

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Ecologists want a FEMA-type agency

*A look behind plans in West Germany to create an emergency crisis apparatus.*

In Germany, the Green Party has been spearheading a debate to turn the police and customs into an "ecology police." The idea is shared by the Social Democrats, and should they come into the position to form a government with the Greens after the 1990 federal elections, the creation of a special police apparatus would be on the agenda.

The "ecology police" and the debate on environment protection, are the roads leading into an agency in Germany like the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The nuclear disaster of Chernobyl and the mysterious spill of toxic waste into German rivers in 1986, the new oil spill off the U.S. coast of Alaska and the earthquake in Armenia, all serve as pretexts to issue calls for "special protection" measures. Like the Orwellian Newspeak, this is to promote control, rather than protection, of the population.

The discussion on "toxic spills" overlaps with the food issue. The Greens say that nuclear accidents or spills of industrial toxic chemicals into the rivers could "endanger the fresh water and food supply of millions of West Germans." The argument came up April 3, when an oil tanker crashed on a reef in the Rhine River near the city of Oppenheim. Ecologists spread hysteria about "potential poisoning of fresh water supply for 8 million Germans," ripping the state bureaucracy for "not responding fast enough to the danger."

As it turned out, there was no such danger, but citing "millions of people" is crucial for the Greens to promote an agency which could inter-

vene, "outside the bureaucracy," in such imagined ecological disasters. Some Greens want to turn the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, created in June 1987 as an outgrowth of the post-Chernobyl hysteria, into such a super-agency with special powers.

The interesting point here is that West Germany already has emergency crisis legislation, detailing precautions and measures in case of armed conflict or war, under the 1968 State of Emergency Legislation. There are also measures at hand in case of bigger civilian emergencies, like floods, earthquakes, huge fires, and the like. Why a special new agency, then?

In the view of the ecologists, the flaw in this legislation is that in the case of civilian emergencies, it does not alter the system of the bureaucracy and the basic power structure. And in cases of war or armed conflict, special emergency crisis management (which can remove or freeze certain administrative restraints and can reduce civil rights) requires a two-thirds majority of the national parliament and the upper house.

"What we need," said an official of the administration in Bonn, "is something in the gray zone between civilian and wartime emergency that could act without delay. It should have the blessing of the government and the parliament, and already be there in a case of emergency. It should have the manpower and equipment to act, and they should be trained for the 'if-case' on a regular basis."

The same official said that this proposed new institution would be comparable to the U.S. FEMA, but

added that "for historical reasons, i.e., the United States being a liberal free market society, [emergency crisis] legislation there is lagging behind." The discussion in Europe is more advanced, in his view, in Switzerland, which has a tight system of civil defense and emergency crisis management organized from the very top of the state down to all individual sections of the population and the economy. "The U.S. could learn from Europe in that respect," the official said, hinting that FEMA officials have been studying the Swiss model.

The basic proposal for a special emergency crisis agency in Germany would be to have an administrative body operating with a blank check from the government and the parliament. As an official of the Bonn Ministry of Food and Agriculture explained, the agency "which is not yet established, but is under discussion" could act the minute an emergency facing the food sector were recognized. It could be a "big chemical disaster in our own country, or one that would affect several of our main food suppliers abroad, which would put the supply of larger parts of our population into question," he explained.

The agency could also be called to action, should larger parts of the population get into a "mass panic," along the example of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when a run on sugar and other basic food products turned the shelves in the grocery stores empty in a matter of a few days. A war outside Germany would be the "model situation between civilian and wartime emergency, in which the new agency could act," the official said. A new war in the Mideast would, based on the experiences with the 1973 oil price shock, possibly launch such a panic and require "regulation of the market system and rationing of basic consumer goods."