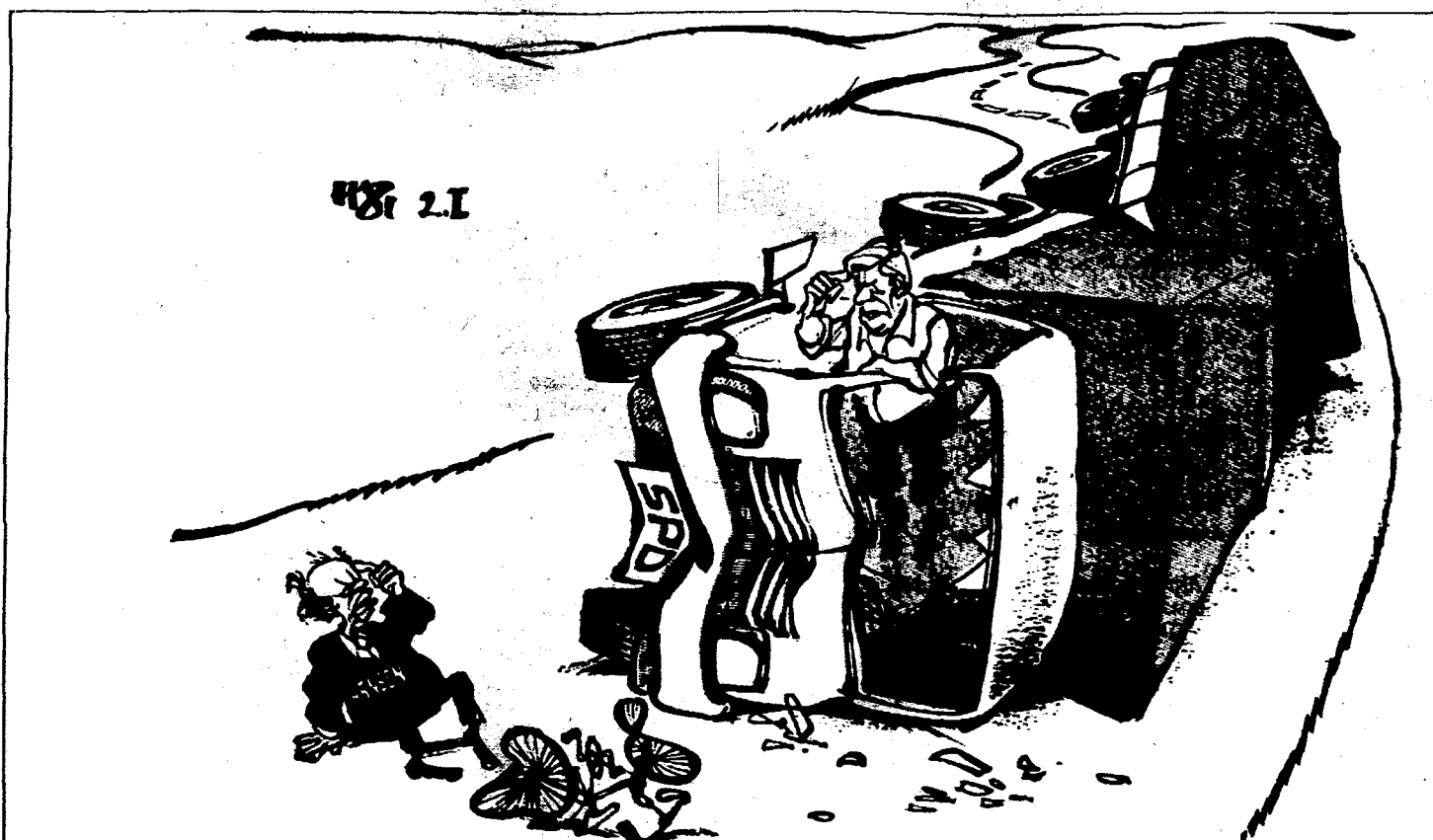


DISARMAMENT



A German cartoonist's view of the collision between Karl Hansen and Helmut Schmidt over arms policies.

Germany catches arms fever

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

A NEW PEACE MOVEMENT is springing up in West Germany, in opposition to the Reagan administration's efforts to force Europe into the arms race. While Chancellor Helmut Schmidt publicly welcomed the ascension of "old friend" Alexander Haig to the reins of power in Washington, discordant noises could be heard from the lower ranks of his own Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Back in December 1979, the SPD convention was persuaded to agree to let the U.S. station Pershing and Cruise nuclear missiles on German soil, but only on the grounds that they were needed to restore balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and with the understanding that the U.S. would ratify SALT II and pursue negotiations to reduce arms levels in Europe. Since then, the U.S. has scrapped SALT II and shifted from a policy of parity to an arms buildup aimed at achieving military superiority over the Soviet Union. Much of the SPD feels that since the U.S. has not kept its part of the missile bargain, the deal is off. This sentiment is widely shared in Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium.

Since the Bonn coalition government's junior partner, the Free Democratic Party, improved its score to 10 percent of the vote in last October's elections, FDP leader and foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher has been throwing his weight around. It is harder than ever to discern traces of SPD principles in Bonn's policy.

Two recent arms export deals have aroused strong opposition. The sale of submarines to Chile is criticized as immoral aid to a regime finance minister Hans Matthofer himself has called "a gang of bloody murderers." The deal to sell about 100 Leopard tanks to Saudi Arabia would in effect end Germany's self-imposed "moral embargo" on arms shipments to "tension zones." Germany has already been taking part in joint arms manufacture with countries like France that sell to all takers, and thus in practice was not strictly holding to the restriction. But the Saudi deal is seen as the signal for Germany's full-scale entrance into the arms race.

Champions of the arms trade are trying to drum up labor support by stressing all the jobs involved. So far, even with unemployment rising sharply (up to a record 1.3 million), German labor has not bought that line. The Hamburg and Kiel metalworkers—who supposedly stand to benefit from the submarine deal

—spoke out against it. German metalworkers (IGM) president Eugen Loderer called dropping arms export restrictions "economically and socially a step in the wrong direction, because it gets us into a dependence hard to break later on"; he added that IGM had a whole list of much better proposals for securing jobs.

A modest proposal.

The SPD, the Socialist International and the Brandt Commission Report all call for cutbacks in arms expenditures in favor of Third World development. In late January, SPD Bundestag (parliament) member Rudolf Schofberger offered his party colleagues a modest proposal that would put these fine principles into practice. Why not shave a billion marks (roughly half a billion dollars) off the arms procurement budget and add it to the foreign aid budget? This would still leave 1981 military appropriations at a record 40 billion marks, 2.97 percent higher than last year. But it would increase the scrawny foreign aid budget by almost a fourth. Schofberger suggested allocating the billion marks to combat hunger, disease and illiteracy in the world's ten poorest countries. Within a couple of days, 24 of the SPD's 218 Bundestag fraction members had lined up in support of the proposal.

While Christian Democrats chortled over the imminent collapse of the ruling coalition, foreign minister Genscher let it be known that any reduction in the military budget would be "a serious affront to the new American administration." SPD Bundestag fraction leader Herbert Wehner quickly moved to contain this embarrassing outburst of unstatesmanlike devotion to principle in his party.

Foreign aid minister Rainer Offergeld, who had previously pled in vain for more funds, didn't seem to hear the billion-dollar proposal. Instead, he gave an interview saying how "happy" he would be to see the U.S. back to "playing its leadership role."

An SPD Bundestag fraction meeting Jan. 27 turned down the proposal, which got 37 votes. The SPD-FDP coalition's majority is too narrow to be able to afford 37 defections. To assure support for military appropriations, fraction leaders agreed to a motion recalling that "worldwide increase in development aid and corresponding cuts in arms expenditures are basic, unanimous social democratic goals" and passed the foreign aid increase proposal (but not the arms spending cut) along to discussion groups.

That same day, the February issue of the leftist monthly *Konkret* appeared with an article by SPD Bundestag member Karl Heinz Hansen that would have attracted little attention had not Wehner

and other SPD leaders pounced on it to create a scandalous uproar that shook up—at least momentarily—the ranks of the anti-weapons minority.

The 53-year-old Hansen is not one to beat around the bush. In his article, he called for a "stop to the stupid 3 percent increase in the defense budget" and called instead for a "reduction of the 1981 arms budget by a billion marks in favor of emergency aid to the 30 poorest countries, for instance Uganda." He also called for an all-European disarmament conference to take concrete steps toward creation of a nuclear-free zone in Europe.

Hansen complained that "behind the SPD's back, the security council headed by Helmut Schmidt agreed to a submarine deal with Chile's 'gang of murderers.'" The decision not only lacks the minimum of political morality that used to distinguish Social Democrats from Christian Democrats. The argument that such a deal is needed to maintain jobs in the

The arms sales to Chile and Saudi Arabia signal an end to the "moral embargo."

shipyards is worse than pragmatic cynicism. It is a sheer mockery of years of repeated attempts by the SPD base and leadership to obtain structural measures to assure employment..."

Hansen argued that arms expenditures hurt investment in civilian industry where employment is more steady and secure. "Because every mark spent in the world—more and more by less developed countries—for weapons is a mark less to buy more worthwhile investment goods." Arms expenditure is "ruinous, because it turns valuable raw materials into leftover scrap, instead of creating economically productive and useful goods." It also "widens the discrepancy between North and South," increases dependence on arms export and thereby "reduces foreign policy leeway."

"Despite these facts, the government in past years has shown no sign of willingness to try out any of the many party resolutions on structural diversification" that would transfer military productive capacity to civilian use, Hansen charged. After the Saudi Arabian tank deal, Germans can throw themselves into "sporting competition with the French in unrestrained arms export. We'll no longer be partly to blame for those who die of hun-

ger in the Sahel, but also directly responsible for those killed with German weapons." Finally, Hansen warned that the SPD risked completely losing the younger generation by such unprincipled politics.

The powers of decorum.

The 24 crusaders against the arms race were riding high, but Wehner within hours used this article to bring them low. He and SPD chairman Willy Brandt issued a statement accusing Hansen and his article of "deliberately and systematically weakening" the SPD and called an emergency meeting of the SPD fraction for that very evening to censure Hansen and threaten him with expulsion. The notice was too short to round up many more than half the fraction, but never mind, Hansen was duly censured 115-to-one (Hansen himself) with 11 abstentions. Taken by surprise, the SPD left split, and the 24 opponents of the arms race called off a press conference they had scheduled for the next day.

The SPD leadership attack did not, heaven forbid, concentrate on the issues raised by Hansen, but rather on the unseemly manner in which they were expressed.

"How long will the Social Democratic Party look on helplessly as its vice chairman, alias Chancellor Schmidt, continually acts against common sense and the platform of his party?" the article began. "Has the fixation on parliamentary majorities and mere staying in power proved to be so catching that the Party is ready to pay the price of social ineffectualness? Have the Chancellor's announcements in a tone recalling Strauss' party, of the 'end of good deeds' and the start of a necessarily 'cruel, tough' social policy already turned into plain political swinishness?"

In Germany, decorum is the secret weapon of the powers that be. Threatened with lost respectability, Hansen's colleagues among the 24 backed away from his "swinishness."

Even so, Hansen popped back the next day at a press conference with two colleagues who hadn't made it to the fraction meeting and who protested at apparent efforts to silence opposition. As some SPD leaders took steps to follow up censure with expulsion, Hansen received hundreds of telegrams of support from religious and civic leaders.

In an interview with the weekly *Der Spiegel*, SPD presidium member Erhard Eppler said that whatever happened to Hansen (whose style he disapproved), the issue would not go away. The Reagan administration's effort to push Germany into a policy of military superiority over the USSR is bound to produce a "new neutralism," he warned. "I see the ecology movement turning into a peace movement," he said.

The neutron bomb "could break NATO," Eppler warned. "Europe must make clear to the U.S. it will not play along with a strategy of being armed to death."

"Either we are alliance partners, or else we are satellites," said Eppler. "It's almost an insult to the American nation to act as if the Americans would not live up to their commitments—as in Berlin—if ever the Germans didn't do exactly what they were told. The Soviets must be made to know that their military adventures can only push Western Europe even closer to the U.S. Reagan must be made to know that there could be an American policy that would no longer meet with our encouragement but with a plain 'no.' This is also of importance to the American opposition to Reagan."

The row over military spending is only one of the SPD's recent internal troubles. There have been problems of replacing the Berlin mayor—Schmidt's heir apparent, former Bonn Justice Minister Hans Jochem Vogel, was dispatched to do the job—and over the Hamburg SPD's decision to pull the municipality out of the consortium building the much-disputed Brokdorf nuclear power plant in neighboring Schleswig-Holstein. The turmoil tolerance level is relatively low in German politics, and talk is increasing of the SPD's "unfitness to govern." Rumors are afloat that Schmidt has heart trouble and will soon retire. So far only the inner circle knows whether this is true or part of some ploy. ■

GREAT BRITAIN

Labour's splinter is not a split

By Mervyn Jones

LONDON

AS THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY struggles with its gravest crisis since 1931 all but the most bone-headed are—with good cause—extremely anxious. Yet the dominant feeling, though you couldn't guess it from most press reporting, is that "things might be a lot worse."

To see why, one must go back to events in the fall of 1980 when the party's annual conference ratified by the narrowest of margins a constitutional change key to the reform program of Anthony Wedgwood Benn and his allies. It decided that the party leader should, in future, be elected on a "wider franchise" representing the local members, the trade unions and other elements in what's broadly called the labour movement—not only by Labour members of Parliament. The change didn't take effect immediately because details of the new voting system were left to a further special conference set for January 24, 1981.

The arguments for and against this change are not only passionately urged, but also serious. Opponents argue that Britain is governed by the parliamentary system, and that the British people won't back a party they suspect of wishing to bypass or downgrade it. The system can only work if the party leader—

time, under the old rules—by MPs alone. Most Labour MPs, if classified by their stance on major issues such as the limits of public ownership, a NATO-based foreign policy and the retention of nuclear weapons, are right-wingers.

Denis Healey, defense minister in one Labour administration and chancellor of the exchequer in the next, and consistently right-wing since he entered politics in 1950, emerged as the front-running candidate. A strong upholder of the rights and privileges of MPs, he let it be known that if elected he would stay as leader "as long as my fellow-MPs want me."

His rival was Michael Foot, whose consistently left-wing record includes being deprived of the party whip in the '60s for campaigning against nuclear weapons. At first reluctant to run because of his age, the 67-year-old Foot was drafted by pressure from his friends (and jocular threats of divorce from his wife) as the only man who could beat Healey. On the constitutional issue, Foot stated that he would accept the conference decision and submit to re-election under the new rules—though he had his own views on the details of the franchise.

All seemed set for a nightmarish scenario as follows: Healey would win the vote at the fall conference. The January conference would adopt new rules, call an election under them, and open the way to a grass-roots favorite, probably Benn. Healey, backed by MPs, would refuse to retire. With two men



Tony Benn

had not been enough time since becoming leader to explain the merits of his plan.

The battle is not yet over. Healey, now deputy leader, is urging that the decision be reversed. Foot has said that it will be perfectly in order to re-open the issue when the regular annual conference convenes next October, and it's presumed that he will again favor the 50-25-25 formula. Unless, of course, Foot's health gives way—a possibility against which even atheists are praying—no new leader will be needed for some years.

Exile on Narrow Street.

But on January 25, while Foot was relaxing with fellow leftists, a meeting was being held at the home of Dr. David Owen on (suitably named, perhaps) Narrow Street, a chic enclave in what used to be London's dockland. The participants were Owen himself, foreign secretary in Callaghan's team; Shirley Williams, formerly minister of education; William Rodgers, formerly minister of transport; and Roy Jenkins, who was a senior figure in the 1964 to 1970 Labour government and then the party's deputy leader, before departing for a stint as president of the European Economic Community's Commission.

These people, inevitably labelled in the press as the Gang of Four, had for several weeks been saying that they were finding it difficult to stay in a Labour Party that—as they see it—has drastically changed its character and outlook. They don't accept any formula, including the Foot plan, that gives the unions a voice in the election of the leader. Owen, at the Jan. 24 conference, had urged a straight vote of individual party members, somewhat on the lines of an American primary; but he got little support.

There's a degree of irony—even hypocrisy, some critics would say—in the stance of these right-wingers. On policy issues, Labour's right wing relied for many years on the votes of the unions, with no complaint from Jenkins, Williams or Rodgers. (Owen, it's fair to say, was too young to be in the game at that time.) Now that some big unions are under left-wing control, they discern the faults of the system.

Still, these faults are in fact rather glaring. Each union casts its vote as a monolithic bloc, according to the number of its members who theoretically pay a small sum of money to be affiliated members of the party. And "theoretically" is the word, since the bloc vote actually represents the union's financial contribution to party funds—for example, a union can cast 500,000 votes when it has only 400,000 members. In defense of this arrangement it's argued that the unions created the party back in 1900 (a historical simplification) and that this umbilical tie to the working class is what gives British Labour its strength. But

similar parties in Germany and Scandinavia manage without it and frequently win national elections.

Emerging into Narrow Street, the Four announced the creation of a Council for Social Democracy. This is generally regarded as the forerunner of a new party. Announcement of the party itself is daily imminent but, like Prince Charles' engagement to Lady Diana Spencer, somehow hasn't happened yet. Shirley Williams says that she's still hoping for "a miracle," as she puts it, with Labour MPs staging a counterrevolution. Most observers ascribe the delay to negotiations for an alliance with the Liberal Party—not too easy to fix up, since some Liberals are hotly opposed to sharing their political pie with the newcomers.

A lame response.

So far, the CSD hasn't exactly been a smash hit. It has been joined by only nine Labour MPs in addition to Owen and Rodgers. (Jenkins resigned his seat to go to Brussels, and Williams lost hers in the 1979 election.) Considering that about 140 MPs could be described as right-wingers, this is a poor haul. Healey and other influential figures have been exerting all their efforts to cut down the defections, with remarkable success. It's also notable that not one of the 11 CSDers has the backing of party members in his constituency—one, indeed, has already received an almost unanimous demand for his resignation from Parliament.

On Feb. 5 the CSD put out a press advertisement claiming 8,000 messages of support. Again, not very many. It listed the names of 100 backers, and the list was astonishingly unimpressive—some aging ex-MPs now retired from active politics, a scattering of professors and other intellectuals, none of them truly

Of the 140 Labour MPs that can be described as right wing only 11 have defected so far—a poor haul.

distinguished, one pop musician, one actress. Grassroots activists in the Labour Party were few—just a branch chairman here, a district councillor there.

But it is disturbing that opinion polls report support for a Social-Democratic-Liberal alliance among 30 to 40 percent of the voters. This needs to be strongly caveated, as Haig would say. No such alliance yet exists. The media have been unrestrained in their plugging of the new grouping. People often give strange answers when asked how they'd vote years before an election is due (in this case, 1983 or 1984) and such intentions melt away when the time comes. Yet these findings can't be entirely dismissed, if only as an expression of discontent with the existing political matrix.

With unemployment at 10 percent and rising fast, the welfare state in ruins and even businessmen agast at the results of Mrs. Thatcher's policies, a Labour victory at the next election might seem to be a safe bet. But we must set against this the long-term erosion of the "loyal" Labour vote. In 1966, 48 percent of those who cast a ballot voted Labour. In October 1974 it was down to 38 percent though Labour won the election. In 1979, it was 33 percent.

If a Social-Democratic Party were to snatch even a slice of the Labour vote, and if the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system were to produce a large number of minority victories, Labour might be robbed of success and Thatcher assured of a further spell in Downing Street. The beneficiary of the events we're now witnessing may well be neither Michael Foot nor David Owen, but the quietly smiling Tory Prime Minister. ■ Mervyn Jones, who has written regularly for both the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*, was formerly London correspondent for *In These Times*.



Michael Foot failed to strike a compromise on the new franchise.

and so the prime minister after an election victory—has the confidence of a majority of MPs on his side of the House of Commons. The wider franchise might produce a leader of whom that could not be said—such as, to be frank, the much-loved but also much-hated Benn.

On the other hand, putting the choice of leader in the hands of the local units and the affiliated unions is a visible advance in democracy. It's also logical, since they already decide party policy by votes at party conferences. And, even if we leave aside the U.S., where the institution of the presidency makes a vital difference, several nations with a parliamentary system and a prime minister—Canada, Italy, West Germany—have party leaders chosen at conventions or conferences.

One nightmare averted.

The constitutional change was followed quickly by the resignation as party leader of the bumbling and ineffective James Callaghan, who had assured all and sundry that his influence would ensure the defeat of the reform move. A new leader had to be elected, for the last

laying claim to the leadership, the party would split wide open.

Worried MPs in the center of the party spectrum saw the danger and helped elect Foot by a margin of 10 among the 262 MPs who voted. And that's why people are saying that things could be worse.

With the January special conference not far away, Foot put his weight behind a compromise formula. The votes of MPs would have a 50 percent weight in what was called, borrowing the American term, an electoral college. The local party units would count for 25 percent and the unions for 25 percent. That way, a clear element of democracy would be introduced, while MPs would have reasonable protection from being saddled with a leader they couldn't follow.

But when January 24 came, this proposal did not carry the day. The conference voted for a formula giving 40 percent weight to the unions, 30 percent to the local units, and 30 percent to MPs. Foot, his serious face splashed across the front pages, was described as dejected and dismayed. In fact, as he told me in a chat the following day, he hadn't expected to win—there simply