

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

If they tell you to go to war, say no

The turnout in German anti-war campaigns has already outnumbered the 1960s anti-Vietnam protest.

‘We shall overcome!”—the song of the U.S. civil rights movement which had a comeback during the anti-regime mass protests in the East of Germany and of Europe in late 1989—can be heard in Germany’s streets again. This time, it targets the blatant incompetence of the politicians and professional diplomats and military strategists to find a peaceful solution to the Gulf conflict.

Coming to a first peak on Jan. 12, the mobilization of church and other anti-war groups turned out a quarter-million people of all ages, in the streets of 120 German cities. Under the slogans, “It’s Five Before Twelve,” “No War In The Gulf!” and “No Blood For Oil!,” citizens gathered for protest marches through the big cities—50,000 in Berlin; 30,000 in Hamburg; 15,000 each in Frankfurt and Cologne; 10,000 each in Munich, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Potsdam, Rostock; between 3,000 and 5,000 in Dresden, Chemnitz, and Bonn.

In Dresden, the city which experienced the most lethal allied bombing raid in February 1945, several thousand citizens formed a human chain cross around the ruins of the Frauenkirche Church in silent protest. The famous baroque church, once one of Germany’s finest, was not restored after the war, but left there as a monument against the insanity of modern war.

The half-restored ruins of the Commemoration Church in Berlin were the site of a rally of about 50,000 citizens that had joined a protest march through the city on Jan. 12. That night, a special “Concert for

Peace” was played by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra at the church.

The churches that played a key role in the growth of the peaceful revolution against the East German communist regime in late 1989, are now fostering the anti-war movement. Vigils are held at thousands of churches, and peace prayers are held in 1,000 church buildings.

Senior churchmen of both confessions in Germany—Catholic and Lutheran-Protestant—have come out harshly denouncing the war drive in the Gulf. In a pre-Christmas call, the Catholic lay organization Pax Christi called on the German government to send a signal for peace by halting logistical support for the U.S. Gulf expedition corps from German territory. A freeze on the logistics operation was also requested in a joint pre-Christmas call issued by both confessions in the two German states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate—where most U.S. troops are concentrated in Germany.

The harshest denunciation to date by clergy of Bush’s war drive came from Franz Kamphaus, the Catholic Bishop of Limburg, in his Christmas homily. Kamphaus, one of the senior spokesmen of the Catholics in Germany, said that war conducted with the kinds of weapons stationed in the Gulf conflict zone, would lead to a “scorched earth and scorched human bodies.” To even think of, or plan such a war, was incompatible with the notion of love on which Christianity is built, he said.

Anti-war groups also began street blockades against U.S. military bas-

es—against Rhine-Main Air Base in Frankfurt, the pivot for the transfer of 40% of all matériel and troops to the Gulf, on Jan. 13. The headquarters of the U.S. 7th Corps in Stuttgart was temporarily blockaded by protesters in the early morning of Jan. 15.

There have been anti-war mass protests in Germany, before: during the heated controversy over the stationing of the so-called “Euromissiles” in the early 1980s, or in the late 1960s anti-Vietnam war protests. What makes the big difference now, is the involvement of the German labor movement. The DGB, Germany’s national labor federation, has launched five-minute warning strikes in the major German cities. Sixteen thousand teachers struck for five to ten minutes in Hamburg on Jan. 15. The day after, 75,000 workers of the private and public sector walked out protesting for five minutes in Dusseldorf; public transport workers joined in Hamburg, Hanover, Berlin, and Leipzig. The DGB campaign is designed to build up for a nationwide strike for peace of up to ten minutes in late January. A prime-time TV magazine in Germany, *Monitor*, supported the DGB campaign with a special on Jan. 15, which was concluded with the emotional reading of a famous 1946 anti-war poem: “If they tell you to leave your job and go to war, say no!”

Some labor unions want to escalate the campaign. The metal workers, Germany’s largest union with 4 million card-carrying members, have called for a nationwide symbolic strike of at least 30 minutes. Labor doesn’t like Saddam Hussein; but the present U.S. administration is considered the real threat to world peace. “We must prevent Bush from pushing the red button,” Karl-Heinz Jungmann, chairman of the Hesse state section of the DGB, said at a Frankfurt protest rally of 15,000 on Jan. 12.