

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Terror offensive forces Bonn to act

France and West Germany begin to coordinate anti-terror policy.

Coincidence had it that the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, met with the French Premier Jacques Chirac in Paris the day after a terrorist bomb had killed 1 civilian and injured 19 others in the post office at the Paris Town Hall. When Kohl arrived in Paris on Sept. 9, he came under the shock of the terrorist bomb attack on the Federal Bureau of State Security in Cologne early that same morning.

The bomb, 50 kilograms of heavy industrial explosive, caused material damage of more than 1 million Deutschmarks. A civilian was injured by metal splinters, when he was passing in a van at the time the bomb detonated. It was great luck that the bomb did not kill or injure any of the officials working on the overnight shift in the State Security building.

Both attacks—in Paris and in Cologne—were without precedent. They ended the naive assumption of politicians in both countries that the terrorists would respect human lives, and only hit “material targets.” The attacks put an end to the argument that terrorism was “still under control.” They also ended the ridiculous illusion, especially in West Germany, that the terrorists would refrain from direct attacks on the state’s official institutions. The Cologne bombing made fools of those many “experts” in Germany, who still recommended that because terrorism was allegedly a “sociological phenomenon,” it had to be treated by sociological, rather than police methods.

The minister of the interior, Fried-

rich Zimmermann, inspecting the site of the Cologne bombing a few hours later, was quite to the point: “This is a declaration of war by the terrorists against the state!” Zimmermann recalled to public memory the fact that this bomb attack was the third, within a few weeks, against a central institution of the government: Previously, two bombs had hit the training and reconnaissance center of the German Border Police near Bonn, and another one destroyed a section at the Federal Bureau of Administration—also in Cologne.

Zimmermann, who belongs to the more conservative wing of the Christian Democrats in Germany, had been among those calling for tougher anti-terror laws before. The supremacy of the liberal wing within the Christian Democrats, reinforced by the minor government coalition partner, the liberal Free Democrats, made such anti-terror laws impossible. The sequence of three heavy bomb attacks against government institutions, the bloody end of the Karachi hostage affair, and daily reports of extremist sabotage against the West German railway system and electricity grid made the liberal dam break.

Within hours after the Cologne bombing, sources inside the Bonn government leaked to the media that “tougher anti-terror laws” were on the agenda. The measures debated are a return to the anti-riot laws, abandoned in 1970 by Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Socialist-Liberal government, a banning of masked mass demonstrations,

and the prosecution of articles, interviews, and reports in the media endorsing terrorism or expressing sympathy with it as a “crime against the state and the public order.”

A return to a tough response of the state to the terrorist scene at large, which includes the violence-prone protest movement against the country’s nuclear industry, will do much to “dry out” the waters the hard-core terrorists need to swim around in, surface for their attacks, and dive back into immediately after.

But terrorism is also an international problem. While the police of the two neighboring countries, France and West Germany, have operated within their respective borders, the most dangerous and unscrupulous terrorist groups, France’s “Direct Action” and the West German “Red Army Faction” (RAF), have operated across the borders for some time. For the RAF, a retreat into France would save them from the German police, and vice versa for Direct Action terrorists.

This will now change. Chancellor Kohl and Premier Chirac resolved at their Sept. 9 meeting in Paris, that the fight against terrorism has to be intensified. Still cautious toward the Free Democratic coalition partner in Bonn, Kohl hesitated to support in public Chirac’s line that terrorism is “an open declaration of war.”

Kohl agreed, however, on a number of concrete measures which will change things in West Germany, too: 1) implementation of close cooperation and coordination in fighting terrorism in France and West Germany; 2) regular strategy sessions of the anti-terror units of both countries, to preempt terrorist attacks; and 3) a joint French-German initiative on the government level to invoke an emergency summit of all ministers of the interior and security in the European Community.