUBA worked with Schalck-Golodkowski's IMES. Rohwedder, who became chairman of the Berlin Treuhand Agency that controlled the East German state-sector industry after unification in autumn 1990, was killed by a sniper in April 1991.

Wolfgang Schäuble, who replaced Jenninger in the chancellor's office in November 1984, continued the secret diplomacy with "envoy" Schalck-Golodkowski and arranged to minimize the West German role in President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative program in exchange for political and human rights concessions by the East German regime in spring 1986. Schäuble survived an attack by a gunman in summer 1990, but has been confined to a wheelchair ever since.