

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Free Democrats conspire with the enemy

Rumors say the FDP either plans withdrawal from the coalition, or prepares for a new one with the SPD after the 1987 elections.

‘We are watching certain developments inside the Free Democrats with great concern. We see that on many central issues of policy, they are closer to the Social Democratic opposition than to us Christian Democrats.” Comments like these can be heard from many Christian Democrats in Bonn and elsewhere in the Federal Republic these days.

Indeed, the FDP of Foreign Minister Genscher seems to spare no effort to blackmail, humiliate, and contradict its Christian Democratic coalition partner. On German participation in the Strategic Defense Initiative, the FDP is openly in opposition. Genscher argues that a governmental decision to join the SDI would be interpreted as an “act of hostility” by the Soviets. Meanwhile, co-thinkers of Genscher inside the Christian Democracy have come up with the argument that, if the decision on the SDI will be postponed until early 1986 anyway, one should postpone it until after the 1987 elections, to keep them free of “such controversial issues.”

As to official contacts with the ruling parties and the regimes of Eastern Europe, the FDP sails with the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD), under the banner of “security partnership.” The scandalous joint working groups between the SPD and the East German Socialist Unity Party on disarmament issues, which go against continued U.S. military presence in West Germany, have been welcomed publicly by prominent FDP spokesmen. The FDP is also putting pressure on the Christian Democrats and Chancellor Kohl to receive the head of the East German parliament officially in

Bonn. This, the Free Democrats claim, would pave the way for a state visit of East Germany’s leader Erich Honecker to Bonn.

Pointing to the diplomatic delicacies of the “German Question” and to the West German constitution, which rules out any definite recognition of the postwar partition of Germany, the Christian Democrats have so far rejected official contacts between the West German and East German parliaments. The FDP’s siding with the SPD demand to bypass the constitution puts Chancellor Kohl in the unpleasant position of either risking another clash with his unruly Free Democratic coalition partner, or backing down—at the expense of the constitution.

It has often been difficult for non-Germans to see the delicate point in this debate on the “German Question”; dropping the re-unification clause in the West German constitution would undermine the complicated, fragile structure of West German sovereignty, and thus also the agreements on the stationing of U.S. and other Western troops in the Federal Republic. The thrust of the SPD’s and FDP’s mobilization against this re-unification clause goes against the presence of U.S. troops, therefore, and serves the intentions of those who want to decouple Germany from the United States.

Thus, the FDP welcomed the SPD’s new defense policy plank, the so-called Bülow Paper (advocating U.S. troop withdrawal from West Germany), as a “meaningful contribution to the discussion about defense alternatives and arms control.”

On another issue of strategic controversy, the South African problem, the FDP has been campaigning for sanctions against the government of P. W. Botha. While the Social Democrats have the same view, the Christian Democrats have rejected sanctions with the reasonable argument that these would not only destabilize the Republic of South Africa, but serve the strategic interest of the Soviets to weaken the West in that region.

Finally, the controversy in Bonn over the recent spy cases: The SPD wants to hold Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann responsible for the scandals, and has vowed to oust him from the ministry within the next weeks. The FDP has officially stated it would “neither support, nor topple” Zimmermann, but some of the party’s spokesmen have already said that “it looks as though the minister may have to go.”

The Zimmermann issue moves the Bonn coalition toward an open break, because the (Bavarian) Christian Social Union, Zimmermann’s party, has declared his remaining in the government a “test of the coalition,” and warned that if Zimmermann were forced out, the other four CSU ministers would also be withdrawn from the Bonn cabinet.

Most likely, this is the reaction the SPD and FDP intend to provoke from the CSU; the coalition would collapse even before the national elections of February 1987, opening the door to a new coalition between SPD and FDP, which would obviously mean the end of the postwar alliance between the Federal Republic and the United States. President Reagan should investigate why his own State Department and ambassador to Bonn, Richard Burt, maintain cordial relations to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who is out to install a new pro-Soviet coalition in Bonn.