

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

North German arms mafia exposed

The shipyards of Schleswig-Holstein produce for Khomeini's Navy. Is there a link to the governor's recent death?

The mysterious death of Uwe Barschel, the governor of the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, in Geneva Oct. 11—an affair related to bitter faction fights inside the “Irangate” cabal—has sparked new investigations into Germany's role in secret arms deals with Khomeini's Iran. The port cities of northern Germany, on the North Sea and the Baltic, are drawing special attention.

The Oct. 22 issue of the French mass weekly *Paris-Match* revealed that “a shipyard in a small city close to Kiel” built speedboats for the Iranian Navy. Bypassing West German arms export laws, these boats were secretly delivered to Iran via Sweden, the magazine reported.

In fact, not just one shipyard, but at least four, in the state of Schleswig-Holstein are said to have covertly built small vessels for Iran's Navy. These are the big HDW shipyard (in Kiel), the Büsumer Werft (Büsum), Kroeger Werft (Rendsburg), and Schlichting (Travemünde). As for submarines, an HDW contract for six of the 209 type, dates back to talks in 1978 with pre-Khomeini Iran, and the IKL naval engineering firm in Lübeck was also involved.

These contracts were carried out in spite of the official Bonn “weapons embargo” against Iran. The way it was done, is that a special, civilian-looking model of a military vessel is built. This model may resemble a yacht and could be delivered, for example, to a port in Sweden or the Netherlands, to be modified into a speedboat with

modern combat equipment. In other cases, blueprints of vessels are produced by engineers at German shipyards and transferred to Iran, via Spain, Portugal, or Israel, and the actual construction job is done entirely outside of Germany.

All of this avoids direct conflict with the German laws which ban weapons exports into war zones like the Persian Gulf.

These secret deals do not proceed without political promotion from the Bonn government, or, to be more precise, a section of the government grouped around the ministries of foreign affairs, finance, and economics. This “inside” group is directly represented on the executive boards of the bigger German shipyards, like the above-mentioned HDW in Kiel, and controls Customs along the German land and maritime borders.

Customs officers investigating illegal arms deals know that a few years ago, Iranian naval officers were systematically touring shipyards in Germany's north to make contact with experts on small attack vessel technology. The problem for Customs is, however, also a manpower problem, because their “front line” with the arms dealer cartel is a long one.

Besides Hamburg, Germany's largest coastal port, and the ports in Schleswig-Holstein, also Bremen, Bremerhaven, and the smaller ports of Nordenham and Stade play a role in secret deals with Iran. Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's political home base, the city-state of Bre-

men, surfaces very prominently in the context of these Iranian arms affairs.

Thus, on Oct. 19, Italian Customs seized a freighter from Qatar, the *Fatulkair*, loaded with NATO guns from the German weapons producer Heckler and Koch. The Customs guards at the Italian port of Savona had been tipped off that the ship, coming from Hamburg and Bremen, was heading for Iran. Special Italian investigators are in Hamburg and Bremen now, to collect more evidence, but find it hard to make any progress. This is a bitter experience they share with German Customs officers, who have been looking into these arms-dealing affairs, which very often involve Swedish and Dutch operatives as well.

Investigations have so far hardly proceeded beyond the point that special permits are required from the authorities in Bonn. Foreign Minister Genscher is not cooperative on these permits. This means that the region along the Weser River, which runs from Bremen to Bremerhaven and the small port of Nordenham close to the North Sea, is like a huge “free-trade zone” for arms dealers, off-limits to official investigators.

As far as the ports in the state of Schleswig-Holstein are concerned, a political network loyal only to former governor Gerhard Stoltenberg, the current Bonn finance minister, stopped unwelcome investigations with methods similar to those used in the Bremen region. After all, most of the secret deals with Iran were signed during the governorship of Stoltenberg—whom Uwe Barschel replaced in October 1982. Many believe that Stoltenberg's political machine in that state maintained the delicate contact with Iran without ever informing the new governor, Barschel. Inside this network, one may well find a key to the case of the mysterious death of Barschel.