

West Germany



Helmut Schmidt

The Schmidt government— walking on a tightrope

by Susan Welsh

West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's decision this week to urge the European Economic Community (EEC)—and particularly his close ally France—to support the Carter administration's sanctions against Iran reflects the dangerous balancing act in which Bonn is engaged. Schmidt is torn between his complete rejection of President Carter's brinkmanship, which Schmidt believes may lead to World War III, and the fear of losing that "nuclear umbrella" which alliance with the United States provides.

"We know," said Chancellor Schmidt in a speech in Hamburg April 11, "that the kernel of our own security lies in the alliance with the United States. If anyone seriously doubts the expediency of one or another measure which is demanded from us, he must still realize that only support of this alliance can preserve the balance of power, which is the basis of peace and collaboration."

The London *Guardian* April 21 explained frankly how Schmidt was armtwisted to go along with Carter. "There appear to be three reasons for the more hawkish West German policy on Iran. The first is that they have been made the prime target for unprecedented U.S. pressure, even extending, according to some reports, to threatening noises about Berlin.

"Secondly, Liberal Party ministers in the Bonn coalition (notably the FDP leader, Hans-Dietrich Genscher) seem worried that any hesitation in giving 100 percent backing to Mr. Carter will be exploited by Franz-Josef Strauss and the right-wing Christian Democrats. Thirdly, ... the West Germans see Iran as less of a direct threat

to detente and cozy political and economic relations with Eastern Europe than Afghanistan."

World War III

The war danger of the present international situation is by no means lost on Chancellor Schmidt, whose country will be the main battleground of a thermonuclear war. Speaking at an electoral rally in Essen April 12, he compared the situation to that in 1914 on the eve of World War I. "There is no adequate war-avoidance strategy on either side," he warned. "Although then events took only a few months to develop to the outbreak of war, nobody should be confused today just because the process is slower."

Schmidt's view of the nearness of war is widely shared throughout the West German political spectrum. Former Inspector General of the Army Gen. Baudissin warned in a radio interview April 23 against a U.S. military intervention in Iran, saying this would create a Cuban Missile Crisis in reverse. The United States might use nuclear weapons in order to "save face," he said—but the real problem facing the United States is not whether to lose face or not, but whether to lose its very existence.

Otto Wolff von Amerongen, the leading spokesman for West German industry, emphasized that sanctions against Iran should be no means be linked to sanctions against the Soviet Union. In an interview to the daily *Die Welt* April 16, he said that "if there is another general embargo against the Soviet Union, we'll be in a cold war again." He rejected any West German actions against Iran which were not backed up by the rest of the EEC, since "this would look too much like a Bonn-Washington axis."

Washington's "fifth column"

United States pressure against the Bonn government is matched from inside the country by a whole range of destabilization operations aimed to prevent Schmidt's re-election in October, and to maximally constrain his policies in the interim. The most significant of these operations, as the above-cited London *Guardian* article hinted, is that of depriving Schmidt of a viable coalition partner. His Social Democratic Party is not expected to get a majority of the popular vote, and relies on its coalition with the tiny Free Democratic Party (FDP) of Foreign Minister Genscher.

Schmidt's electoral opponent, Franz Josef Strauss, has lately been courting the FDP, which has backed Carter's policies nearly as much as Strauss himself. Genscher and his fellow FDP-member, Economics Minister Count Otto von Lambsdorff, broke cabinet discipline last week to demand that West Germany adhere to the U.S. boycott of Iran and of the Moscow Olympics, policies which Schmidt opposed.