

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

May Day riots explode in Berlin

Will the Western Allied Powers be forced to intervene to restore order, in a modern version of a Berlin crisis?

As in past years, the traditional "alternate May Day celebration" in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin this year culminated in violent street riots. Thanks to the fact that West Berlin is now governed by a "red-green" coalition government, the city authorities are even less capable of dealing with the crisis than in the past.

Three hundred and twenty policemen were injured, 14 of them severely. Seventy-five stores, banks, and post offices were wrecked and plundered, 34 private cars were set on fire, and 120 police cars were destroyed.

Most of the destruction was caused by some 2,000 largely masked rioters, who emerged from the May Day festival at Lausitzer Platz in Berlin-Kreuzberg. The organizers of the festival were mainly left-wing groups, ranging from the more moderate Social Democrats to the Communist SEW and the pro-terrorist Alternatives, which overlap with the professional rioters of the Autonomous Groups and with the support underground of the Red Army Faction Baader-Meinhof Gang terrorists.

Without warning, the rioters began an all-out frontal attack, hurling stones and sharpened iron cramps, flares, and roof plates on the small contingent of 300 policemen deployed near the festival. Before reinforcements of 1,300 riot police had been brought in, the mob ransacked and burned department stores, set fire to vehicles, built street barricades out of burning tires, and attacked the fire-fighters. Fortunately, the mob failed in their effort to set afire a gasoline

station in a densely populated residential area, which would have caused many casualties.

Police spokesmen characterized the insurrection as the "heaviest since 1980." Total material damage is in the millions of deutschemarks, and TV footage from the scene reminded one of the daily disaster reports from Beirut.

The Kreuzberg insurrection was well prepared, and capitalized on the fact that the new "red-green" Berlin magistrate of the Social Democrats and the Green Alternatives has declared a "policy of de-escalation" as one of its top priorities. This means that the magistrate is dismantling the special riot police, and restructuring the political police, counterespionage units, and the normal riot police. According to the red-green magistrate's plans, the city's security forces are to fight "right-wing or neo-Nazi violence" and drop all surveillance and legal action against the left-extremist political underground.

Underlying this policy is the fact that the red-green magistrate wants the integration of West Berlin with the Soviet-controlled eastern part of the city and with the surrounding territory of East Germany. The aim is to bring down the Berlin Wall, in the process of hoped-for "reconciliation between East and West."

The East has set as its precondition for integration that the military, counterespionage, and intelligence presence of the three Western Allied Powers be reduced to zero, that political prosecution of pro-Soviet groups op-

erating in West Berlin be stopped, that "all affairs relevant to the city" be managed "by the Berliners themselves." This means the Communists in East Berlin and the red-green magistrate in the West would rule, in close consultation with their Soviet puppet-masters.

Western counterespionage experts in Berlin have repeatedly pointed at the fact that many of the riots are steered from a Communist command post at Kurstrasse, East Berlin. The core groups behind the riots are well funded and well trained, with depots of stones and other riot gear set up far in advance of riots. There is a paramilitary structure, involving radio communication among the riot leaders, who are protected by bodyguards from being caught by the special riot police.

The red-green "de-escalation strategy," which tells the police to refrain from any "offensive" posture and avoid direct confrontation, makes it virtually impossible to arrest any of the perpetrators.

This May Day, the "strategy" of the police was largely to defend themselves against the mob. For most of the time the police were "nearly at the end of their capabilities," according to police commissioner Georg Schertz. Only 16 arrests were made, out of 2,000 rioters.

East bloc insurrection specialists may even play a more direct role. Since most of the rioters are masked, it can't be ruled out that specialists brought in from across the sector borders, from the East, are among the leaders. At least some of them have received training in the techniques of armed insurrection and guerrilla war—not necessarily in East Germany, but likely in special camps in Nicaragua, where 200 or 300 irregular warfare troops per year from all parts of Germany are trained by East German instructors.