

Report from Bonn by George Gregory and Rainer Apel

Bonn renews nuclear growth

After a long period of dormancy, Schmidt's government plans to wake the potential of its nuclear program.

The West German government's third long-term energy program, due to be released the first week of November, looks toward an increase in the total primary energy derived from nuclear, from the current 4 percent to about 18 percent by 1995.

At the same time, the government announced after a cabinet meeting Oct. 14 that it had approved measures to accelerate the licensing of nuclear reactor construction. And in Düsseldorf Oct. 15, the licensing authorities of North Rhine Westphalia announced that the fourth license in a series of five would be granted for continuing construction of the controversial Kalkar fast-breeder project.

These actions suggest a new resolve by both Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and his factional allies to break through on the thorny political problem of nuclear energy. This will require challenging those in Schmidt's cabinet itself who are sabotaging nuclear energy, as well as the environmentalists within Schmidt's Social Democratic Party (SPD), his coalition partner the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and the radical-ecologist "Greenies."

As in the United States, a mountain of red tape, combined with court actions, have created a near-moratorium on the expansion of energy in the Federal Republic of Germany. No new plant has gone on line in the past year. Multiple

licensing requirements exist for every phase of the construction and then new licenses are needed for operation of the plants. No nuclear plant can operate unless its management can specify exactly what they will do with the nuclear wastes produced six years down the line. But since environmentalist obstruction has blocked the construction of the nation's first unified nuclear waste storage and reprocessing facility in the town of Gorleben in Lower Saxony, and since the long-term availability of reprocessing facilities in France has been thrown in question by France's Mitterrand government, the problem of waste disposal has become increasingly worrisome.

The opposition to Chancellor Schmidt's pro-nuclear program runs throughout the government and the largest political parties. Interior Minister Gerhard Baum, a Free Democrat and devotee of the "post-industrial society," does not openly oppose nuclear energy, but is responsible for the labyrinth of licensing requirements. Upset by the recent cabinet decision to limit an individual's ability to bring lawsuits against nuclear power plants and utility companies, Baum said he would not tolerate any violation of the right to protest.

Federal Research Minister Andreas von Bülow (SPD) is slashing funds for basic scientific research, and particularly opposes the pilot project for construction of a high

temperature reactor (HTR) in Schmehausen. Reimut Jochimsen (SPD), Economics Minister in the heavily industrial state of North-Rhine Westphalia, recently denounced the fast-breeder as a technology which will "belong in a museum" by the year 2000.

The parliamentary opposition parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), although officially more pro-nuclear than the Social Democrats, in fact bear a large degree of responsibility for the sabotage of nuclear energy development. The CDU Governor of Lower Saxony, Ernst Albrecht, was responsible for nixing the Gorleben nuclear waste reprocessing and storage facility. Franz Josef Strauss, the CSU head who was the chancellor candidate of the opposition parties in the last election, claims to be pro-nuclear. Yet in the state of Bavaria which he governs, only 2.6 percent of energy is supplied by nuclear—below the national average of 3.6 percent—while the Strauss government finances radical anti-nuclear environmentalist groups like the Bund Naturschutz.

If Chancellor Schmidt moves vigorously against these high-level opponents of nuclear energy, he will have the support of the majority of German industry and trade unionists. One leading industrialist, Rudolph von Bennigsen, Chairman of the Veba oil company, called nuclear energy an "urgent necessity," in an interview with the business daily *Handelsblatt*. If nuclear energy is not developed, he said, the cost of electricity will increase drastically, hurting the competitiveness of German industry and preventing economic recovery.