

Labor in Focus by Rainer Apel

The alternative to class struggle

The European Labor Party demands steel industry revival and no decoupling of Western Europe from America.

To strike now for a 35 hour work week is as appropriate as the behavior of a man threatened at gunpoint who tells his attacker he would just like to finish his crossword puzzle, and then everything would be in order. In other words, it is absurd."

The words are those of Helga Zepp-LaRouche, who chairs the European Labor Party, in the ELP's steel program, "Save the European Steel Industry!" The just-published pamphlet intersects the targeted strikes called by the German metalworkers May 14 to demand a 35 hour work week, which could cripple auto production across Europe (Report from Bonn, *EIR* June 5, 1984). On May 28, a leader of the German labor confederation said at a Bonn rally that a general strike might be in the offing.

The ELP warns that the current strike wave is developing in the midst of a steel crisis, which is inseparable from the strategic crisis, the world financial crisis, and the brewing new Berlin crisis which is pressuring West Germany to "decouple" from the United States.

Decoupling, besides the 35 hour week, is the political objective of the German Social Democrats and their European sister parties, which run the politics of most of the European labor movement. They have introduced the fight against installing U.S. missiles in Europe into the daily propaganda of the European Trade Union Congress (ETUC) and its member unions.

The ETUC is dominated by the German labor union movement. Founded in 1973 on German initia-

tive, ETUC's first president, till 1979, was the head of the German labor union federation (DGB), Heinz-Oskar Vetter.

Vetter, a founding member of the Trilateral Commission, was replaced by the chairman of the Dutch national labor federation FNV, Wim Kok, ETUC president until 1982. The tight policy coordination between Dutch and German labor was evident when Kok called 750,000 members of his FNV on a "political protest strike against the stationing of U.S. missiles in Holland" on May 3.

Solidarity messages poured in from the DGB headquarters in Düsseldorf, West Germany, expressing "the hope that our Dutch colleagues may be more successful in preventing the stationing than we have been in Germany." In return, Dutch Socialist Party chairman Joop den Uyl conveyed to the German Social Democrats' national convention in Essen on May 17 the Dutch labor movement's hopes that "the strike of our German metal workers colleagues will pave the way for the 35 hour week in all of Europe."

The role of the communist labor unions in Europe, which are not (at least not yet) formal members of the ETUC, must also be watched. They control a majority of workers in the key industries of Italy and France. Timed with the outbreak of the German metalworkers' strike, the communist-led French CGT called a strike at the country's number two automaker, Citroen. Simultaneously, the Italian metalworkers' union FIOM struck the big auto firm Alfa Romeo. Three weeks

earlier, the CGT set off violent labor protests in steel, shipbuilding, and mining, and threatened a social uprising against the government in Paris. The Italian Communist Party mobilized 800,000 for a "march of labor on Rome," threatening the government with overthrow.

It must be said that the brutal austerity policy of both the Italian and French governments constantly opens new fronts for broad-scale confrontation with labor, and makes it relatively easy for the radicals to mobilize labor against the government. The same situation is emerging in West Germany, where the government has publicly sided with management against labor to reject the 35 hour week, while the DGB has merged with the anti-missile movement in a political confrontation with the government's pro-NATO policy.

The communist sections of the European labor movement are the prime transmission belts for Soviet propaganda against capitalism and NATO, i.e., American military presence in Western Europe. If they join ranks with the Socialists and Social Democrats for what metalworkers' leader Franz Steinkühler termed a "fight for a new balance of power in Europe's society," the Soviets will have a crucial lever to destabilize all of Western Europe.

This is where the ELP's programmatic intervention is critical: The steel crisis can only be solved by gearing up exports of high-technology capital goods to the developing sector and constructing great infrastructure projects. The credit will come from setting up a new international monetary system independent of the London, Swiss and New York banks. Steel production must be revolutionized, moreover, by applying the technological breakthroughs of the "laser and plasma age," says the ELP.