

Report from Bonn By Rainer Apel

German fertilizers for African farmers

The urgent need to fight worldwide famines is addressed in Thuringian potash miners strike.

With the speech Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chairwoman of the German Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BBS), gave to a public rally of several hundred protesters in the Thuringian town of Bischofferode July 17, the weeks-long strike of 700 potash miners against the foreclosure of their Thomas Muentzer mine entered a new stage.

Zepp-LaRouche's address was in support of the 42 miners and wives who had been on a hunger strike for almost three weeks. The speech introduced a highly explosive aspect, when she linked the political thrust of that strike, which opposes the deindustrialization policy of the free market-oriented Berlin Treuhand agency and its backers in the banking sector and the government, to the efforts of two prominent Germans who wanted a return to a pro-industrial approach but paid with their lives for it: Deutsche Bank chairman Alfred Herrhausen (killed by a bomb in 1989) and former Treuhand agency chairman Detlev Rohwedder (shot dead in 1991).

The ideas these two stood for must be seen in the broader context of a worldwide struggle against the crimes of the free market ideologues, and are continued in the struggle of the potash workers today, she stated, to the applause of the audience (with the exception of a few leftist hecklers). She declared that German potash could help to fight famines in the developing nations.

The favorable response of most of the workers shows the moral commitment behind this strike, which was launched against the explicit "no" of the mine workers union.

Although many reporters attended the rally, neither the speech nor the essential demands of the hunger-striking miners have been reported by media since that strike began in early July.

It is well understood in the German establishment that this strike is different from previous labor protests, and that it occurs in a much broader social context. The political establishment, including the labor union bureaucracy, fears that the Bischofferode protest will become "a turning point in the social history of post-unification Germany," as numerous influential dailies such as *Die Welt* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* warned in editorials published after July 17.

The press wrote that this strike set a new model for labor protests, notably in eastern Germany, where 900 companies still under the control of the Treuhand agency are slated for foreclosure because they cannot be privatized under prevailing free market conditions. This poses the threat of another 800,000 layoffs in the former state-run east German industry, which has already had to lay off 60% of the work force it had before unification.

The Bischofferode miners did not back down in the face of the usual empty promises made to them by bankers, phony investors, the Treuhand agency, and the government, but decided to continue their action until they had a written guarantee of jobs. Thus, they set a new standard of labor determination that may, as Regine Hildebrandt, the labor minister of Brandenburg (one of the five eastern German states), said on national Ger-

man television July 19, be repeated in "hunger strikes in virtually hundreds of other eastern companies that are awaiting the same fate."

From the start of the struggle of east German potash miners against having their jobs eliminated under the regime of "rapid privatization" in spring 1991, they have drawn the connection between the production of potash as a key component of fertilizer and its undersupply in nations of the developing sector. The slogan "German Potash Against World Hunger, Secure Jobs for Us Here" has played a prominent role in miners' mobilizations, and two years ago was still openly supported by the mine workers union.

German potash mining managers are now joining the propaganda of the cartels about an alleged "30% overcapacity in global production."

Yet only two years ago, on May 28, 1991, Otto Walterspiel of the Kassel Potash Company said: "The world needs potash to have food for a growing population," at the World Potash Conference in Hamburg. He attacked an absurd situation in which, although there are sufficient resources and production capacities, "the European Community is reducing its food production, sales are also down in eastern Europe, and the developing countries have no money to buy potash, an irreplaceable plant fertilizer."

"Providing food to a growing world population can only be guaranteed by a stable potash-producing industry," he said, calling for state intervention. The potash miners in Bischofferode have campaigned for just that, a state-funded program to save the mines from foreclosure, with the aim of using the potash for the production of fertilizer, which then would be shipped to underdeveloped countries to help them build up their own food production capabilities.