

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Blueprints, rather than blue helmets

A former minister has a good idea: a German Peace Corps for Third World relief and development missions.

At the peak of the Gulf crisis, hundreds of thousands of German youth took to the streets to protest the war, and many German air force and air defense soldiers stationed in eastern Turkey declared into TV cameras they would not fight in this insane war. The protesters and "refuseniks" are not making many headlines now, but they are still there. A big commitment is shown by German soldiers currently deployed to eastern Turkey and western Iran for Kurdish relief missions. Faced with much tougher conditions than their comrades in eastern Turkey during the Gulf war, they are declaring into TV cameras that this mission makes sense.

This should make politicians think, especially those that are campaigning for a German "place in the sun" on the side of the big powers that control the U.N. Security Council. The vast majority of Germans oppose out-of-area military missions under NATO or U.N. flags, but would back "blue helmet" peacekeeping missions.

Politicians should be aware that the youth that took to the streets against the war have remained "doves" in their minds. The figures of draft resisters in Germany keep increasing—a trend mirrored in other NATO countries, such as Spain.

What conclusion shall be drawn from this? One good proposal is for a German Peace Corps, a non-military task force for relief and development missions in the Third World. The proposal was made by Jürgen Warnke, a former minister of Third World affairs, last October. He said united Germany should become a "big power for peace," playing a leading role in

Third World development. Warnke proposed the creation of a Peace Corps that would draw on the commitment of the youth to help.

This is a good proposal. The way the Peace Corps can operate is the way ongoing relief missions for the Kurds, Red Cross missions into destroyed Iraq, or the initial relief mission into flooded Bangladesh are now carried out.

The Peace Corps would operate like a rapid intervention force, drawing on idle transport capacities and equipment of the German armed forces, operating like the military but without firearms. The "arms" employed would be portable energy generators and water treatment kits, field hospitals with medical equipment, field kitchens, and the like.

The Peace Corps would use army engineering methods. Shortly before Christmas 1990, a team of German army pioneers completed the construction of a hospital from prefabricated army material in the city of Rudbar, in the middle of the Iranian Elbrus mountains, a region devastated by an earthquake several months before.

No more than eight German army pioneers and 30 Iranian workers, who received instructions on the site, built the modern hospital with 2,100 square meters of medical facilities in just 14 weeks. If there hadn't been certain administrative obstacles and delays, the project could even have been completed earlier.

It is obvious that in regions destroyed by earthquakes and floods, this is the only method to restore a minimal medical care structure. Obvi-

ously, too, this is the method to build up something rapidly in any place in the Third World that lacks basic health infrastructure.

Not just the Kurds or the people of Bangladesh need help. Most of Africa's 400 million people—some 6 million of whom are already infected with AIDS—need help, large parts of the Mideast and Asia do, of the 440 million Ibero-Americans, the World Health Organization estimates that up to 120-150 million at risk from the cholera epidemic need urgent help.

The first phase of the creation of a German Peace Corps would be oriented toward relief missions, carried out according to a world map of disasters and epidemics. The second phase, which should begin during the first phase, would be oriented toward long-term development projects, of building up a sound infrastructure for health care, food production, water treatment, and energy production.

The first phase could work on the basis of the cited Rudbar example. Mobile bridges like those the army engineers have, and air transport capacities are available: Germany inherited a lot of equipment from the abandoned East German armed forces, when the two German states joined last October, which could be put to use, while more is produced.

The second phase would feature sending engineering teams to Third World areas, organizing the building of stationary bridges, power stations, and the like, in which local industries and crafts of the region would be used. An office of German industry in Berlin is already recruiting engineering teams from skilled personnel of shutdown eastern German industries.

The third phase of the Peace Corps would be characterized by the deployment of "blueprints" for rapid development—definitely a better solution than U.N. "blue helmets."