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(COLLAR)

FRG INTERNAL: SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CDU

SUMMARY

1. NOMINATION OF RUEHE TO SUCCEED GEISSLER AS CDU SECRETARY GENERAL. DISSATISFACTION IN THE CDU AT KOHL'S HANDLING. GEISSLER IS WELL KNOWN. RUEHE IS ABLE BUT UNKNOWN TO MANY IN THE COUNTRY. CDU PARTY CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER LIKELY TO BE A LIVELY AFFAIR WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A CHALLENGE TO KOHL.

DETAIL

2. CHANCELLOR KOHL ANNOUNCED ON 22 AUGUST THAT AT THE CDU PARTY CONFERENCE ON 9 SEPTEMBER HE WOULD NOMINATE VOLKER RUEHE, CURRENTLY DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE CDU/CSU PARLIAMENTARY PARTY, TO REPLACE HEINER GEISSLER AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CDU. THE DECISION TO DROP GEISSLER, THOUGH NOT UNEXPECTED IS CAUSING A STIR. (BONN TELNO 390 OF 13 APRIL), COMING AS IT DOES ONLY 16 MONTHS BEFORE A FEDERAL ELECTION.

3. THE PREVIOUS DAY, GEISSLER HIMSELF HAD ANNOUNCED HIS OWN DISMISSAL AND HIS REFUSAL OF A CABINET POST, HAD CRITICISED THE 'WRONG TURNING' BEING TAKEN BY THE PARTY AND HAD UNLEASHED A WAVE OF CRITICISM FROM WITHIN THE CDU AT KOHL'S DECISION. MANY REGIONAL PARTY BRANCHES DISLIKE THE UNCEREMONIOUS DUMPING OF A LONG TIME POLITICAL ASSOCIATE OF KOHL AND SERVANT OF THE PARTY. PROMINENT FIGURES ON THE LEFT WERE OPENLY CRITICAL. THE MINISTER PRESIDENTS OF LOWER SAXONY (ALBRECHT) AND BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG (SPAETH) MADE KNOWN THEIR DISAGREEMENT. BIEDENKOPF, GEISSLER'S PREDECESSOR AND A FORMER CDU LEADER IN NORTH RHINE WESTPHALIA REMARKED THAT KOHL'S OWN LEADERSHIP WAS IN QUESTION. NO PROMINENT FIGURE CAME OUT VIGOROUSLY IN SUPPORT, THOUGH IT CAN BE ASSUMED THAT THERE IS QUIET SATISFACTION ON THE RIGHT OF THE PARTY AND IN THE CSU, THE LEADERSHIP OF WHICH IS WIDELY ASSUMED TO HAVE PUT PRESSURE ON KOHL TO MAKE A CHANGE.

4. THE SELECTION OF RUEHE - A WELL-KEPT SECRET - HAS BEEN WELCOMED BY THE CDU/CSU CHIEF WHIP BOHL AS A 'VERY GOOD THING'. MORE WIDELY

HOWEVER, THE WELCOME HAS BEEN MUTED BOTH BY THE UNHAPPINESS OVER GEISSLER AND OVER RUEHE'S LACK OF TRACK RECORD IN PARTY MATTERS. RUEHE IS MUCH LESS WELL-KNOWN TO MOST GERMANS THAN GEISSLER. OUR SPD CONTACTS SEE HIM AS MUCH LESS OF A THREAT THAN HIS PREDECESSOR. HIS EXPERIENCE TO DATE (HE IS 46) HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY EXCLUSIVELY IN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY, WHERE HE HAS BUILT UP A SOLID REPUTATION FOR INTELLIGENCE, GOOD SENSE AND MORAL COURAGE. HE IS ATLANTICIST, SPEAKS EXCELLENT ENGLISH AND IS WELL-KNOWN IN BRITAIN AND TO THIS EMBASSY. HIS EXPERIENCE OF PARTY ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS ON THE OTHER HAND IS LIMITED TO HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY IN HAMBURG WHERE HE HAS DONE A GOOD JOB OF BUILDING UP HIS BASE. SO MUCH, THEREFORE, WILL DEPEND UPON HIS ABILITY TO LEARN FAST AND HIS SURE-FOOTEDNESS. SO FAR, HE HAS SLIPPED UP ONLY ONCE WHEN IN 1985 HE FAILED TO GET A PROPER BALANCE IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE TRICKY ISSUE OF THE ODER-NEISSE BORDER, SOMETHING HE HAS SINCE RECTIFIED. AS SEEN FROM KOHL'S POINT OF VIEW, RUEHE HAS THE RIGHT NATIVE QUALITIES WITHOUT GEISSLER'S KING-MAKING AMBITIONS. RUEHE'S TASK WILL BE TO UNITE THE PARTY BEHIND THE CHANCELLOR'S LEADERSHIP FOR THE SERIES OF LAND ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR LEADING UP TO THE FEDERAL ELECTION IN DECEMBER. THIS WILL NOT BE EASY AND THE CHALLENGE COULD MAKE OR BREAK RUEHE'S CAREER.

COMMENT

5. WHY AT THIS JUNCTURE DID KOHL MAKE A CHANGE WHICH HE WILL HAVE KNOWN WOULD BE LIKELY TO CAUSE CONTROVERSY IN HIS OWN PARTY? HE HAS BEEN TIGHT-LIPPED BUT A NUMBER OF REASONS CAN BE SURMISED. NOTWITHSTANDING THEIR LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KOHL AND GEISSLER ABOUT POLICY PRIORITIES, AND ELECTION STRATEGY AS WELL AS GEISSLER'S OWN AMBITIONS AND INCREASING PERSONAL FRICTION BETWEEN TWO MEN OF DIFFERENT TEMPERAMENT, ALL PLAYED THEIR PART. GEISSLER, AN INTELLECTUAL OF STRONG CONVICTIONS, BELIEVES IN A SIGNIFICANT AND HIGH SPENDING SOCIAL ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT. HIS MAIN ELECTORAL TARGET HAS BEEN TO ATTRACT TO THE CDU VOTERS WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE SUPPORT THE SPD. WHEN STRAUSS WAS ALIVE, GEISSLER COULD RECKON TO SERVE THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING A COUNTERWEIGHT ON THE LEFT. BUT ABSENT STRAUSS, AND WITH THE RISE OF THE REPUBLIKANER, KOHL SEES A GREATER NEED TO PREVENT A FURTHER SERIOUS EROSION OF SUPPORT ON THE RIGHT WHICH COULD DEPRIVE THE CDU/CSU OF THE CHANCE OF WINNING SUFFICIENT VOTES IN THE NEXT ELECTION TO BE ABLE TO FORM A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IN COALITION WITH THE FDP. KOHL SAYS THAT HIS DECISION IMPLIES NO CHANGE OF POLICY COURSE. IT IS NEVERTHELESS WIDELY INTERPRETED AS A SWING TO THE RIGHT. IT MAY WELL BE THAT POLICY WILL NOT CHANGE MUCH. IT IS NOT, IN ANY CASE, SHARP ENOUGH EDGED FOR CHANGES OF COURSE TO BE READILY IDENTIFIABLE. BUT THE

BALANCE OF POWER IN THE PARTY HAS ALMOST CERTAINLY SHIFTED SLIGHTLY RIGHTWARDS. THOSE ON THE LEFT CERTAINLY THINK SO.

6. RUMBLINGS IN THE CDU WILL CONTINUE AT LEAST UP TO THE PARTY CONFERENCE IN BREMEN WHICH LOOKS SET TO BE A FAIRLY LIVELY AFFAIR. IT IS NOT EASY TO ASSESS HOW SERIOUS IS THE THREATENED CHALLENGE TO KOHL'S LEADERSHIP AND THE LIKELY PLAYERS MAY WELL NOT YET HAVE DECIDED THEMSELVES. RUMOURS ARE GOING ROUND THAT RITA SUESSMUTH PRESIDENT OF THE BUNDESTAG AND A POPULAR MEMBER ON THE LEFT OF THE CDU, MAY CHALLENGE KOHL FOR THE PARTY CHAIRMANSHIP. SHE AND HER SUPPORTERS WILL HAVE TO RECKON WITH KOHL'S WELL TESTED ABILITY TO FIGHT OFF FACTIONAL CHALLENGES AND WITH THE ACCUSATION OF BEING MORE INTERESTED IN THEIR OWN ADVANCEMENT THAN THE PARTY'S VICTORY.

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