

Eastern upheaval puts hard spin on West Germany's coalition politics

By Diana Johnstone

The momentous upheavals in Eastern Europe add to the interest in elections to be held a year from now in West Germany, whose influence in the region is fast becoming dominant. Whether a Bonn government is conservative or tinged with Social Democratic "red" and Green can make a difference in the historic evolutions underway.

Recent controversy over preparations for Chancellor Helmut Kohl's visit to Poland pointed up the danger that conservatives will try to use West Germany's financial power to pursue nationalist goals. Poles were upset over plans for Kohl to attend a Catholic Mass at Annaberg in Silesia, where in 1921 a majority of the local population voted to remain German in a post-Versailles Treaty border-setting referendum and Germans defeated Polish armed attempts to claim the territory. Kohl's selection of this symbolic site was a concession to the powerful "Vertriebene" organizations of ethnic Germans driven out of Eastern Europe at the end of World War II. The Silesian Germans, a huge lobby within Christian Democratic politics, still want Silesia back from Poland.

The concern recently expressed by Lech Walesa that reform in East Germany was moving too fast toward German reunification can be explained by these claims. In 1970, Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt signed the Warsaw Treaty recognizing the Oder-Neisse border between East Germany and Poland. But the treaty is binding only on West Germany—and not on any all-German government that might emerge from reunification. The West German right seems ready to make demands in return for the money the country will pour into Poland.

The Social Democrats and the Greens would approach Eastern Europe without such nationalist pretensions, keeping in mind what Germany did to the region in World War II. A "Red-Green" coalition in Bonn would mean a truly kinder, gentler Germany. But a Red-Green coalition still looks like a long shot. Somewhat likelier is what Germans have been calling a "traffic light" coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens along with Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's Free Democratic Party (FDP) as the yellow "caution" in the middle.

For one thing, although the Christian Democrats have been losing votes to the nationalist far-right Republicans, the SPD and the Greens do not yet have a majority. For another, although it is getting ready to campaign for "ecological restructuring," which sounds like a perfect Red-Green coalition slogan, SPD leaders don't want to govern with the Greens, or at least not with the Greens alone. The Greens, however, have largely come around to the idea of coalition with the SPD. Now the issue dividing pro-coalition "Realos" and the others is coalition with the FDP as well.

From green to red: Early this month the Green Party's top "promi" (a lightly disparaging term for a prominent person), lawyer Otto Schily, resigned his Bundestag seat to join the SPD. If Schily had defected to the SPD two years ago, as many expected him to do, it would have been seen as a dangerous escalation in the "Realo-Fundi" (realist-fundamentalist) factional battle threatening to tear the Green Party apart. But when Schily finally made the switch, the ease with which the Greens shrugged it off showed that the Realo-Fundi feud has lost its sting. Personal incompatibility was grounds enough for the Schily-Greens divorce. Schily was a bourgeois liberal gentleman who wasted less and less of his charm on his Green colleagues, whom he tended to treat as upstarts who failed to give him his due.

This failure culminated with the decision of the Green Party in North Rhine Westphalia to respect its irregularly observed principle of "rotation" in office by not nominating anyone for a third term in the Bundestag. That meant Schily would not be asked to repeat his electoral success in Düsseldorf. Annoyed, he resigned for an uncertain chance at an SPD seat next year.

In a party of self-assertive individualists, Schily was an extreme case. The party's left said it was shedding no tears at his departure, although Schily's image may be missed during elections. Joschka Fischer, who remains as top Realo and media favorite, pointed out that Schily had made the Greens attractive to an influential left-liberal sector of voters. A skillful lawyer, Schily's investigation of the Flick scandal, involving illegal contributions to the FDP, probably helped win former FDP voters over to the Greens.

Schily and Fischer were both among the select handful of prominent Greens invited early last summer by a progressive nobleman, Count Hermann Hatzfeldt-Wildenburg, for private conversations with prominent SPD leaders at his castle. The Crottorf Castle talks naturally aroused protests from other Greens that the "promis" were dealing over the heads of the base. The public results did not appear particularly fruitful. Green Bundestag defense specialist Alfred Mechttersheimer, who was among the Crottorf Castle guests, later published a paper distinguishing analogous, controversial and incompatible defense-policy positions, in search of overlapping places where a red-green compromise might be possible. A Social Democrat who was also among the chosen few at Crottorf, Karsten Voigt, promptly threw cold water on this tentative probe for common ground. Voigt called Mechttersheimer's approach "superficial," since coalition must express fundamental accord, and stressed the basic incompatibility of Green pacifist convictions with the preparation of a military budget—any military budget.

To what extent this sort of exchange may be calculated to reject or, on the other hand, to "educate" the Greens toward accepting SPD positions is hard to tell. Green member Petra Kelly is an isolated voice in her indignant objections to the party's acceptance of NATO to accommodate the SPD. The disappearance of the Soviet threat has also sharply diminished perception of the NATO threat, while a handful of Realos have been defending NATO as a stabilizing force against the threat of German nationalism.

The agenda is greener: The SPD call for ecological restructuring is a sign of the tremendous ideological success of the Greens in getting others to put green issues at the top of the agenda. The probable SPD candidate for chancellor, Oskar Lafontaine, is a specialist in his own Saarland in defeating Greens with green ideas, and he would no doubt like to do the same on the national level.

The key to the SPD program is the Ecotax, which is divided into two categories. The first is a hike in taxes on

consumer petroleum products, mainly gasoline, that will add 32.8 billion marks (a little less than half as many dollars) to the treasury to be used for social redistribution: raising the basic income-tax deduction and contributing to various social-welfare payments. A second category of taxes to be levied against emission of atmospheric pollution, disposable beverage containers, toxic waste and the like will raise about eight billion marks. This money is to be used for environmental investments, notably to promote environmentally sound transportation.

The Green Ecotax program is more ambitious. In a recent SPD-Green debate on the Ecotax in the business magazine *Wirtschaft Woche*, Green Bundestag member Christa Vennegerts criticized the SPD project for writing into the social budget a source of revenue that, if it succeeds, should diminish. In other words, a real Ecotax on gasoline, as opposed to the gas taxes that have always existed, should both dissuade people from driving and at the same time be used to offer them an alternative. Thus the Green proposal is to raise 25 billion marks from increased gasoline taxes to be used wholly to extend public transportation. Vennegerts said the Greens also wanted to raise social benefits, but not from the Ecotax part of the budget. In addition, the Greens call for raising 25 billion marks from a primary energy tax on nuclear power, oil, coal and natural gas to be used for financing conversion to other energies. They also demand some 33 billion marks in more punitive taxes on environmentally damaging production such as packaging, atmospheric emissions, chemicals and so on, to be used to finance environmentally sound technology as well as an environmental damage fund and the rehabilitation and extension of canal networks and purification plants.

In response to the Green proposal, the SPD's Ingrid Matthäus-Maier made three points: Green measures would

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require a "gigantic bureaucracy," they would impede West Germany's competitiveness in the European single market, and such exaggerated measures "cannot get a majority." The timidity of her arguments reflect the SPD's effort to win business support in view of an eventual coalition with the FDP—or even a "grand coalition" with the Christian Democrats.

But this pro-business orientation is eroding the SPD's historic constituency in the trade unions. Some unionists complain that the SPD's recent enthusiasm for women's equality and ecology are just diversions from its abandonment of the working class. As a result, the vanguard of the labor movement is showing a fresh interest in the Greens. This is an interesting development, since initially the Greens' anti-growth and anti-productivist positions aroused automatic labor hostility. A guest speaker at the congress of the metalworkers union, IGMetall, in West Berlin late last month was former autoworker and Green Bundestag member Willy Hoss, who had been expelled from IGMetall 17 years ago for his radical opposition. Hoss, the first Green to address an IGMetall congress, called for an ecologically-oriented "co-determination" to give labor a say in the contents and purposes of production against capitalist concentration and powerful arms contractors like Daimler-MBB. The congress thereupon voted to extend IGMetall statutes on peace, disarmament and international understanding to "protection of the natural environment to ensure the survival of humanity." Even the sacrosanct auto industry is to come under scrutiny of the union in search of a conception of ecological transformation of transport.

In his policy speech to the congress, IGMetall leader Franz Steinkühler acknowledged that the Greens have become a serious political force, "on the way from political protest to political formulation." IGMetall is "ready for sensible political cooperation with the Greens," he said, obliquely warning the SPD that it can never have a majority if it neglects labor. □

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By Jim Naureckas

WASHINGTON

AT FIRST GLANCE, A RECENT WHITE HOUSE leak of classified material appeared to be an attempt to deflect criticism of the Bush administration's performance during the October 3 aborted coup against Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega. But on closer examination, the leak may have been part of a deliberate strategy to remove what restrictions remain on the covert operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and give legal backing to agency involvement in targeted killings.

"The Bush administration is using the Panama situation to push for across-the-board authority regarding assassinations," argues Ralph McGehee, a former CIA officer. "All the things that are happening are a way of gearing up the CIA for a return to the glory days of the '50s and '60s."

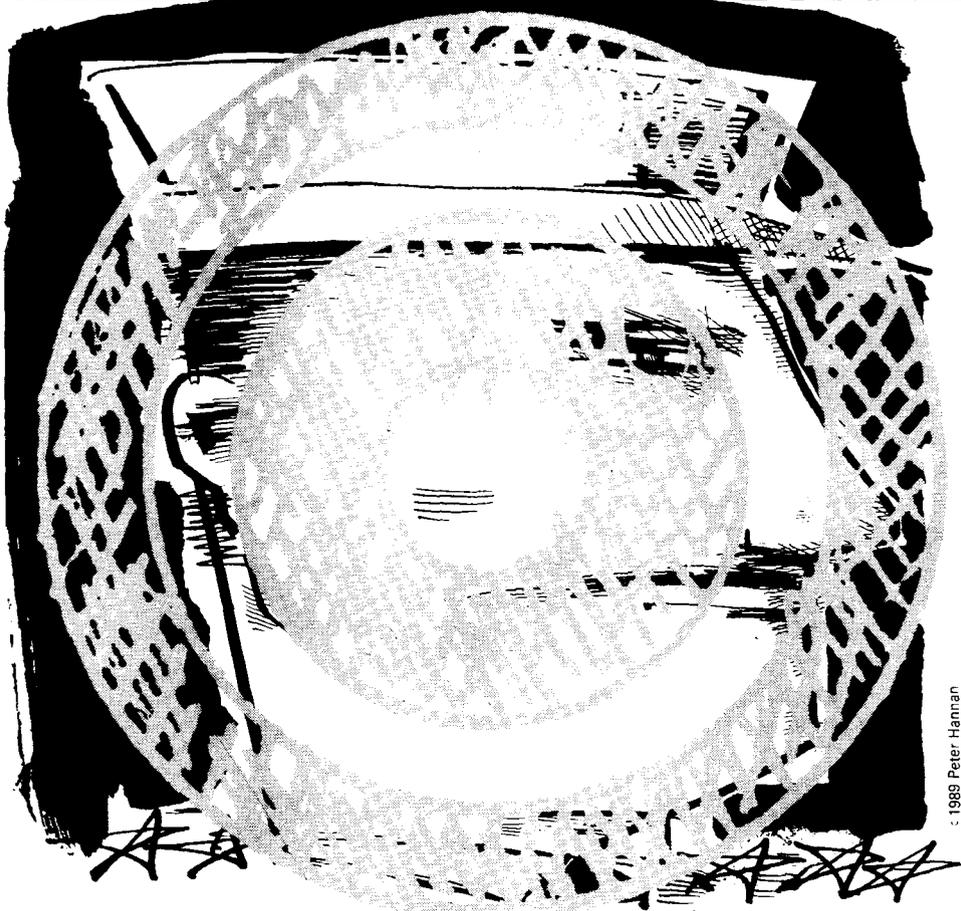
The classified material President George Bush released on October 17 was correspondence between the Reagan White House and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence regarding a potential 1988 coup against Noriega. In secret communication the White House and the committee agreed that the CIA would not support an October 1988 plot, primarily because it seemed to have little chance of success, but also because the plan was deemed likely to result in Noriega's death. Both parties acknowledged that backing a coup that would probably result in the death of a foreign leader would violate long-standing executive orders forbidding assassination.

After leaking the classified material, however, Bush and CIA Director William Webster described the correspondence as a unilateral Senate edict that could be interpreted to mean that the targets of U.S.-sponsored coups would have to be informed in advance if their lives might be threatened. Although the CIA's deputy directors for both operations and intelligence later denied that the 1988 agreement had hampered them in any way during this year's anti-Noriega military revolt, Bush publicly implied that Congress' "micromanagement" had foiled the recent coup.

Struggle over oversight: If that were all there were to the story, it would be merely another example of President Bush using the same Lee Atwater-style campaign tactics that got him elected. But the leak served a larger purpose beyond protecting the president from charges that he "lost Panama."

Bush's leak was a sneak attack in an ongoing battle between Capitol Hill and the administration—particularly the CIA—over what role, if any, Congress should have in overseeing covert activity. By shifting embarrassment over the Panama issue from the White House to the Senate, Bush forced the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to withdraw plans for a statutory requirement that all CIA covert operations be reported to Congress within 48 hours.

In exchange, Bush said he intends in the future to inform the committee in advance about covert operations in all but "rare cases." He reserved, however, the presumed presidential right to permanently conceal CIA activities. "It's a classic extreme executive position: 'We have all the power and you have none,'" says Gary Stern of the American Civil Liberties Union's Center for National Security Studies. The "com-



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CIA pushes for ambiguities in 'accidental' killing law

promise" maintains the same requirement for "timely" notification that former President Ronald Reagan used to delay telling Congress about the Iran arms deals until the sales were disclosed in the Lebanese press.

By putting the Senate committee on the defensive, the CIA was able to announce new assassination guidelines without fear of a congressional backlash. CIA Director Webster told the *Washington Post* that the new standards forbid only plans with the explicit goal, rather than the likelihood, of killing political leaders. But past CIA activities indicate that Webster's formulation could once again legitimize CIA-backed murders.

In the first decades of the CIA's history, assassination of Communist leaders such as Fidel Castro was a preoccupation at the agency—there was even a "Health Alteration Committee" at one point that oversaw such matters. But the CIA has always denied responsibility for the deaths of foreign leaders, even when investigators have uncovered elaborate agency murder plans.

Altered states: The Congo's Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo and Chilean Gen. Rene Schneider were all killed by people backed by the CIA during coups or "kidnappings," but in each case the CIA blamed the deaths on rogue agents or explained them away as accidents.

After Watergate and congressional investigations of the CIA in the '70s, attempts were made to rein in some of the more unpalatable excesses of the agency. The first executive order forbidding involvement in assassinations was issued by President Gerald Ford in 1976, when Bush was CIA director. Under President Jimmy Carter, the agency was less involved in covert operations than during

any time in its history.

Because Carter tried to rein in the CIA, many intelligence officers opposed his reelection and welcomed newly elected Ronald Reagan's nomination of William Casey as CIA director. A veteran of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's free-wheeling predecessor, Casey had a well-deserved reputation as a "cowboy" who would get things done by ignoring congressional restrictions. From issuing a contra manual calling for the "neutralization" of Nicaraguan officials to supporting the 1985 bombing attempt on Lebanese Shi'ite leader Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah—which left 80 dead—the CIA under Casey ignored the executive orders that forbade agency-sponsored assassinations.

The desire of intelligence officials to be able to take lethal action has not changed from Reagan to Bush. "Assassination is the dot on the 'i' or the cross on the 't' for them," says Louis Wolf, co-editor of the *Washington*,

Whatever the legal framework, the CIA will probably find a way to keep using assassination as a covert tactic.

D.C.-based *Covert Action Information Bulletin*. "It's one of many options." What has changed under Bush is that Webster, a former judge, is far more interested than his predecessor in getting legal backing for killings. "Casey would never have raised the issue—he'd have just gone ahead and done it," says McGehee.

A former CIA officer, McGehee is now a harsh

critic of the intelligence community and argues that the public debate over the assassination guidelines reflects the fact that neither Congress nor the CIA wants to accept full responsibility for covert killings. "Top officials in the agency do not want a clear-cut charter to conduct assassinations," he says. "What Webster is asking for is the writing-in of ambiguities." Legislators, on the other hand, want to protect their own "deniability" to avoid blame for future political embarrassments.

Justifying the unthinkable: A memo released last April to *Defense Week*, a Washington-based newsletter, illustrates that the Bush administration has developed a legal justification for targeting individuals for elimination. Written by Gen. Hugh Overholt, the Army's judge advocate general, the document defines "assassination" as "an act of murder for political purposes," then notes that killing an individual in "self-defense" is not murder. The memo concludes that "pre-emptive self-defense" against "individuals whose activities constitute a direct threat to U.S. citizens or U.S. national security" would not be forbidden by the rules against assassination, which were intended only "to preclude unilateral action by individual agents or agencies against selected foreign public officials."

The memo, distributed for approval to the CIA and the State Department, contemplates attacks against the drug industry: those who are "aiding and abetting international criminal activity" are specifically mentioned as targets of U.S. military action. Overholt also calls for attacks against "terrorists," a category that in administration terminology includes guerrilla movements such as the FMLN in El Salvador and the African National Congress.

These forces, rather than Communist governments, would be the most likely focus of federal hit squads in the post-Cold War '90s. Often the two categories are merged by government hard-liners. Knight-Ridder's Frank Greve reported last June that drug czar William Bennett "strongly advocate[s] 'pro-active strikes' against 'narco-terrorists.'"

The CIA has already set up narcotics and terrorism task forces so that it will not be left behind as *glasnost* spurs the U.S. government to adopt new bogeymen. "They've built this massive paramilitary apparatus," says former CIA officer McGehee. "To justify themselves, they have to conduct covert operations."

Whatever the legal framework, the CIA will probably find a way to continue using assassination as a covert tactic, and Congress will probably once again look the other way. "Oversight has been very lax at best," says McGehee. "You [CIA officers] never tell the intelligence committees the truth—but they don't particularly want to know the truth."

To some, the most disturbing thing about the assassination issue is the matter-of-fact way coups and covert violence are accepted as legitimate foreign-policy tools. "The executive and legislative branches," says David MacMichael, Washington director of the Association of National Security Alumni, "have reached that point of moral blindness where anything the U.S. wishes to do is ipso facto moral." □

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