

# The “Uses” of Terrorism

Michael Lucas

1977

In considering the anti-nuclear movement in Germany—the growing opposition, agitation and the emergence of hundreds of local citizen’s initiatives that are directly organizing to stop the nuclear designs of the government and the electric utility companies—we must keep in mind that Germany, as Europe’s most highly industrialized national economy, is a much more densely populated territory than, for example, the United States. Nuclear plants here are unavoidably in closer proximity to small and large population centers and adjacent or directly on top of farming areas. There are no large, empty flatlands and unpopulated regions in which nuclear plants can be tucked away out of sight and out of the relatively close environmental range of the urban and rural communities.

In Germany there are ten nuclear power plants in operation and thirty are under construction or being planned. The sites are for the most part located in the vicinity of small towns adjacent to rivers. The most important of the latter is the Rhine, which, if the government plan is carried out, will be turned into one huge atomic complex with installations going the length of the river valley from Bayer-Leverkusen and Cologne in the north to Basel, Schorstadt and Kaiseraugst in the south.

Popular resistance to the burgeoning nuclear network in Germany has taken the form of growing numbers of demonstrations and occupations (often bloody) of plant sites throughout the country. During Easter over 10,000 people took part in more than 14 different demonstrations (see FE #283, June 1977; also #280, February 1977, “West German Protest” and “The Battle at Brockdorf”), and traditional May Day parades saw their numbers swollen with many anti-nuclearites, ecological groups, Spontis and anarchists.

But since May Day the federal government has been noticeably stepping up its efforts to upgrade its repressive potential. In reading the bourgeois press over the past two weeks one can see the handwriting on the wall in different sectors of the political landscape.

## A New Precedent

In the class struggle between property owners and the homeless—of which there are hundreds of thousands in Germany—a regional supreme court on May 6 handed down a decision against a group of squatters which may have implications for all citizen’s groups.

In 1971 in Hanover, 107 young people took over an empty house. Their action grew out of a particularly acute housing crisis in West Germany and the familiar story of empty houses kept empty by private landlords and speculators who are fully protected by capitalist real estate laws.

The owners, only too ready to show their loyalty to the constitution (when such loyalty still works in their interests), called in the police, who staged a spectacular night raid with no less than 400 local and national police (Bundeschutz). Following the raid the case went to court. The decision finally handed down not only lauded the police’s efficiency but in a new first held the 107 occupiers liable for a portion of the expenses of the assault! The squatters were not only thrown back onto the street, but are being-forced to pay for the privilege!

The question that is now being asked by the anti-atomic power plant movement and the citizens in general is whether the Hanover judgment will be used as a precedent for similar court action against groups occupying power plant sites, public buildings, etc.

One can imagine the following scenario. To clear a site of demonstrators and protect a nuclear plant from a potentially hostile crowd the government will dispatch a unit of police with armored cars and tanks (as at Brokdorf) and then, following the demo, attempt to financially cripple the movement by charging it with the expenses of its repression. If adopted, such a tactic would have as one of its results the further erosion of the legal legitimization of the anti-nuclear movement and the citizen's protest actions in general. This would not stop the movement against nuclear power plants but tend to push it into forms of action that would be illegal as a result of the government's convenient redefinition of the law.

## **Effective Show of Force, Farcical Police Overkill or Rehearsal for the Future?**

A day after the court decision, a peaceful demonstration of 1600 to 2000 people protesting the turning on of a nuclear plant at Ohu found themselves face to face with a miniature army of over 7500 local and national police equipped with no less than 8 helicopters, 1400 vehicles (including armored cars) and 20 water cannons. The bourgeois press reported that it was the largest single police operation since the security net set up during the Olympic games in Munich in 1972.

Several days before the demo the media began a propaganda campaign preparing the local population less for the demo than for the influx of police and military hardware. People were warned against "radicals" and "violent acts" and residents of Landshut and the immediate surrounding area were given leaflets by the police which advised them to report anyone seen carrying weapons or depositing them in barns.

Special water supply lines were set up for the possible use of the water cannons and the power plant itself was protected with special barbed wire perimeters and armed guards. In addition, streets were blocked with gravel-filled containers and the airspace of the entire area was closed to all civilian aircraft. Just to make 200 % sure that a confrontation would not take place at the demonstration, all helmets and other forms of face and head protection were prohibited. Even carrying a knapsack was taboo.

The radius of the security net was about 30 kilometers with its center at Ohu. All roads were closed and the stop-and-search operation extended even to the Munich Nuremburg superhighway. Within the immediate area of the demonstration people in cars were stopped and questioned—some twice or three times by some 3200 "bulls" (as they are called in everyday German) assigned to this task. Anyone without proper identification was detained. In German-style thoroughness, assorted articles were confiscated including hard-boiled eggs, bottles of lemon juice and helmets.

According to the chief of the operation, who was asked to justify this massive consumption of police power, the government had expected three to five times as many demonstrators as actually showed up. He went on to say, with a peculiar bit of veiled candor, that the massive police operation at least "showed what the police have to offer in equipment and organization."

The march understandably never reached the plant site, but instead ended with a demonstration in front of a local district town hall.

The dispatching of a small army to counter the Ohu demo is part of the shock effect that the battles of Brokdorf and Grohnde have had. The government acted as if it were preparing for an armed confrontation and not a peaceful demonstration of a few "nature lovers" and "ecological freaks." In this respect Brokdorf and Grohnde mark a turning point in the uneven but progressive escalation of the battle against the nuclear nightmare.

It would be short-sighted to dismiss the events at Ohu, however, as an example of police "over-kill" or miscalculation. The sealing off and military occupation of the 30-kilometer area of Ohu was not only a show of force intended to have a dissuasive effect on the angrier and potentially more aggressive elements in the anti-nuclear movement, but also a military maneuver useful for the government in drawing up and testing its plans for dealing with any and all forms of mass opposition.

## New Laws About Demonstrations

As a logical follow-up to current police management of demonstrations there has been a proposal in the Bundesrat (the legislative branch of the federal government) to outlaw all forms of what it has dubbed “passive weaponry.” The measure would make wearing of gas masks, helmets or any other sort of face or head protection at demonstrations a criminal offense. The German government apparently thinks it is not only appropriate that its policemen cudgel its political opponents, but that they should have their full freedom to do so unhindered by troublesome “passive weaponry” that protects you from getting a cracked skull and prevents the assailant from getting the satisfaction of an “unmediated” impact. Also proposed was a measure to stiffen the punishment for carrying weapons from one to three years imprisonment (presumably helmets, scarves and who knows what else will be considered weapons if the law is passed).

According to the justice minister in Wiesbaden, such changes in the law are “necessary” in order to combat the impression of the “public” that “up to now too little has been done” against recent “seriously criminal events.” The learned justice presumably was referring to recent demonstrations in some of which police clubbed the shit out of the “public” that was present (accounts of injuries that have been published about Brokdorf read like hospital reports after the battle).

## Repression and the Government Anti-Terrorist Campaign

In the past few weeks the West German and Berlin press—the so-called more “respectable” bourgeois rags as well as the daily scandal sheets—have been filled with diatribes against terrorism and violence.

We read in a front page (weekend edition) editorial of the “highly respectable” *Frankfurter Allgemeine* of May 14<sup>th</sup>:

“Nobody knows how many people are taken in by this depraved brutality which freely expressed itself in the Gottingen ASTA Newspaper [a student newspaper of Gottingen University which failed to condemn the terrorist assassination of German Chief Prosecutor Buback]. The danger posed by 2000 or even 1000 terrorists for the internal security of the BRD is already too large, since it only takes 100 or even 1000 terrorists to drive the State into a corner. And if the communist groups which up to now have drawn attention to themselves with occupations of town halls, nuclear power plants and building sites, but have refrained from murder, one day attempt to link up with terrorist groups?

“This is sufficient reason for the State to prepare itself; not only by increasing the number of police and upgrading equipment, but also by changing the law where up to now it has been too easy for the terrorists to protect themselves and too difficult for the State...”

(Buback was in charge of handling the trial and the imprisonment arrangements for the Red Army Fraction (aka Baader-Meinhoff Gang), several members of which have perished in their cells before they ever reached the courtroom—Holger Meins from a hunger strike and Ulrike Meinhoff allegedly from suicide. Anyone with feeling and thinking organs still intact who has kept up with the news over the past few years knows that pre-trial imprisonment of political prisoners in Germany—there are many hundreds of others of lesser fame than Baader Meinhoff—is a condemnation to deprivation, torture and sometimes death.)

On the most superficial level the reason for the above cited article was that an official student newspaper in Gottingen, though it criticized terrorism as a viable form of political action, nevertheless expressed a certain joy and satisfaction that the fellow who had been personally responsible for so much suffering and despair had bit the dust (or to be more precise, the lead of a submachine gun).

On another level, however, the editorial’s use of the assassination of the Chief Prosecutor is part of the State’s media campaign to scare the “public” into believing that its interests are the same as those of the bourgeoisie, thereby diverting attention from the social and economic issues that are socking this same “public” in the face in the form of increasing unemployment, increasing decay of public services, an extensive and spreading strike

movement in the universities, the nightmare of “peaceful” atomic energy and the increasing Angst that everyday life in general is going to get a lot more unbearable than it already is.

The wave of anti-terrorist propaganda is the ruling structure’s attempt to convince the “public” (as well as itself) that the real enemy (presumably the cause of the difficulties of capitalism today) are a handful of individuals going around shooting people. In its ideological mix, processed through the media, the “small group of terrorists” becomes, by a sleight of hand, “communists” (as in the editorial above) and then all forms of popular agitation which have become too large or effective to be comfortably tolerated.

As if part of a play whose first act leaves the audience nothing to anticipate except what it already can see is going to happen, on May 19, 60 million Marks were appropriated by the federal government for the purpose of increasing “internal security.” The money will go towards expanding and improving the police and investigation forces that specialize in hunting down “terrorists,” more coordination between the various already existing police agencies and the organization of a territory-wide radio information hook-up that will make it that much easier to track people’s movements and check identities.

A “Police Information System” is also to be created which will function as a centralized computer bank in which all important information on “suspects” (essentially anyone whose dossier they would consider interesting enough) can be instantly retrieved. It is not very difficult to figure out from which advanced capitalist country the inspiration for such sophisticated anti-subversion weaponry is coming.

Also mentioned in the press announcement alongside the “anti-terrorist” aims of the appropriation is an improved coordination among the different police units engaged in stopping “violent action” against atomic power plants.

These latest measures together with their consciously timed input into the media are an attempt to give that much more de facto legitimation to the association of terrorism with popular opposition, most importantly at the moment, the anti-nuclear -movement. The same squads of police and paramilitary that will be going through homes, work places, bookstores and cafes “looking for terrorists,” “weapons,” and “communist literature” will also be “investigating” (terrorizing and incriminating) activities of anti-nuclear groups. The extent to which the government will be able to get away with such repression will depend not only on the growth of the anti-nuclear movement but also in part on the evolution of class power relations as a whole. This means not only struggles in Germany, but also in other countries, particularly Italy, Spain, England and France.

Behind the government’s repressive “catch-all” “anti-terrorism” is its increasing disquiet over the recent and spreading eruption of strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and shoot-outs in the Italian universities, as well as the presently inflamed situation in Spain, where the Carlist monarchy can no longer make up its mind what to do to stem the oncoming tide of popular demands. As a result, the government’s response oscillates from day to day between concession and repression.

If the situation in Germany is not anywhere as far gone as in Italy or Spain, the German federal government nevertheless sees the handwriting on the wall and is preparing not only to quell its own internal opposition but also to play its role as the leading European power in what is militarily the most strategically sensitive zone of the Continent, with the other Germany on its eastern front (and completely surrounding Berlin), Italy in the south, and farther to the east, Poland, the present epicenter hotbed of revolutionary unrest in the East Block.

The initiatives taken earlier this month by the United States in order to increase and further consolidate NATO forces in Europe are indeed signs of increasing East-West tension, but a tension that comes from fears on both sides of popular rebellions and converging revolutionary movements.

Whether the coming explosions occur within its own working population or in its “enemy’s” the sclerotic rulers are catching their eon-old cues. In this context the inter-imperialist fight between the east and the west cannot be dismissed just because it is overplayed, for obvious reasons, by both sides. Each of the two super powers and their respective allies know that a working class rebellion within its territory can considerably weaken its power—and hence its bargaining position on the world monopoly board of inter-capitalist competition. The NATO forces in Germany as well as the massive Russian military presence in Eastern Germany are expressions of the fact that both super State powers are poised between the possibility of revolutionary insurrection on one hand and the hackneyed everyday play of economic and “ideological” defense of the shaking world status quo on the other.

—Berlin, May 1977

# fifth Estate

Michael Lucas  
The "Uses" of Terrorism  
1977

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/284-july-1977/the-uses-of-terrorism>  
Fifth Estate #284, July, 1977

**[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**