

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Re-entering the nuclear power era

*There is a renewed positive interest among Germans in exporting and using nuclear technology.*

About a year ago, a few months before the general elections for parliament, the opposition Social Democrat Party (SPD) executive abruptly called an end to all intra-party debates about its anti-nuclear policy platform. This killed a number of initiatives from prominent Social Democrats who, after a 15-year "construction pause" in Germany's nuclear sector, wanted to discuss at least a limited program of building new nuclear power plants in order to guarantee the nation's energy supply into the next century.

Looking to get the ecologist vote that SPD chancellor candidate Rudolf Scharping needed to replace incumbent Chancellor Helmut Kohl (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), the SPD anxiously avoided anything that might signal changes in its 15-year anti-nuclear policy profile. It even broke off cross-party "national energy consensus talks" with the governing CDU.

The fact that Scharping failed to defeat Kohl in the October 1994 elections, meant that sooner or later, part of the SPD would return to the debate on nuclear technology. And indeed, the lobbying for atomic power and a return to the energy consensus talks with the CDU increased inside the party organization. But, once again, the anti-nuclear current won and voted down motions for altering the party's energy platform, at a session of the SPD parliamentary group in Bonn on March 14. The party reaffirmed its call for a total exit from nuclear technology in favor of increased state funding for "alternate energy sources such as solar technology."

The struggle is by no means over,

however, as was made clear two weeks later by Hermann Rappe, a senior member of the SPD parliamentary group and a longtime, now outgoing, national chairman of the chemical workers union.

At a union event in Hanover on March 28, Rappe charged those who run the SPD "energy policy" with gross "ignorance and arrogance," because they "not only want to determine, once and for all, what future generations should know, but even want to make sure that future generations will no longer have access to vital modern technologies."

The SPD platform would impose a 25-year limit on operation of nuclear power plants, which means that by the year 2010, all plants will have to be closed down—and no new ones have been built in Germany since 1978, under the impact of environmentalism.

Calling for a "future-oriented, fundamental outlook," Rappe urged a "responsible-minded preparation for the future" that will concentrate on research and development of "new concepts for nuclear reactors and nuclear waste storage."

Rappe's name has come up repeatedly in connection with emerging strong labor union support (especially among chemical and mining workers) for new "inherently safe" reactor types such as the gas-cooled High-Temperature Reactor, or the Enhanced Pressurized Water Reactor, a lightwater reactor which the joint Franco-German venture of the firms Framatome and Siemens is developing.

Rappe's pro-nuclear statement found an echo in remarks by Hans-Olaf Henkel, the national president of

the association of German industry (BDI) in an interview with *Stern*, a weekly notorious for its radical ecologism. The interviewer was surprised when Henkel voiced his pride over the fact that German industry is leading the world in nuclear technology, especially in the field of reactor safety. In the first open endorsement of atomic energy by a leading representative of German industry in almost 15 years, Henkel said that he profoundly disliked all the talk "about the threat of a climate catastrophe, without anybody even asking what nuclear technology can contribute to solve the problem."

"At present, there is construction going on at 60 nuclear power plant projects in 18 different countries," Henkel said, "and I consider it irresponsible if the one country that is proven to have the best mastery of nuclear technology from a safety standpoint, is told to exit from that."

If ecologists' plans to limit reactor operation to a maximum of 25 years, instead of the 40 years that is technically feasible, succeeded, Henkel declared, "a burden on German electricity consumers and taxpayers of about 240 billion deutschmarks" would be the price to pay.

Instead, Henkel said, Germans should "take part in the all-European development of a future reactor type," which they should ensure could be built in Germany from the year 2005 on. The interviewer reminded Henkel of the anti-nuclear orientation of the SPD which would block any such development. Rather than blaming the Social Democrats, Henkel said, "There are two currents in the SPD. . . . The supporters of the one current are slowly, I believe, realizing that the discussion about carbon dioxide is putting the question of nuclear technology back on the agenda, and this throughout the world. This is the current I am hoping for."