

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Kohl missed a great opportunity

The facts of the Chernobyl accident speak against the Soviet lobby in West Germany.

With the next national elections only seven months ahead, Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl should be more than concerned about his popularity. The latest opinion polls show a meager 41 points for him, but 53 points for Johannes Rau, the Social Democrats' candidate for chancellor in 1987.

The Chernobyl disaster discredited all of Moscow's political co-thinkers in Germany, such as the Social Democrats (SPD) and the appeasers inside Kohl's Christian Democrats (CDU). The facts on the catastrophe, and the way the Soviet authorities handled the case, offered a great opportunity to Kohl to launch a counter-offensive against the political opposition.

He could have made the Chernobyl accident a case-study of Gorbachov's cynicism and untrustworthiness. Kohl could have capitalized politically on the affair, at a clear distance from the appeasers. He could have denounced the Social Democrats and the Green Party for their revealing silence on the Chernobyl affair.

Discrediting the Greens, and their SPD partners, would not have been even difficult. The Greens exposed themselves as Soviet agents by condoning Moscow's obscene, lying behavior in the aftermath of the accident. Why? "We didn't want to join the anti-Soviet campaign," said a Green Party spokesman in Bonn May 5. After contacting the Soviet embassy for private talks when the accident was reported, the Greens announced a renewed campaign against "the main political target, which is nuclear power in the

West."

There is no doubt that Kohl's own party base in the Christian Democratic Party was waiting for the chancellor, who is also their party chairman, to move. But Kohl missed the big chance, and lost the game to the media and the opposition, which took all efforts to re-interpret the Chernobyl case into an issue of mere anti-nuclear hysteria.

Especially the farmers were hit by the anti-nuclear hysteria which was whipped up by the media and the Social Democrats. SPD party chairman Willy Brandt took the lead on this campaign on May 3, when he said at an election rally in Hanover—the Lower Saxon capital—that "Chernobyl proved we must get out of the plutonium cycle economy and of nuclear power in general."

The party heads of the different SPD sections followed suit, stating that a Social Democratic Bonn government in 1987 would make sure Germany got "out of nuclear power as soon as possible." The SPD-Green government of the state of Hesse, led by Social Democrat Holger Börner, even marched ahead with official bans on the sale of agricultural products, alleging, "All fresh milk, salad, and vegetables are susceptible to the radioactive fall-out from Chernobyl." The Hesse Ministry of Environmental Affairs, led by Green Party member Joschka Fischer, sent out its "surveillance teams," harassing the consumers with scare stories of "intoxicated food."

To make the case worse, the other state governments, including those

ruled by Christian Democrats, also took such measures.

Chancellor Kohl and his Christian Democratic leadership let all of this happen, without intervening. The public rage against this scare campaign was highest among the farmers, many of whom listed income losses of up to 50%, due to the drop of sales of fresh agricultural products.

It is estimated that German farmers lost some 10 to 20 million deutschmarks total income per day during the first phase of artificial anti-nuclear hysteria.

The farmers were obviously waiting for Kohl to come out in defense of their income interests. The chancellor could have restored his own shattered image among farmers, who are up in arms against Bonn because of the government's disinterest in the bad income situation in the agricultural sector anyway. Kohl's failure to defend the farmers against the SPD-led hysteria campaign is certain to cost his Christian Democrats additional votes in the farming sector, now.

All of this will undermine the chances of Kohl's Christian Democrats to win the state elections in Lower Saxony on June 15, which can be considered quasi-primaries for the national elections of Jan. 25, 1987. With Kohl's popularity down to the record low of 41 points, he is not certain to survive June 15. The party will rather leave Kohl, like the proverbial rats jumping from the sinking ship, and look for another Christian Democrat for chancellor candidate.

The political tradition in West Germany does not allow such "changing of horses" mid-stream in the pre-election race, however. It would even accelerate the decline of the Christian Democrats, improving the chances of the Social Democrats to win the national elections in 1987.