

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Miners for a New World Economic Order

*An alliance is building between the Catholic Church and the mine workers based on a Christian economic policy.*

The German labor movement is heavily penetrated by the Club of Rome's post-industrial ideology. In the 1970s, the metal workers union especially backed campaigns against the "threat of new technologies," which they said were only destroying jobs, and against nuclear power development. These campaigns helped to cause a drop of industrial investment in the range of several hundred billion deutschemarks.

But a new alliance between the Catholic Church and labor unions is sharpening the perception of some unionists concerning the economic needs of the world.

Among the 2.7 million organized metal workers, who represent close to one-third of the entire labor movement in western Germany, there was resistance against environmentalism in the more conservative unions, such as the chemical, construction, and mine workers. But they paid tribute to the overall green "paradigm shift" in union policy. Mine workers' leaders would endorse a mix of coal and nuclear power, but in a cautious way.

After reunification in October 1990, union priorities began to return to industrial investment under the pressure of unions in east Germany, which had kept a higher ratio of industrial workers (47%) and fewer service and administrative workers than west Germany (40% industrial workers). In the five eastern states, there still was a lot of industry, much of it old, "dirty," and polluting, but the eastern unions' priority was on keeping industrial employment high. The 4 million organized workers in the east forced the

western labor movement to review and adjust its positions on industry and environmentalism.

There is a good potential for west German unions to return to pro-industrial views, but the struggle over labor priorities is unresolved. What is missing is a clear "yes" to Third World development—which would mean dropping post-industrialism for good.

Developments on another flank may help shift the balance within the unions toward a saner approach on economics. A debate on world development has been initiated through Catholic Church currents that have close traditional relations with sections of labor.

"Potash against world hunger!" was a slogan promoting increased production of fertilizers voiced at recent rallies of mine workers in Thuringia, east Germany, who are trying to keep the region's potash mines open. Speakers pointed to the undersupply of food in the Third World and the task of securing world nutrition through the use of fertilizers.

Northern Thuringia has a very active minority of Catholics, and there exists a Church link to the unions. The latest Papal encyclical *Centesimus Annus* is reportedly widely discussed in this region.

Senior managers of the mining industry have joined labor's campaign. On May 28, Otto Walterspiel, chairman of the Kassel Potash Co., stated that "providing food to the growing world population can only be guaranteed by a consolidated potash-producing industry." Walterspiel called for less deregulation and more state sup-

port to the industry.

In the west German Ruhr region, where miners are up in arms against plans of Economics Minister Jürgen Möllemann to cut state subsidies to the coal sector under pressure from the European Commission and the Anglo-Americans at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. There, the Catholic Church sided with the workers. All four Ruhr region dioceses endorsed the mine workers' "no" to the Möllemann-GATT plan for a 35% cut in subsidies. On Aug. 15, a special mass was held at the Cathedral of Trier in support of the miners. Some 2,500 miners took part in the event, which had been arranged by Bishop Hermann Josef Spital.

The policy of the Church was laid out in an essay by Bishop Spital in the late June issue of *Paulinus*, the journal of the diocese of Trier:

"From a short-term viewpoint, it is true that coal offered on the world market is cheaper than coal produced in our country. But it is produced under labor conditions that meet neither the technological standard that is possible today for the sake of the working man and his safety, nor does it meet the call for sufficient protection of the environment—it is also for these reasons that it can be offered at cheap prices. But for the sake of the human beings in low-wage countries, we are not allowed to tolerate a *murderous* competition around low prices, although competition necessarily belongs to the conditions of the market economy.

"For the sake of the human beings, the market must be structured in such a way that conditions of production in the Third World as well are being elevated to those we have."

Spital added that *Centesimus Annus* "is pointing with more commitment than ever before to the necessity of a reshaping of the economy so that it corresponds to human needs."