

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The CDU 'wonder-weapon' fails

Even Franz-Josef Strauss couldn't halt the draining away of Christian Democratic votes in the Bavarian elections.

More than the Lower Saxony municipal elections on Oct. 5, the Bavarian state elections on Oct. 12 were considered a test of the strength, or weakness, of the German Christian Democrats (CDU). In Bavaria's State Gov. Franz-Josef Strauss, the Christian Democrats had their most prominent conservative politician. The CSU, the independent Bavarian section of the CDU, was to prove that the drain of conservative votes, which the CDU suffered in all recent elections, could be halted with a campaign emphasizing anti-liberalism.

It didn't work. Strauss's CSU took a loss of more than 2% of the vote (from 58.3% in 1982 to 56.1% now), and losses were highest in the "farm vote belt," where farmers abstained from the vote, or voted for the new extreme right-wing "Republikaner" Party. In the farm belt votes, the CSU lost an average of between 5% and 6%. Even when one takes into account that average losses for the opposition Social Democrats were higher, at 4.2%, the CSU's poor showing is telling.

The only good news from the Oct. 12 elections is that the liberal Free Democrats failed to reach the 5% margin of votes mandatory for a seat in the parliament. But the bad news is that the radical-ecologist Green Party gained 7.3% and will be seated with 16 deputies in the Bavarian State Parliament—for the first time. The appeasement approach of the CSU on the question of nuclear policy, a tactic pursued after the bloody May 17-19 riots at the planned Wackersdorf plant

for nuclear reprocessing, did not stop the Greens.

It is obvious now that Strauss's party is no exception in the popularity crisis of the German Christian Democracy. In about 100 days, West Germans will elect a new parliament, and more than 20% of the country's 42 million voters live in Bavaria. The 5% drop in the general vote participation on Oct. 12 speaks a clear language.

It is generally expected that during the week of Oct. 31 to Nov. 6, after the scheduled series of strategy sessions, the CSU will decide whether to have a joint campaign platform with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's CDU in the 1987 elections or not.

CSU chairman Strauss will have to decide whether to keep to his profile as the main critic of Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Liberals, persisting in making Genscher's departure the main condition for supporting Chancellor Kohl's policy.

Should Strauss decide to back down and accommodate to Kohl's liberalist course, the drain of conservative votes from the Christian Democrats would accelerate. Many a conservative voter has stayed loyal to the Christian Democrats because of Strauss's position as the spokesman of the party's anti-liberalist wing. Once Strauss drops his gun, many of the conservative battalions will leave Kohl's army.

There is another, crucial aspect of the Bavarian state elections which has to be kept in mind: the surprising vote turn-out for the Republikaner Party,

which is appealing to the views of the extreme right-wing. These are voters hostile to foreigners, foreign workers, and exiles in Germany. These are voters who are straight monarchists, or subscribe to other oligarchical world-views, such as "nature before industry," including nuclear industry.

They also include voters who are fixated on an extreme localist or regionalist profile and do not care about national, international, or strategic issues. For them, the Western Alliance is no good, simply because the main ally, the Americans, are not Germans, and are not even Europeans. They want a nationalist, neutralist solution of the "German Problem." In terms of economic policy, the constituency of the Republikaner Party believes in full autarchy and extreme protectionism. The Republikaner Party, whose chairman, Franz Schoenhuber, publicly states his pride to have been a member of Hitler's Waffen-SS, is the German equivalent of the National Front of Jean-Marie le Pen in France.

The Republikaner Party invested more than 1 million deutschmarks in the Bavarian campaign, and is said to have a war-chest of more than 4 million to be used in the "near future." Party chairman Schoenhuber is hinting that his party may run in the 1987 national elections, stating that he hopes to conquer a good portion of the "conservative vote" from the CDU and CSU.

Many in West Germany are comparing these Republikaners to the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD), which was able to conquer a significant portion of the right-wing vote in the mid-sixties. In the national elections of September 1969, the NPD contributed to a significant loss of votes for the Christian Democrats, which enabled the Social Democrats to take power then. What happened in 1969 could happen again in January 1987.