

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Goethe Institute or Schiller Institute?

The factional battle in German politics has spread to the cultural field, and the corrupt Goethe Institute is under fire.

In January 1986, the Schiller Institute in West Germany issued a dossier exposing the role of the government-funded Goethe Institute in spreading zero-growth ideology and cultural decadence, instead of promoting the great German classics, through its many branches at home and abroad. Five months later, this debate has surfaced in the daily newspapers, with Bavarian Gov. Franz-Josef Strauss leading the charge against the Goethe Institute.

Addressing a gathering of department leaders of the Goethe Institute in Munich June 12, Strauss charged the Institute, which has the official mandate to present the best of Germany's culture abroad, with spreading cultural pessimism, distortions, and even pro-terrorist ideologies.

Strauss said that there is "a masochistic tendency to slander the Germany of today," and "to equate the rampaging 'chaotics' of the criminal, violence-prone pyromaniac scene, with today's German youth." This was a reference to the Goethe Institute's policy of promoting members of the Green Party, as well as featuring films of anti-nuclear protests, which present the image of West Germany as "an atomic police state." The Goethe Institute has become, said Strauss, an instrument of black propaganda against the Federal Republic of Germany.

Strauss charged the Institute with rendering German cultural policy abroad a "mere playground of the international culture 'chiqueria'" [the

decadent culture "mafia"—ed.], while leaving the cultivation of the German Classics to the Herder Institute of East Germany. The Herder Institute, cooperating closely with the Goethe Institute, dedicated most of its own efforts to "the promotion of the classical and humanistic side of German culture within a communist linguistic framework," charged Strauss.

"The light and festive colors used by the G.D.R. [German Democratic Republic] to paint her society abroad, will be more successful in the long run than the dark hues of the 'Twilight of the Gods' presented by the Federal Republic." Instead of taking up this challenge of cultural warfare between East and West, the Goethe Institute was looking for "the alleged special affinity of the Germans to the political and cultural structures of the European East."

The main institution responsible for this decline of the cultural profile of Germany's foreign policy, said Strauss, was the foreign ministry in Bonn, which funds the Institute with an annual budget of 170 million deutschmarks (about \$77 million). The transformation of the Goethe Institute proceeded over a period of more than 20 years, but the 10 years that Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher has been in office have been the worst. During this period, the Institute has become a mouthpiece of propaganda against the West German society. Strauss demanded that the Institute undergo a profound change and be

provided with a "politically responsible leadership."

The Goethe Institute's officials listened to this speech in a state of shock. Never before had a prominent politician dared to take their policy head-on. The front-page headlines in the media on this open confrontation were bad publicity for the Institute, which took very seriously Strauss's announcement that after the next national elections in January 1987, the reform of the Institute was on top of the political agenda in Bonn.

Franz-Josef Strauss's speech reflected a broader sentiment among the non-leftist majority of West Germans. There have been, over the years, innumerable complaints from private citizens, from conservative German diplomats, from musicians, actors, and many others about the conduct of the Goethe Institute. Whenever Chancellor Helmut Kohl has visited foreign countries, he has been presented with more evidence on the Goethe Institute's nefarious activities. Yet he has chosen to remain silent, and not to risk a confrontation with his liberal coalition partners, the Free Democrats of Foreign Minister Genscher—the funder of the Institute.

This state of affairs was one of the motivations behind the foundation of the Schiller Institute, as a counterweight to the Goethe Institute, in May 1984. When making contact with representatives of nations in North and South America, Africa, and Asia, the Schiller Institute found that there was great interest in learning about the German classics, both in literature and in music. But instead the Goethe Institute was sending out the likes of the Green Party's Gen. (ret.) Gerd Bastian as a military expert to an event in Bombay, or showing videos in Brazil about the violent anti-runway movement of the Frankfurt Airport.