

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

German Social Democrats hoist red flag

Class-struggle rhetoric, support for the KGB's "nuclear-free zone," and a new opening to East Germany.

In the fall of 1983, the Italian Socialist Ripa di Meana published documents proving the close collaboration between the Socialist International's leadership and the Soviets on certain key anti-American issues. The Socialist International's president, West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman Willy Brandt, responded by accusing Ripa di Meana and a whole faction of conservatives in the social democracy of "collaboration with Western intelligence agencies." At the same time, the Arne Treholt spy case in Norway proved Ripa di Meana's point: Treholt, a leading politician of Norway's Socialist Party, proved not only to be a colonel in the KGB, but also to have written the original script for the "call for a nuclear-free zone in Europe" which has become the battle-cry of the German Social Democrats in their fight against the U.S. Euromissiles in Germany.

In the meantime, the SPD has embarked on a public campaign to make its contacts to the East more official: A delegation of SPD deputies in the national parliament visited, for the first time ever, the East German national assembly. The delegation was led by Horst Ehmke, author of a recent anti-American document titled "The Self-Defense of Europe."

Another delegation headed by the leader of the SPD parliamentary opposition in Bonn, Hans-Jochen Vogel, traveled to Moscow and East Berlin between March 7 and 10 to meet the new Soviet figurehead Konstantin Chernenko and the East German party

chief Erich Honecker. Summing up his talks with Chernenko, Vogel mentioned that they also resolved to step up the international campaign "against the militarization of space"—a reference to President Reagan's beam-weapon anti-missile defense policy. Summing up his talks with Honecker, Vogel said he saw "more commitment to disarmament on the side of Herr Honecker than on the side of [West Germany's] Chancellor Kohl."

A few days after Vogel's return from East Berlin, Ehmke wrote an open letter which claimed that "all present problems in Europe" could be traced back to the fact that the German workers' movement of the 1920s was split into Social Democrats and Communists. This, he said, "paved the way for Hitler" and thus for World War II and Europe's post-war partition into East and West, too. Resuming the dialogue between Social Democrats and Communists, Ehmke said, would therefore help to overcome some of Europe's problems of today.

At the same time, the SPD's party manager, Peter Glotz, stated in a public speech that the party had to change its self-conception and work with the labor movement to "become the organizational center for a new political left capable of gaining the [parliamentary] majority in this country." Glotz added that the SPD's new program should revive the recognition of the "conflict between labor and capital." This reference to old class-warfare demagoguery comes at a moment when the country's trade-union leadership is

preparing workers for mass political strikes against the stationing of the U.S. missiles and U.S. chemical weapons. Glotz's statements were preceded by a visit of Soviet "labor union leader" Mikhaleyev to the West German Federation of Labor's headquarters in Düsseldorf, and by the visit of the chairman of the German metal workers, Gustav Mayr, to Moscow, for talks on "issues of disarmament."

On March 17, Egon Bahr, the SPD's leading spokesman for a pro-Soviet ordering of European affairs, said that "the Soviet leaders show more commitment to nuclear disarmament than the Americans" and gave the green light for his party section to open official relations with the neighboring party sections of the SED (Socialist Unity Party), East Germany's ruling party.

What makes this contact delicate is the fact that Egon Bahr's party base is Schleswig-Holstein, the north German region threatened most by Warsaw Pact shocktroops. But that is not what concerns the Schleswig-Holstein Social Democrats: Their agenda for the upcoming dialogue with the SED at the end of April is to discuss "the idea of a Europe free of nuclear and chemical weapons" and "free of American GIs and Red Army soldiers as well."

Elderly, conservative Social Democrats, who are obviously in a minority within their party now, have warned of such contacts: They remember that the last such experiment in rapprochement between the SPD and the Communists ended with the Communists taking control of the Social Democrats in East Germany. This merger, forced through under Soviet auspices, was sealed in 1946 with the foundation of the SED which has become the West German Social Democrats' favorite dialogue partner of today.