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TEXT

TAGS: PGOV, AU
SUBJECT: FORMER CHANCELLOR SINOWATZ CONVICTED OF PERJURY

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: A HIGHER COURT ON APRIL 15 CONFIRMED THE PERJURY CONVICTION OF FORMER SOCIALIST CHANCELLOR SINOWATZ. SINOWATZ HAS FOUND TO HAVE GIVEN FALSE TESTIMONY IN A SLANDER TRIAL BY DENYING THAT HE SAID IN 1985 THAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY WOULD MAKE KURT WALDHEIM'S "BROWN" (NAZI) PAST AN ISSUE IN THE 1986 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE VERDICT, WHICH IS NOW FINAL, IS SEEN BY SOME AS A WATERSHED RULING AGAINST POLITICAL CORRUPTION. OTHER SOCIALIST POLITICIANS WHO SUPPORTED SINOWATZ' LINE, AMONG THEM BURGENLAND GOVERNOR SIPOETZ, NOW FACE PERJURY TRIALS AND MAY BE FORCED TO RESIGN. THE VERDICT AGAINST SINOWATZ IS ALSO BEING INTERPRETED AS EVIDENCE THAT THE SOCIALISTS INSTIGATED THE WALDHEIM

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AFFAIR. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

2. CHRONOLOGY:

IN A 1986 REPORT IN THE WEEKLY "PROFIL", JOURNALIST ALFRED WORM CLAIMED THAT THEN CHANCELLOR AND SOCIALIST PARTY (SPO) CHAIRMAN FRED SINOWATZ HAD SAID AT AN OCTOBER 1985 PARTY MEETING IN BURGENLAND THE SPO WOULD MAKE "WALDHEIM'S BROWN PAST AN ISSUE IN THE 1986 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS." IN A POLITICAL ACT TYPICAL OF THE TIME, SINOWATZ DEFENDED HIS HONOR BY TAKING WORM TO COURT; THE RESULT WAS A SERIES OF JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS WHICH CULMINATED IN THE APRIL 15 PERJURY VERDICT AGAINST SINOWATZ. THE CRIMINAL CONVICTION OF A FORMER AUSTRIAN CHANCELLOR IS UNPRECEDENTED. AS A RESULT OF THE CONVICTION, PERJURY CHARGES ARE NOW PENDING AGAINST SEVEN OTHER BURGENLAND SPO POLITICIANS, INCLUDING SOCIALIST GOVERNOR SIPOETZ, WHO HAD CATEGORICALLY DENIED IN COURT THAT SINOWATZ COULD HAVE MADE THE CONTROVERSIAL 1985 STATEMENT.

4. REACTION:

IN REACTION TO THE VERDICT, LEADING SOCIALISTS LIKE CHANCELLOR FRANZ VRANITZKY AND PARLIAMENTARY PRESIDENT HEINZ FISCHER REITERATED THEIR BELIEF IN SINOWATZ' INTEGRITY. REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL OTHER PARTIES EXPRESSED SATISFACTION OVER SINOWATZ' CONVICTION AND CALLED FOR SIPOETZ' RESIGNATION IN VIEW OF THE PARALLEL CHARGES AGAINST HIM. IT HAS ALSO BEEN SUGGESTED THAT EARLY PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS BE HELD IN BURGENLAND (SCHEDULED DATE 1992).

5. WALDHEIM:

SOME COMMENTARIES EMPHASIZE THAT THE VERDICT FINALLY ESTABLISHES THE SPO'S ROLE IN INSTIGATING THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR. THEY ALSO SUGGEST THAT PRESIDENT WALDHEIM MIGHT BENEFIT FROM THE RULING SINCE IT ENFORCES THE IMPRESSION THAT WALDHEIM HAS BEEN NOTHING MORE THAN THE VICTIM OF SHADY INTRIGUES. THEY DO STRESS, HOWEVER, THAT THE SINOWATZ CASE SHOULD BE A LESSON FOR THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

6. COMMENT:

ALWAYS A LOYAL SOCIALIST FUNCTIONARY, SINOWATZ IS MORE THE PERSONIFICATION OF SOMEONE WHO PLAYED ALONG WITH THE POLITICAL PRACTICES OF HIS ERA THAN A GENUINELY CORRUPT POLITICIAN. HIS GUILTY VERDICT WAS PERHAPS EVEN INFLUENCED BY AN EXAGGERATED MISTRUST OF POLITICIANS BORN OF THREE YEARS OF SCANDAL. NEVERTHELESS, IT HAS TRIGGERED MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR THE BURGENLAND SOCIALISTS. IT HAS ALSO PROBABLY HAD SOME IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD WALDHEIM, SUPPORTING THOSE (INCLUDING WALDHEIM HIMSELF) WHO MAINTAIN THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS JUST THE VICTIM OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE. HABIB

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