

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Are jobs a 'dying species'?

*German elites—including top labor bureaucrats—are speculating with the depression rather than fighting it.*

**A**lso for us: coal, jobs, security," read one of the big banners carried Sept. 27 in the city of Bergkamen by coal miners and workers from other industries, who protested plans of the Ruhr Coal Corp. to shut down the Monopol coal mine there. Of 6,000 jobs the company wants to cut (in addition to the 20,000 that are on the agenda already) one full third will be at the Bergkamen mine.

What makes the decision look most absurd, is the fact that right here, 12 years ago, one of the most modern coal mines was built, linked with a modern coal-fired power plant. At the time it was called a "symbol of a future for German coal" by politicians and senior mining sector spokesmen.

Today, the symbol is gone, as well as the future of coal mining in Germany. To a great extent, this is the result of the deepening crisis in the steel, manufacturing, and especially the auto sectors of German industry. Less consumption of steel and iron ore means less work for the coal mines that supply the blast furnaces and iron-works, naturally.

The German steel industry, which already in late 1992 agreed to cut 30,000 jobs, announced on Sept. 27, as the miners of Bergkamen took to the streets, that another 20,000 jobs will be cut. This means that Ruhr Coal will soon address the "necessity" of firing even more miners, and so the spiral keeps winding down and down.

The crisis in coal and steel is linked also to the immorality that has caught the minds of politicians, management, and the labor bureaucracy. Forced to admit in public earlier this

year that the country was in a "deepening recession" and not an upswing, senior economists, bankers, politicians, and other elites began talking about the "economic impulse" that would come from the United States like a locomotive to pull Germany out of its troubles. And, so they said, nobody was to blame because everybody was "caught by surprise" when the upswing turned into a recession.

It is simply not true that nobody "recognized before what the situation really looked like." It may be true that many of the politicians, industrial managers, and labor leaders simply overslept during the shift in world economic realities, but enough of them have known for a while that the economic depression is man-made, by people who have given up on production.

Many knew, because they began pulling money out of manufacturing tangible goods a few years ago, choosing to let it "work" in monetary speculation instead. The worship of that new "god" has been increasingly practiced not only by bankers, industrial managers, and other private stockholders—it has been a practice also of a yet-unknown number of labor union officials.

It was revealed in a spectacular way a few weeks ago that Franz Steinkuehler, longtime national chairman of the metalworkers union IGM, the biggest union in Germany with about 3 million members, was forced to resign, after being exposed in the media as making money with risky investment operations. These operations were guided by insider information he

had access to through his seat on the board of Daimler-Benz, Germany's leading automaker, which has just announced, by the way, plans to cut 44,000 jobs or 15% of its work force in the next two years. This announcement implies the loss of even more jobs in steel and coal.

The question has been posed again and again in recent years why, in spite of clear signs of a deepening depression, labor unions in Germany are not campaigning for big industrial projects that will provide what those miners of Bergkamen have called for: "jobs and security."

Labor representatives at Siemens, Germany's leading producer of nuclear technology, are not fighting to keep that sector alive, but approved, instead, the management's recent decision to cut 1,100 jobs in the nuclear engineering operation of the company—as allegedly "not having a future."

Labor leaders at Thyssen, Germany's leading producer of components for the maglev train system, Transrapid, oppose that technology as "too costly." Mining worker union leaders are opposing nuclear power as long as state guarantees for coal mining are not given into the late 1990s—although the technology of the gas-cooled, high-temperature reactor with its options for the processing of coal offers the ideal solution for a "future of coal in Germany."

And labor leaders in the aerospace sector oppose space technology because their union, the IGM, says that going to space is a "waste of money."

The "waste" argument is a bit hypocritical, because industrial companies of Germany have lost immense amounts of money in the type of insider speculation in which IGM ex-chairman Steinkuehler was engaged. The "speculation" issue has so far not been addressed by the IGM and other labor unions.