

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The battle for the Ruhr

Communist agitators, seeking to capitalize on unrest over steel shutdowns, met an unexpected obstacle to their plans.

Since the beginning of December, the Ruhr region—Germany's industrial heartland—has been the center of labor unrest and riots. Workers have marched from one factory to another, blocking roads and demanding that the planned foreclosure of the Krupp plant at Duisburg-Rheinhausen—employer of 5,500 steelworkers—be called off.

The conflict goes far beyond the Rheinhausen case. The Bonn government and the European Commission in Brussels have plans to "phase out" some 40,000 steel workers, plus 30,000 jobs in coal-mining and 40-50,000 in construction. By far the most of these will be laid off in the Ruhr. Multiply that by a factor of 2.5, to estimate how many jobs will be lost additionally in the feeder industries that depend on these three industrial sectors.

Altogether, some 220,000 Ruhr jobs will be "phased out," if the government and the Euro-Commission have their way. This will turn cities like Duisburg, Dortmund, and Bochum—which all have an official jobless rate of over 15% already—into slums.

Besides deep penetration by "post-industrial" ideologues of the administration of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where the Ruhr region is situated, and of the Bonn government itself, unabashed austerity is behind this decision to "phase out." The NRW state and the federal government alike believe that 63,000 deutschemarks of annual state subsidy for each industrial job in the Ruhr is an expendable luxury.

They also believe that the task of

the labor unions is to convince their members of this "necessity." Predictably enough, labor's response has been a militant explosion. But this militance lacks a program, an alternative to the demoralizing situation.

The Ruhr region, home of 25% of the German population and of 30% of industrial labor, has a decisive impact on German politics. At several crucial points in postwar German history, string-pullers used the Ruhr as a lever for changes in Bonn. In 1965-66, labor unrest helped to topple the Christian Democratic-Liberal government and install a federal Grand Coalition austerity government of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. In 1968-69, a wave of wildcat strikes contributed to the end of the Grand Coalition and its replacement by a Social Democratic-Liberal coalition.

The current labor unrest is intended to install another multi-party Grand Coalition government, to implement austerity and to open the door to closer cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Predictably enough, the German Communist Party (DKP) is stirring up the unrest in the Ruhr, with 20,000 cadre deployed to steer the "steel riots," under the slogan, "If we perish, we'll go down fighting." The DKP's executive committee has announced plans to shift the party's substantial resources to the Ruhr, leaving its agents and flunkies in the "peace movement" to fend for themselves for the time being.

Moscow's plan is to create in the Ruhr the kind of "irregular warfare" conditions that have previously emerged from riots in Frankfurt,

Wackersdorf, Berlin, Hamburg, and other cities. Police report that anarchist-terrorists have been spotted in the Ruhr, and that they fear occupations like that in the Hafenstrasse district of Hamburg, where anarchists in 1987 forced the city government to give them free rein in the "liberated zone."

The Communists' plans have run up against opposition from the Patriots for Germany party, whose head is Helga Zepp-LaRouche. Through the simple tactic of issuing a leaflet and a sticker—"Steel for the World, Work for Us"—the Patriots have sparked widespread interest in their program, and incurred the fury of the Communist organizers. The youth organization of the DKP smeared the walls of a hall where the Patriots were planning to hold a meeting, with graffiti that read, "LaRouche—Nazi Pig" and "Destroy the Patriots-Nazis."

The Patriots' leaflet describes how a program of industrial exports for the Third World could solve the crisis in the Ruhr. A Patriot organizer overheard a discussion about it between members of the DKP and members of the factory council at Krupp Rheinhausen: "They've gained influence with their idea of producing steel for Africa," said one. "We have to discredit them. Three years ago they demanded steel factories for the Third World, and now they want us to export steel to them." Said another, "The only problem with that sticker, is that it was produced by the Patriots. Why didn't we think of it?"

Seeking to coopt the idea, a Communist factory councilor gave an interview to the Communist newspaper *Volkszeitung*, calling for railroads to be produced for export to . . . Nicaragua! This same individual was quoted in the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the largest newspaper in the Ruhr, denouncing the Patriots as "fascists."