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BRITISH EMBASSY,

BONN.

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FCO

18 September 1987

*cf* Mr Dam  
Mr Fry  
Mrs Leske  
Mr Crosswell  
Mr Dixon

*RB*  
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*My dear David,*

TENSIONS IN THE BONN COALITION

1. Arguments within the governing CDU/CSU/FDP coalition in Bonn are nothing new. Traditionally most of these have taken the form of disputes between the CSU (primarily Strauss) and the FDP (primarily Genscher), with the CDU occupying an uncomfortable position in the middle, and Kohl himself doing his best to calm things down and keep his own head below the parapet. But since this summer the lines have been drawn up rather differently. The sharpest exchanges are now taking place between the CSU and the CDU, with the FDP mainly watching from the sidelines. This is a phenomenon which merits some closer attention, since it significantly affects the capacity of Kohl's coalition to engage in the serious business of government.

2. We have reported the main instances of these disputes as they happened. The first was the argument in early August, when Labour Minister Blam (CDU) took the opportunity of a visit to Chile in his party capacity to speak up forcefully on behalf of 14 Chilean dissidents who had been detained on terrorist charges, and to argue that the FRG should offer them asylum to save them from the death penalty. The CSU took vigorous exception to this. Strauss objected even more strongly to the second and more important development, when Kohl announced out of the blue on 26 August that the FRG will give up its Pershing 1As if a satisfactory INF agreement is concluded and implemented.

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Incensed that he had not been consulted, Strauss announced that his party would boycott two coalition meetings, and there were dark mutterings from Munich about further reprisals if the CDU did not pay more attention to their Bavarian sister party's views. Additionally, and in parallel to these two specific bones of contention, the CSU have spent much of the last few months attacking the CDU for neglecting the Union's traditional supporters, and warning the CDU's Secretary-General, Geissler, that his strategy of seeking to make the CDU more attractive to voters in the centre of political spectrum will not work, and will only lose the Union parties crucial support on the right.

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3. Why is all this happening? Kohl's uncharacteristically forthright decision on the Pershings was made partly for foreign and defence policy reasons. But he had domestic party-political reasons too, with important Land elections then on the horizon in Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein. What these disputes have in common, I think, is that they are all symptoms of a deep-seated concern in the Union parties about the steady erosion of their vote. Since June 1986, when Lower Saxony went to the polls, there have been eight Land elections (two of them in Hamburg) and one Federal election in this country. In seven of these elections the CDU or CSU have lost votes, sometimes in dramatic numbers. Where the CDU were in government with an absolute majority before, they have only been able to hold on to power by taking on the FDP as coalition partners. If the CDU also lose their absolute majority in Baden-Württemberg next March - and this seems at present very likely - then the CSU stronghold of Bavaria will be the only part of the country where the Union can command a majority on their own. (It is also the only Land where the FDP are not now represented in the Landtag.)

4. This special attribute of Bavaria naturally serves Strauss well in his argument that the CDU strategists around Geissler

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are misguided if they think they can stop the rot by making the Union more attractive to potential new supporters in the centre, whether by playing up the CDU's commitment to human rights (Blöm in Chile) or by meeting the concern of voters anxious for an arms control agreement (Kohl and the Pershings). But Strauss has problems of his own from a different quarter. The CSU were seriously shocked at the time of their own elections in Bavaria last October. Here too the Union vote dropped; partly because their supporters stayed at home (notably the farmers: a problem which afflicts the Union everywhere), but partly because 3% of the electorate voted for the extreme right-wing Republicans. For Strauss, who had declared that there must be no place in the spectrum for a democratic party to the right of the Union, this was a serious blow. The Republicans' success, albeit not big enough to give them seats in the Bavarian parliament, largely explains why Strauss has been so vociferous this year in accusing the CDU of shifting the Union leftwards and opening up a dangerous gap on the right. The success of the DVU, another extreme right-wing group which won one seat in the Bremen parliament on 13 September (when the CDU vote collapsed by nearly 10%), will give him further ammunition.

5. This is not the place to argue in detail the pros and cons of this 'strategy debate' going on within the Union parties. But it is important to bear it in mind when seeking to understand why the CDU and CSU are currently so much at loggerheads. Both parties are losing support; and, as election follows election, each is inclined to blame the other for its own losses. Indeed, the 'strategy debate' itself - ironically, launched by Geissler at the beginning of the summer break to draw attention away from the contentious issue of tax reform - has now become not so much an answer to the Union's problems as one of the problems itself. One of the reasons why the voters in Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein deserted the CDU on Sunday was undoubtedly that they were fed up

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with the party's bickering. Kohl's reaction since has accordingly been to tell all concerned to stop arguing. This may work for his own party, up to a point, but it is unlikely to pacify the CSU.

6. A further factor in these intra-Union tensions is the personal relationship between Kohl and Strauss. This has never been cordial. Strauss still regards himself as the greatest Chancellor the FRG never had, and it irks him that Kohl, the man he described back in 1976 as 'totally incompetent' for the Chancellorship, should always have outmanoeuvred him when it came to the crunch. He did so in 1976, when Strauss threatened to secede from the Union and set his CSU up in nation-wide competition with the CDU (Kohl called his bluff, and Strauss backed down). He did so in 1980, when Kohl let Strauss stand for the Chancellorship against Schmidt, watched him lose heavily, and then became Chancellor himself two years later. And he did so again last month, with the decision over the Pershings. Strauss' wrath was in part fury at the realisation of his own powerlessness to do much about it. The CSU, used to reigning supreme in Bavaria, were once again bitterly reminded that in Bonn they can never be strong enough to do as they please.

7. The Pershing affair means that the Kohl/Strauss relationship is now as bad as it has ever been. Clearly it can only be repaired if both want it to be. That Kohl wants to patch it up is clear from the impromptu visit he paid to Strauss in Munich at the beginning of September; but all that that meeting achieved was angry complaints from Strauss afterwards that Kohl had breached their agreement not to talk to the press about it. In short, Strauss is still in no mood to bury the hatchet. Moreover, though it would be heresy for any CSU figure to say so, he is now 72, and knows that his career is entering its twilight phase. Kohl has always got the better of him, and the time in

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which Strauss can get his own back is running out. But his capacity for damage remains great, and Kohl knows this and has to handle him with care.

8. The question arises whether Strauss may yet try to pull down the pillars of the temple, say by withdrawing his CSU ministers from the Cabinet. If there is another collision this cannot be ruled out; but his lieutenants in Bonn (notably Waigel, who leads the CSU in the Bundestag) will try to counsel him against such a move, on the grounds that it would solve nothing and only underline the CSU's weakness. One cannot win the game by refusing to play.

9. That said, the CSU's hurt feelings mean that they will be uncomfortable partners for Kohl and the CDU in the months ahead. Seeing themselves as the victim of Kohl's unexpected exercise of his authority over the Pershings, they are already calling on him to exercise it again, but against the FDP this time, because of the latter's reluctance to press ahead with tougher legislation on law and order. They will also play tough when it comes, as come it must, to agreeing what exactly is to happen with the Government's much-vaunted reform of the tax structure. Here too there will be new editions of the familiar CSU/FDP arguments, but this time with the CSU making it amply clear that they think the Chancellor owes them a favour to make up for the Pershing affair. For his part, Kohl recognises that he can ill afford to offend the CSU again in the near future. Giving them instead of the SPD the vacant German seat at the Commission in Brussels may help to pacify them. And this is why he has also told Blöm that there can be no question of his (Blöm's) visiting South Africa this autumn on another human rights mission. That would have the CSU up in arms.

10. Meanwhile, what about the FDP? In electoral terms they have profited everywhere from the Union's difficulties. They are now in coalition governments in five Länder (with a sixth in the

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making in Schleswig-Holstein) and are represented in every Landtag except the Bavarian. The difficulties they endured at the time of the Wende back in 1982/83 are a thing of the past. The arguments within the Union have left them in peace to consolidate their position. But, as their Secretary-General Haussmann has recognised, the 'strategy debate' in the Union is not without its consequences for them. If the Union were to succeed in capturing more of the middle ground, that could squeeze their vote once again. And in Bonn, the FDP know that the Government's agenda for the autumn contains plenty of explosive material for their relations with their coalition partners, particularly the CSU. No-one has seriously suggested that they would be better off back in coalition with the SPD (the SPD/FDP coalition in Hamburg is very much sui generis) but they have some earnest fighting to do in the months ahead. Kohl's task in holding the ring is not going to be easy, and at the moment he is not making a success of it.

*Yours ever  
Julian*

J L Bullard

cc M StE Burton Esq CMG CVO  
BMG Berlin

HM Consuls-General in the  
FRG and West Berlin

R Barnett Esq, WED, FCO ✓

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