

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Irregular warfare strikes, again

Renewed rioting by anti-nuclear thugs, and right-left riots are diverting attention from mass unemployment.

With the official jobless rate in Germany approaching 5 million (which in reality is over 9 million), the government in Bonn ought to focus its attention on the urgency of leading the country out of the Second Great Depression. But instead, Bonn is hiding behind media headlines hyping renewed anti-nuclear riots, and violent clashes between gangs of skinheads and antifascist punkers. This pattern of incidents polarizes the elites and poses a combined challenge to the German state and its institutions in a way that very much recalls the "strategy of tension" of the late 1970s and 1980s.

For example, the government has ordered the deployment of no less than 30,000 policemen and special riot police, to guarantee safe transport of six containers of nuclear waste by rail, over the several hundred kilometers from nuclear plants in the south to the national storage site at Gorleben in the north.

This strange odyssey of the six containers occupied most of the first week of March, and it has been the biggest police operation in postwar Germany. Originally, the government planned to deploy "only" 19,000 policemen, but changed its plans after several grave instances of train sabotage, which in the early morning hours of Feb. 25 alone, paralyzed the railway grid at six different locations, and brought rail transport to a standstill at these locations for several hours. For example, the rail connections to Germany's biggest airport at Frankfurt were disrupted, because the power lines had been torn down when trains

ran into slings prepared by the saboteurs.

An underground pamphlet secured by the police, proclaimed the train sabotage as "justified," because "the struggle against the atomic state and the nuclear program" were "a first step toward crashing of the system." Another pamphlet, which was circulated around Gorleben, declared: "It is important to launch an offensive attack on the public infrastructure of railways, electricity supply, and state institutions."

None of this irregular warfare talk and activity has come as unexpected, because the sabotage scenario has been built up over several months of hyped-up debate over this transport of nuclear waste. The police had evidence of what was shaping up, and there have been proposals to preempt it, to make sure that the most violent anti-nuclear elements would be neutralized. For example, in late February, concentrated police control of area roads around the embattled storage site would have guaranteed that many, if not most, of the hard-core rioters that usually come in from other parts of Germany, would have been turned back or arrested.

But the decision-makers in Bonn decided against it, and instead adopted a "de-escalation approach" which would keep the police largely inactive, "in order not to provoke the other side." This defeatism had already utterly failed during the huge anti-nuclear riots in the 1980s.

The second preemptive police action, would have been to prevent the

rioters from constructing a forest camp, which is what they have always used as a bridgehead for riots and sabotage. This simple preventative was not taken either, so the camp was set up, and the hard-core riot underground from throughout Germany was allowed to gather near Gorleben and plan out its confrontation with the police. Train lines and roadways were blocked by felled trees, or by tractors and other vehicles, and even undermined by "excavations."

A situation has, therefore, been allowed to develop at Gorleben that kept about 18,000 policemen occupied with the restoration of transport routes and the protection, virtually meter by meter, of the six nuclear waste containers, over the 20 kilometers from the last train stop at Dannenberg to the storage site.

But there has also been a parallel escalation of violent fights between right-wing skinhead groups and "anti-fascist" punker gangs, mostly in eastern Germany, culminating, in mid-February, in bloody clashes in eastern Berlin. At the same time, a leftist punker was killed by a skinhead youth in Magdeburg. In retaliation for the Berlin clashes, one Kai Diesner, a 24-year-old neo-Nazi, fired several shots on Feb. 19 into a bookstore of the post-communist PDS party in Berlin-Marzahn, seriously injuring an employee.

This bloody act then served as a welcome pretext for several hundred leftists to riot, causing considerable damage in Magdeburg and Aschaffenburg on Feb. 23. That same day, Diesner killed a policeman and wounded another when his car ran into a police patrol. After a shootout with police, Diesner was finally arrested, after which he proudly confessed to being a member of the White Aryan Resistance, an international network of neo-Nazis that was originally spawned on the U.S. West Coast.