

Backlash sets in vs. Germany's Greens

by Rainer Apel

The Greens and the ecology movement in Germany in recent weeks have begun to feel the pressure that has built up against them, and they are beginning to retreat from some of their most outrageous projects. The most spectacular retreat came on Feb. 22, when Environmental Affairs Minister Jürgen Trittin (Greens) declared that his draft for a new nuclear technology bill no longer contained the original proposal to ban all nuclear reprocessing as of January 2000. This does not reverse all of the Green onslaught on the nuclear technology sector, but it does give the industry and its workforce precious breathing space to map out new offensives against the ecologists.

German industry owes something to labor, in this respect. The best, and most forceful flank against the Greens recently has been coming from labor. More and more workers are getting enraged at the fact that, with the economic depression is already killing several hundred thousand new jobs every year, the Greens and their ecology projects are about to kill several hundred thousand more industrial jobs. And, what is very important for Germany, workers are beginning to take to the streets.

On Feb. 4, about 4,000 nuclear power workers and other unionists took to the streets of Stade, protesting against Trittin's policy. On Feb. 19, more than 250 leaders of factory labor councils from the power sector and supply industries, convened in Munich for a national conference in defense of nuclear technology.

On March 9, a bigger national rally of the workers in support of nuclear power is scheduled in Bonn. But, the fact that the government called off a national roundtable meeting in Bonn, scheduled for the same day, is telling: The "red-green" government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democrat) is still committed to abandon nuclear technology, and it does not want to have such a roundtable in an environment where thousands of angry workers are encircling the government district in Bonn. This would force the Chancellor to make concessions which he does not want to make.

The Chancellor has felt compelled, on prior occasions, to overrule his Green minister on aspects of the planned nuclear technology bill, to calm the population. And, he felt compelled to cancel his attendance at the Feb. 20 celebration of the 100th "birthday" of the German League for the Protection of Nature. The chairman of the league, Jochen Flasbarth, had

been on national television a few days before, attacking shipyard workers in the Emsland region who plan to protest ecologist sabotage of investments in river regulation projects. Schröder told Flasbarth that he could not attend the ceremony, at a time when workers had justifiably expressed concern about the future of their jobs. Attending the ceremony, would be misread as a signal that the Chancellor was not paying attention to jobs.

Growing labor clout

Now, this is an interesting development: The government has come under so much pressure from labor, that it cannot risk being "misunderstood" by workers. This has to do with the broadening sympathy for big labor union strikes, and with the fact that the first "red-green" state government, in Hesse, was voted out on Feb. 7 (see last week's *EIR*). The Greens suffered the worst losses in Hesse, but it is clear that time is running out for the Green-Social Democratic alliance. Schröder's effort to placate labor's concerns is not a result of a change of views, not a matter of principle for him, but sheer opportunism that forces him into tactics to calm labor and ecologists alike, to keep the shaky balance of his own government in Bonn.

But this is good news for labor: Now that the weak flanks of the "red-green" alliance have been exposed, labor can increase the pressure, to force more concessions from the government. The best solution would be to bring the government down, through labor strikes, but the labor movement is not yet committed to go that far.

The situation has also had a remoralizing effect on the courts, which for most of the last 20 years have ruled according to "political correctness," i.e., in favor of "public opinion," which most media and politicians believed was in favor of ecologism. A Feb. 4 court ruling on the Ems River regulation projects went in favor of the ecologists, and against labor. But, a very interesting ruling occurred in another case, on the ecologist project to establish a wetlands nature park along the Elbe River basin.

There, the state court in Lüneburg ruled against the ecologists and in favor of the plaintiffs, a farmer and his wife, who charged that the nature park projects would eliminate 40% of their land, and thereby threaten their basis for existence. The court ruled that nature parks cannot be established in regions which for centuries have been cultivated by human beings, and which for as long a period have been the basis for economic and social life in a region.

Exactly that should have been said in many similar legal cases over the past 20 years, most of which were decided in favor of "nature" and against man. If more courts begin to rule like the one in Lüneburg, if the law begins to protect labor and industry, the perspectives are good that this war against the Greens could end with their final defeat. Labor must just keep on the offensive, and escalate its protests.