

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

No jobs in the post-industrial age

German steel and mining workers have no real interest in industrial dismantling.

Immediately after World War II, Allied occupation policy called for, under the Morgenthau Plan, total dismantling of Germany's heavy industry. Labor unions fought the dismantling policy until it was dropped in 1952. The reconstruction of the Ruhr region, as Germany's main industry belt, could begin.

Dismantling is the policy again in early 1988, this time disguised behind ecologist slogans like "production compatible with conservation of nature." The difference to 1945 is that today, many labor bureaucrats view themselves as followers of the Green conservationist movement, rather than leaders of an industrial labor union.

For example, metalworkers in the Ruhr region campaign for a shift toward post-industrial production. Translated into figures, this means cutting 37,000 jobs in steel and another 30,000 in coal mining, plus some 140,000 in the feeder industries to the two sectors, and all within the next 5-10 years. In all seriousness, union officials declare there is no future for steel production, nor for steel jobs, because of "shrinking world markets." The future of labor and new jobs lies in production for conservation of nature, they argue.

In the case of the Krupp steel plant at Duisburg-Rheinhausen, the focus of current steel labor unrest in the Ruhr, this ideology took a very concrete form. The executive of the metalworkers, backed by the Social Democrats, argued that to save jobs for the 6,000 steelworkers of the plant, an "employment pool" should be creat-

ed, keeping workers employed for several years. Workers in such a "pool" would no longer produce steel, but tear the plant down, clean the plant area from all relics of former production such as toxic waste, reconverting the soil to a "pre-industrial condition."

This, argues Franz Steinkühler, the national chairman of the German metalworkers, would provide "work" for workers who would otherwise be jobless over the "transition period of seven to ten years required to build up new production sites." Steinkühler thus boosts technetronic production as "work of the future."

But since Steinkühler and other labor 'crats accept limits to growth, their "industry of the future" will provide far fewer jobs than today's industry. The Steinkühler argument is that work for 7-10 years in an "employment pool," is a far better choice to a worker than to face no job and depend on low unemployment checks.

Labor 'crats like Steinkühler, who took part in the Bonn government's "roundtable on the coal-steel crisis" Feb. 24, accepted a program of investment incentives for projects in "anti-pollution" and "readjustment of production." The program is to fund small-sized pilot projects like computer centers which will employ 5-50 workers each. A data center on pollution factors, planned in Duisburg by the Nixdorf company, will create a mere 15 jobs, for example. "Adjustment" from steel to "new products" will kill 10-15,000 jobs in Duisburg alone, however.

Is a worker of 30-40 years of age

buying 10 years of work in an "employment pool," that also has no guarantee of employment after that "transition period"? Do the majority of steelworkers in Duisburg really believe that instead of three steel plants, there will be 500-1,000 computer shops in the city by the year 1998 employing the same workforce?

As long as there is a feasible alternative, the average worker won't buy such nonsense. This is proven by the fact that when the Patriots for Germany party intervened with the slogan "Steel for the World, Work for at Home," almost every steel worker at Krupp-Rheinhausen took a sticker to put on his car or motorbike, or to take home. Framed by the slogan, the sticker depicted the shape of the African continent, as the envisaged consumer of giant shipments of steel and other industrial products within a program of rapid economic development. The sticker went out together with an open letter by Patriots party leader Helga Zepp-LaRouche, detailing a number of big infrastructure projects in Africa which require a lot of steel. These proposals excited and remoralized many steelworkers, who dislike the "new world without steel" propagated by the labor 'crats and the government in Bonn.

Naturally, steelworkers prefer producing steel, and they sense the difference between the "employment pool" concept and the Patriots' proposal, as being one between a scheme offering jobs to some and another offering jobs to all, and more. The "employment pool" concept is no way out of the Ruhr crisis, because tearing steel plants down and cleaning the soil simply won't feed workers' families in a region, which, like the Ruhr, has an average jobless rate of 17-20%. The other side of the Steinkühler coin, "readjustment of production," would add at least 5% to this jobless rate.