

German Reich Steps Up Political Repression

Liberation News Service

NEW YORK (LNS)—In the more than six weeks following the kidnapping and execution of Hans-Martin Schleyer by guerrillas of the Red Army Faction (RAF), the West German Government took few visible steps to win the release of one of the country's leading industrialists and ex-Nazi. But the government wasted little time in enacting laws that will take the country back a long ways toward the golden years of Schleyer's youth, when he was in charge of stamping out anti-Nazi sentiment on university campuses, first in Heidelberg, then Innsbruck, Austria, and finally in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

Schleyer was abducted in Cologne on September 5. When his bodyguard and two policemen assigned to protect him opened fire, they were cut down in a hail of gunfire, along with Schleyer's chauffeur. In a letter delivered the next day at the federal criminal police office, the RAF demanded the release of 11 of its members and supporters now being held in West German jails. The 11 persons, including original RAF leaders Andreas Baader, Jan-Carl Raspe and Gudrun Ennslin, were to be given 100,000 marks (about \$46,000) apiece, and a plane to take them to the country of their choice by no later than noon, September 7.

That deadline passed. So did several others. Protected behind a complete news blackout, bales of barbed wire, machine gun posts and armored cars, government leaders called in representatives of big business (including the president of Schleyer's own company, Daimler-Benz), and the opposition political parties to form an extra-constitutional "crisis headquarters."

A month later, the crisis headquarters was still meeting, the armored cars were still drawn up in a circle around major government buildings, and Hans-Martin Schleyer was complaining in a letter to his wife about the long delay, "the continual uncertainty in which I have been vegetating for a month."

If the government responded indecisively to the RAF's demands-, it moved rapidly on other fronts.

"They're taking advantage of this to do everything they have been wanting to do for years," commented one German activist recently visiting the United States.

Police have seized on the excuse to break into homes, round up, search and question "suspected sympathizers" and lock up lawyers and others who have defended the rights of imprisoned "terrorists."

All three lawyers and five legal aides connected with the law firm of Klaus Croissant that defended Andreas Baader are now in jail on one charge or another. No matter that Croissant was originally picked almost by chance off a list of possible public defenders. No matter that other lawyers who had worked with him describe Croissant as a "liberal humanist" who is being hunted by authorities who feel he took his job too seriously.

On September 30, Croissant was jailed pending extradition proceedings in Paris, where he had fled in search of political asylum earlier in the summer. And on October 6, federal and state police broke into Croissant's law offices in Stuttgart and carted away all his files. Most of the files dealt with pleas to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, to Amnesty International and to the European Convention on Human Rights, protesting the treatment of the more than 400 people already being held in West German prisons as accused RAF members and supporters.

New Repressive Laws

Meanwhile, the government has been forging ahead with a series of new laws, including several that further limit the rights of political prisoners.

An emergency decree rushed through parliament faster than any bill in West German history went into effect on October 1. Under that law, imprisoned “terrorists” can be kept in total isolation for up to a month, cut off from contact with each other and with the outside world, including their own lawyers, “if the life or liberty of a person is threatened by a terrorist organization.” Only 20 votes were cast against the bill, although the harshness of the existing solitary confinement has been widely criticized as one of the main factors leading to the recent upsurge of RAF actions.

Even before the Schleyer kidnapping the government had enacted laws to speed up trials, to permit certain court proceedings in the absence of both the defendant and his or her lawyer, and to exclude completely lawyers against whom a “justified suspicion” of conspiracy—which could consist of merely representing a political prisoner—sufficient to bar a lawyer from the court-room.

Few took seriously a government deputy’s proposal to shoot one RAF prisoner every half hour until Schleyer was freed, but other proposals are being taken very seriously indeed, including:

- reinstating the death penalty;
- calling out the army in the fight against the RAF;
- eliminating the right of prisoners to select their own lawyers;
- listening in on all conversations between prisoners and their lawyers;
- banning at least three “extreme left anti-constitutionalist political parties”;
- creating a centralized national intelligence bureau;
- keeping under guard, even after their sentences have been served, prisoners convicted-of a “criminal association” and
- arresting thousands of suspected “sympathizers.”

The hunt for closet “sympathizers” and “intellectual forebears” of terrorism has become the rallying cry of right-wing politicians and much of the mass media. Leading the way has been the vast newspaper empire of Axel Springer, which incorporates more than a third of West Germany’s papers and was itself the target of an RAF bomb in 1972. The words “Die Sympathisanten” (the sympathizers) blazed across the cover of Germany’s answer to *Time Magazine*, *Der Spiegel*, the first week in October.

The hew and cry got so loud by October 7 that West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt spoke up in parliament against “anti-terrorist hysteria.” But that was only after opposition politicians had listed some of Germany’s most prominent figures among the “inkstand criminals” who are “spiritual fathers of terrorism.” At last count, right-wing politicians and periodicals had located three Nobel Prize winners on the RAF’s family tree—novelists Henrich Boll and Gunther Grass and former chancellor Willy Brandt.

For lesser lights on the alleged “intellectual matrix of terrorism,” however, the processes of German justice grind on at full speed. Hardly a day passes without another episode:

- Gerd Schnepel, publisher, sentenced to two years in jail for “pollution” and “poisoning the atmosphere”—all because he printed a book protesting the treatment of political prisoners;
- Klaus Peymann, theater director, out of a job for having “reinforced the power of the terrorist scene”—all because “for humanitarian reasons” reasons” he allowed a letter from RAF prisoner Gudrun Ensslin’s mother requesting donations for the prisoners’ dental expenses to be posted on a lobby bulletin board;

- a 36-year-old woman fired from her civil service job—all because she sold copies of a newspaper put out by a left-wing political party.

All of these actions, of course, are perfectly legal in West Germany, where laws are already on the books outlawing publication of materials that might inspire political violence and banning employment of radicals in the public sector. Inside Germany, they have passed almost unnoticed amid the calls for even more repressive legislation.



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