

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The meltdown of Kohl's popularity

The revived anti-nuclear campaign caught the Bonn government off guard.

The German Social Democrats have decided to revive the dormant anti-nuclear movement as a tool to win the 1987 elections. All stops of demagoguery against nuclear power are being pulled out, to terrorize the West German population with invented news about post-Chernobyl radiation. A specific target of this scare campaign is, however, the farm and food sector in the country, which happens to be a sizeable traditional constituency of the Christian Democrats of Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The scare campaign caught the Kohl government off guard. For two weeks after the Chernobyl accident became known, the government of Chancellor Kohl remained inactive. This left the field to the demagogues of the Green Party, the Social Democrats and the media, who put out the line that all fresh food had been poisoned by the radioactive fall-out from Chernobyl. The result was a dramatic drop in food sales for farmers, and in the food stores. The losses were reported to be around 25% or even 30% of the average income from sales of fresh food, and in several regions, losses of even up to 50% were witnessed. Lacking authoritative information from Bonn whether there was a fall-out effect or not, consumers tended not take any risks, and not to buy fresh food, therefore.

Especially the "vegetable belts" in the regions along the rivers Rhine and Main, and the milk farming regions of South Germany, were hit hard by the scare campaign. The first 12 days of

the anti-nuclear scare campaign cost the German farmers an estimated total of between 700 and 1,000 million deutschemarks. These are losses in sales; not counted are the springtime investments farmers have made in the "vegetable belts" which can largely be considered to be lost now. Many farmers won't be able to pay their debt, or their debt service.

Preliminary reports from the 83,000 food stores in West Germany show a loss of about the same dimension, and this in a situation of generally escalating bankruptcy figures in that sector. Like the farmers, the food store owners have largely been voters for the Christian Democrats of Chancellor Kohl. They witnessed, however, that the Bonn economic policy is not run by Kohl, but by his minister of finance, Gerhard Stoltenberg, also known as the "austerity pope of Bonn."

Stoltenberg declared he had no money for the farmers, nor for the food stores, and that he would not "violate principles of budgetary policy" because of Kohl's fears that votes in the farm and food sectors might be lost. Rumors in Bonn have it that Stoltenberg refused to help Kohl out, because he hopes to capitalize on the chancellor's problems and become the next chancellor candidate of the Christian Democrats himself.

Thus, the farmers and food store owners were rudely repudiated by the Christian Democratic leadership. To make the case worse, the CDU leaders passed a program "for the farmers" on May 13 which encourages the shrink-

age of agricultural production by granting bonuses for "reduced acreage in production." This is a German version of the USDA's "payment in kind" program. The hand of Stoltenberg and his pro-austerity faction inside the Christian Democratic leadership was becoming visible.

"This means that the CDU leaders decided to keep their eyes closed on reality," a spokesman for the German Farmers Association told *EIR* on May 14, expressing that the farmers felt "tricked by the Christian Democrats." Pointing to the upcoming, crucial June 15 state elections in Lower Saxony, the same spokesman added: "It may well turn out on June 15 that the voter will wake up these politicians to reality."

A similar statement was given by an official of the German Food Store Owners Association. This means that the calculations of the Social Democrats worked out well, so far: The anti-nuclear campaign would create pressure on Kohl and his party from the constituencies among farmers and food store owners, and a failure of Kohl to do something for them would lead to political disappointment and an escalated drain of the vote for the Christian Democrats. The Social Democrats know they can't win the farm vote, but they count on the erosion of the Christian Democrats' constituency.

Since Chancellor Kohl and his party don't challenge the Social Democrats, they feel safe and hope to ruin the Christian Democrats irreparably. Thus, the result of the black propaganda and scare campaign, which was launched from Moscow after the Chernobyl accident and transferred into West Germany through the Greens and the Social Democrats, has been a total "melt-down" of Kohl's authority and popularity.