

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Henry Morgenthau's green children

*Radical ecologists may soon enter the state government of Germany's industrial heartland.*

**T**he elections for state parliament on May 14 in the states of Bremen and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) ended in a disaster: The radical-ecologist Green party doubled its vote, gaining third-party status with 13% in Bremen and 10% in NRW. In both states, the Greens and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) together have a majority, which enables them to form "red-green" coalition governments. The opposition Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) only chance to rule is if it forms a "grand coalition" with the SPD, because the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), its coalition partner also in the federal government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Bonn, failed to pass the mandatory 5% hurdle to reenter the two state parliaments.

A majority of the SPD in both states is committed to forming "red-green" coalitions, meaning that NRW, the biggest and most-populated of the 16 states, the industrial powerhouse of the nation in the "Ruhr region," may soon be governed on the basis of a radical anti-industrial platform.

The Green position is that there be no more highway and other public infrastructure projects, no allegedly "polluting" industries like chemical production, and no investments in the coal-mining sector. The Greens are calling for drastic speed limits on cars and additional taxes on energy consumption to fund radical ecologist projects. The SPD will inevitably make substantial concessions to a Green coalition partner, and, for the first time since the infamous 1944 plan of U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, the Ruhr region is

threatened with deindustrialization and a substantial loss of jobs. For Germany, this would have the same effect as a major banking crash.

Moreover, the fact that the FDP has now lost parliamentary status in 11 out of 16 states over the past two years, means that the party is turning, as voters put it, into a "thing without underbelly." Sooner or later, Kohl will find it difficult to explain why he keeps a party in his coalition that no longer exists.

The FDP national party chairman, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, resigned from the party chair after the May 14 election debacle, in an attempt to control the damage.

Kohl's coalition may break apart over the FDP crisis, and if that happens, he only has the options of a "grand coalition" with the SPD to keep the nation governable, or to hold early elections, which could result in a "red-green" majority. The other, unlikely alternative is for Kohl to rule with a minority government with case-by-case majorities until the next scheduled elections in 1998.

All these scenarios have a flaw, namely, that they neglect the possibility of bigger disruptions in the economic-financial sphere or other catastrophes that force new principles onto the political agenda. A banking crash or a series of bigger industrial collapses fueling unemployment, could become the trigger for the political elites to put the emergency first and the ecology last, to form a "grand coalition" between the two biggest parties, the SPD and the CDU, or an "all-party consensus" that would be determined by the SPD and the CDU.

Even natural catastrophes could trigger a similar development. The flood along the Rhine River at the beginning of this year hurt ecologism in the Netherlands, and opened the door for dike improvements and other infrastructure programs that the Greens there had blocked for 20 years. Anti-greenie sentiments also emerged in the German regions along the Rhine, and in late February provoked a scandal in Bremen, which at that time was governed by a three-party coalition of SPD, Greens, and FDP: It was discovered that Ralph Fuecks, the Green minister of environmental affairs, had decreed that an area originally designed for small enterprises become an ecology protection zone from which all economic activity was to be banned.

This collapsed the coalition and, because the SPD refused to take a clear position against the Greens, led to a split-off from the SPD. A new party, Work for Bremen (AFB), was formed on the basis of an anti-Green platform, and on May 14 received 10% of the vote. The results for the AFB, which largely came at the expense of the SPD, have caused a fierce debate inside the SPD on whether another coalition with the Greens was really desirable, whether it wouldn't lead to more desertions. And indeed, a strong minority of Social Democrats in Bremen is calling for a "grand coalition" with the CDU.

In NRW, the SPD may decide for a coalition with the Greens, but a "red-green" alliance will threaten erosion of SPD constituencies, especially among the mining, chemical, and steel workers whose jobs are threatened by radical ecologist programs. Indicative of broader opposition, mining workers union chairman Hans Berger has already threatened to stage a "march of 100,000 miners" on Düsseldorf, the state capital.