

Report From Germany by Rainer Apel

FDR Impulse Emerges in Labor Movement

Ferment for a broader strike is building, as unionists invoke the principles of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

The new year may begin with a broad strike wave in Germany. A months-long conflict over the government's ill-conceived plan for privatization of the railways culminated in November with strikes by railway engineers that paralyzed almost half of the nation's passenger transport, and brought rail freight to a standstill for a few days. To the great shock of the railway management and the government, the strike had the support of a majority of the population, so management agreed to resume negotiations. But it did so without much commitment, mainly because of the government's refusal to declare that privatization was off the agenda for good.

Should talks break down again and strikes resume, this would instantly affect the public service sector, where the national labor union ver.di has already announced a strike vote, if the government and the other public employers continue stonewalling against any talks on the union's demands for an 8% wage increase and a halt to further extension of working hours with no pay increase. Large sections of the metal and construction workers will also enter wage bargaining talks soon.

The spark of the railway engineers would not have ignited the rest of the labor movement, however, had not the global financial system entered its final collapse phase from late July on. The impact included inflation of prices for basic consumer goods (food, up 40-50% for some categories; gasoline, up 18-20%;

household gas, up 10% and more).

The renewed militance of the labor movement also shows the impact of the LaRouche movement's long-standing campaign for an FDR-style solution to the crisis, for Germany and the world.

In the Spring of 2005, when the Social Democratic Party (SPD) began opposing the hedge funds ("locusts"), some sections of the labor movement began calling for a minimum wage law, using in their literature a picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his historic statements in preparation of the U.S. minimum wage and the Fair Labor Act of 1938.

Unfortunately, that momentum slowed down, after the SPD entered Christian Democratic Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government in November 2005. Therefore, it is most significant that at the end of 2007, references to FDR resurfaced, for example on a postcard printed for mass circulation by the labor federation of the state of Rhineland Palatinate, as part of a campaign for the minimum wage.

The minimum wage issue places enormous pressure on the Social Democrats to repudiate their Fabian variant of the monetarist policies of budget-balancing, in favor of a more pro-labor posture. The latter current gained an overwhelming majority at the SPD's national convention in Hamburg, in November 2007. The convention also voted against railway privatization. A couple of days later, Labor Minister Franz Müntefering (SPD), a hard-line defender of budget-balancing at the

expense of the lower-income strata of the population, was forced to resign. He was replaced by Olaf Scholz, who is more pro-labor.

Müntefering's demise reflected the fact that the party had continuously lost major constituencies since late 2005, when it entered Merkel's neocon Grand Coalition. The special tragedy of the SPD is that Müntefering, who in April 2005 picked up on a leading campaign item of the LaRouche movement and initiated the polemic against the locust funds, ended up joining with the Fabian neocons and polemicizing against labor and its justified resistance against the brutal austerity policies of the government.

The LaRouche movement in Germany and its Civil Rights Solidarity Movement (BüSo) have continued to shape this debate. BüSo national chairwoman Helga Zepp-LaRouche wrote an open letter to the railway engineers, and they and the citizens of Germany in general have been addressed by another BüSo statement, "In Defense of the Common Good," both circulated as mass leaflets in many parts of Germany. Both statements emphasized that the global financial system has entered its final collapse phase, and that only a top-down restructuring of the financial and economic system at the level of governments, using the model of the Bretton Woods System, will provide an alternative. The BüSo is also demanding "firewall" legislation, like Lyndon LaRouche's Homeowners and Bank Protection Act in the United States, to protect Germany's productive capacities. With that, the BüSo enters the coming three weeks of a hot election campaign in the state of Hesse, where a new state legislature will be elected on Jan. 27. (See interview with candidate Alexander Hartmann, in *International*.)