

Bonn Partners Differ On Atom Arms Role

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BONN, Sept. 23—On the eve of Chancellor Erhard's departure for talks with President Johnson in Washington, the junior partner in Erhard's coalition government joined the opposition in asking Erhard to stop insisting on a role in the joint operation of NATO nuclear defense.

Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder told Parliament

that the government would continue to insist on such a role and that an East-West treaty to stop the spread of nuclear weapons should not bar West Germany's participation in Western nuclear defenses.

Schroeder was replying to a speech by Socialist defense spokesman Helmut Schmidt urging that Germany renounce an interest in nuclear hardware in exchange for some sort of joint strategic planning arrangement in NATO along the lines of the "McNamara committee" that met in Rome today.

The Free Democrats, Erhard's coalition partners, joined Schmidt in calling for a German "finger on the safety catch" rather than on the trigger—a veto right on the use

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of nuclear weapons on German soil.

Finally, the coalition stopped bickering long enough to pass a resolution lauding the government's efforts toward establishing better ties with Eastern European countries.

The listless debate took place as pessimism mounted over the Johnson-Erhard talks. The influential newspaper Die Welt said today, "Never has a Chancellor traveled to Washington so burdened down by anxious skepticism."

Bundestag President Eugen Gerstenmaier, a member of Erhard's own Christian Democratic Union, commented, "Whether Ludwig Erhard can hang on as top man in this government hinges on the outcome of the trip and the smooth passage of the stabilization law" — Erhard's proposed measures to give the federal government power to restrain spending by the German states.

Suggest Postponement

Many of Erhard's advisers suggested that the Washington trip be postponed because of the delicate political situation in Bonn. Erhard's refusal to

heed this advice was reportedly one reason for the sudden resignation this week of his top aide, Ludger Westrick. Many CDU members have been working behind the scenes to oust Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel, under attack because of Germany's Starfighter jet crashes and for his interpretation of civilian control of the army. Some want to oust Erhard as well.

The Chancellor apparently sees the Washington trip as a chance to paste over the cracks in the domestic picture window with a foreign policy "victory."

But chances of this are seen as small when one considers the three tough issues on the agenda: the U.S.-German offset payments agreement, the number of U.S. troops in Germany, and the role of Germany in any U.S.-Soviet non-proliferation agreement.

Expires in June

The current offset agreement expires next June 30. It obligates Germany to purchase military equipment in America equal to U.S. foreign exchange losses from stationing 225,000 troops in Germany. The agreed figure is about \$650 million a year, but the Germans are currently almost \$900 million behind and will probably still be \$400 million short when the agreement runs out, according to Finance Ministry estimates.

Erhard will tell Mr. Johnson that Germany is in no economic position to fulfill the commitment and will suggest that certain twilight categories like space research be accepted as "military" purchases and that some German army units train in the United States as Bonn's air force does.

The Germans are irritated by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara's linking of the payments question with that of U.S. troop levels here. Britain did the same thing last month and Germany is accepting a cut in British troop levels rather than increase payments under a similar agreement with London. The British now are not so sure significant savings can be achieved by any but the most drastic troop cuts.

Objection By Russia

Potentially the stickiest point for the talks is the rumor that President Johnson will ask for a German renunciation of any interest in participation in Western nuclear

arrangements—the subject of today's debate. German desires for a nuclear role have been cited as the Soviet Union's chief objection to a nonproliferation treaty.

As today's debate indicated, Erhard is expected to remain adamant on this subject.

Anatole Shub of The Washington Post reported in Washington:

Official sources here indicated that the main substantive outcome of the Johnson-Erhard talks would be an announcement of further agreements on U.S.-West German collaboration in space research. U.S. space administrator James Webb concluded the agreements in Bonn earlier this week. The official announcement is likely to be made in the final Johnson-Erhard communique.

On the tangled issue of allied troop levels and German offset payments, the sources hoped for some progress, at least in creating a framework for further discussion. The idea of tripartite talks between the United States, Britain and West Germany is still under consideration. One thought is that, instead of merely discussing offset costs, the three powers would review their larger strategic situation and doctrine.

On nuclear issues, the official sources said that Secretary Rusk's conversations Thursday with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had not indicated any substantial change in the Russian position toward a treaty to ban the spread of nuclear arms. There has also been no indication of change in the Erhard government's insistence on keeping open the possibility of German "co-possession" of nuclear hardware, to which the Russians object.