

Outside Factor May Be Decisive in Crisis

U.S. Faces Choice in Germany

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BONN, July 12 — "The Turning Point," "The Breakthrough," "The Loser's Name is Evhard," "Erhard's Countdown Begins" — these are some of the headlines in German newspapers today.

With virtual unanimity, West German editors declare that last Sunday's Social Democratic election triumph in North Rhine-Westphalia marks a major milestone in postwar national politics and calls the future of Chancellor Erhard into question.

While presses and public are still buzzing over the Rhine results, the politicians are attempting to draw the tactical consequences. National leaders of Erich Mende's Free Democratic Party met here today. The Social Democratic and Christian Democratic Union National executive committees will meet again Thursday. In Duesseldorf, meanwhile, negotiations have already begun among the three parties on forming a new state government for North Rhine-Westphalia.

The sorting-out process is expected to last for weeks. The situation is very delicately balanced, with many conflicting personal ambitions, regional loyalties, economic interests and constitutional complications in play.

It may well be, however, that the decisive influence in the crisis over the coming months will be wielded by none of these men, but by an outside factor—the United States.

While it is one of the polite fictions of diplomacy that no government ever interferes in the internal affairs of another, this has been even more fictional with regard to the United States in West Germany than in most cases.

Former Under Secretary

of State Robert Murphy describes in his memoirs, for example, how just after the war he deposed the provisional Social Democratic Mayor of Munich and installed his "old good friend" Fritz Schaefer of the conservative Catholic People's Party instead. The Socialists had never ruled Bavaria, Murphy explains. ((The present Mayor of Munich, Social Democrat Hans-Jochen Vogel, is the most popular in the city's history.)

Similarly, from the moment the United States decided on German rearmament, first Dean Acheson and then the Dulles brothers supported Adenauer and the C D U to the hilt, overtly and covertly.

The policy changed with the inauguration of President Kennedy, who disliked former Chancellor Adenauer and made little secret of the fact that Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt was his favorite German.

However, beginning with

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the interregnum between Mr. Kennedy's death and President Johnson's reelection, there was another change. Senior State Department architects swung their weight behind the C D U trio of Erhard, Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder and Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel, who were considered most zealous in the struggle against French President de Gaulle and for the creation of a multilateral nuclear force.

U.S. officials here made no secret of their preferences. "We couldn't possibly get any better than Erhard, Schroeder and von Hassel," one high official freely advised visitors. Schroeder was touted at American gatherings as "the man who has done more than any one in Europe to relax tensions."

In last summer's national election campaign, the U.S. Embassy was officially neu-

tral, but high officers in Bonn were consistently denigrating Brandt ("Poor Willy isn't what he used to be") even though the Americans in Berlin still liked the Mayor.

Although the State Department will doubtless deny it, the fact is the United States now faces an important choice in West Germany. I

It will be exercising the choice in the coming weeks not only on public occasions—such as Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's visit here next week and Erhard's projected visit to Washington in September—but also in dozens of private conversations with the numerous, undecided, middle-level German politicians who now hold the balance of power.

If the United States considers its main interest here to be the maintenance of a hard line toward the Soviet Union and determined opposition to Gaullist France, it will continue to support and perhaps can preserve the Erhard government.

This appears to be the predominant instinct among the local U.S. diplomatic and intelligence bureaucracy.

On the other hand, the United States could give decisive encouragement to the movement for a "grand coalition" of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats if it regards other purposes as central.

Such a coalition would undoubtedly make it easier to achieve a nuclear nonproliferation treaty; a "consultative" rather than "hardware" solution to the atomic problem in the alliance; reduction of the U.S. garrison here from six to four divisions (and consequent easing of Vietnam manpower strains as well as the "offset costs" controversy); the beginnings of a realistic policy toward Czechoslovakia and Poland, and a host of overdue internal reforms.

U.S. Ambassador George C. McGhee is a loyal public servant who will carry out his instructions. So the choice, by conscious decision or default, will be made in Washington.