

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Battle is joined for nuclear power

To counter recent victories for the pro-nuclear forces, radical ecologists are threatening a new upsurge of violence.

Should the 16-year administrative blockade of nuclear power projects not be lifted in the near future, the Germans might one day, not so far into the next century, find themselves having to knock on Asian doors to get their nuclear facilities repaired, for they will no longer have the specialists to do the job.

This warning, coming from a senior member of a Frankfurt-based engineering firm at a nuclear policy seminar of the Evangelical Academy at Loccum at the end of June, seems to have been heard by the judges of the Supreme Administrative Court in Berlin, who ruled on Aug. 9 that three challenges by ecologists against the new nuclear fuels plant at Hanau, in the state of Hesse, are to be dismissed, and that the project is legal. Pending six other minor legal challenges, the plant, which is operated by the Siemens Corp., can now be completed so that it can go into production of fuel elements from plutonium for Germany's 22 nuclear power plants. The Hanau site is the only one of its kind in Germany and one of only six in the world.

The court ruling, a key victory in a years-long battle between ecologists and the nuclear industry, can become a vital step toward lifting the technology blockade which the country's politicians imposed in 1978, at the peak of violent protests against the nuclear power sector. No new atomic power plant has been authorized since.

There are certain indicators that the political environment in Germany is changing, making possible a return

to the pro-technology impulse that secured the country a place among the most developed of the industrial nations.

On July 21, the state government of Bavaria published its new medium-term investment program, which will provide 3 billion deutschmarks (\$1.9 billion) for projects in the nuclear and other engineering sectors of that state. Most important is the Bavarian decision to fund the planned new nuclear research reactor at Garching, a "neutron source device," with DM 450 million—the largest single item in the state budget for science and technology. This Bavarian funding goes unmatched in the rest of Germany.

Another DM 300 million will be spent to fund a number of regional engineering colleges which Bavarian Gov. Edmund Stoiber said are an "absolute must for a high-tech state like Bavaria that has an interest in playing a role in the next century."

Stoiber called the planned nuclear research reactor "an indispensable precondition of any future top-level productivity in science and technology," and announced that the Bavarian state will also create special "technology transfer centers" to speed up the application of new technologies to the industrial production process.

Another important development was an advertisement recently published in the country's big news dailies by all the mayors of municipalities that are sites of nuclear power facilities. An ad like that, endorsing nuclear technology, would not have been possible in recent years, given the

anti-nuclear climate.

On the other side, however, there has been a revival of rabid ecologism that would employ violence to stop nuclear projects. This can be observed in the protests at the planned nuclear waste dump at Gorleben, where activists have blocked roads, sawed through railroad tracks, and damaged electrical transmission towers.

The left-wing opposition Social Democrats (SPD) are joining this propaganda campaign, in an effort to sell their lackluster chancellor candidate, Rudolf Scharping, as the "alternative to Helmut Kohl" in the October elections. The SPD's left wants a coalition with the Greens after the elections, but ecologism and radical "anti-fascism" in the party's campaign alone won't yield a majority in the parliament. The "red-green" alliance needs a third partner, and the only one that comes to mind is the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), formerly the ruling East German Socialist Unity Party (SED). The PDS is continuing the SED's policy of fomenting ecologism in western Germany to weaken the system there; it is strong in the five eastern states of Germany, where it controls 20% of the vote—not an insignificant factor for the October elections.

A "red-green-red" alliance already exists in the eastern state of Saxe-Anhalt, where the SPD and Greens didn't receive a majority of votes in the June 12 elections for state parliament, and had to rely on the votes of the PDS to be able to form a minority government. The PDS element "outside" the coalition is strong enough, however, to reinforce the radical ecologists in the SPD of that state; that policy is already having its first results in statements by the Saxe-Anhalt government, that it wants to block all big infrastructure projects for ecological reasons.