

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Hostage to crime and terrorism

*Forty people were held hostage in three days, while liberal "civil rights" politicians prevented the police from doing anything.*

A debate on "police rights" has been sparked in Germany, after the disastrous end of a hostage affair, in which gangsters took more than 40 hostages over a three-day period. Except for the terrorist extravaganzas of the 1970s, this was the most brutal and spectacular act of violent crime in the postwar history of the Federal Republic.

The police were prevented from acting by political directives "not to shoot." The end of the affair: The three gangsters were wounded but alive; two hostages and one policeman dead.

The saga began when two gangsters robbed a bank and held employees hostage. A raid by special police units on the bank was blocked, on orders from the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia; instead, the fugitives were given a high-speed car and escaped to the city of Bremen, changing cars on the way. A third gangster reinforced the team on its way, and in Bremen, the next day, the bank robbers captured a bus with 32 passengers, making their getaway to Hamburg. A policeman was killed when his car collided with another, while following the bus.

At a motel on the highway, police managed to arrest one of the three fugitives, a woman, but were then ordered to release her, on the grounds that otherwise her accomplices in the bus would begin killing hostages.

The robbers killed anyway: A 15-year-old boy was shot in the head, while trying to protect his younger sister, whom the gangsters held at gunpoint to apply pressure for the immediate release of their arrested ac-

complice. By the time the boy was shot, the accomplice had already been set free.

The bank robber team then crossed the German border to the Netherlands, exchanging the bus for a new car, and reentered Germany with two hostages. They arrived in Cologne on Aug. 18. From there, the last act of the drama started: The police finally got the political go-ahead for action. The gangsters' car was stopped, but one of the two hostages was shot by one of the criminals.

The whole affair lasted three days, over a large part of northwestern Germany, crossing the borders of three German states. What made this case a disaster without precedent was the interference by politicians in law enforcement, the insane decision to let at least 4 (some policemen even said 10) good chances to liberate the hostages go by.

The media had access to the criminals the entire time, presenting interviews with them live on national television. "Where are the police, how can this be allowed?" asked millions of Germans watching this.

The police, special anti-crime units, were there. "Where are the politicians?" is the question that ought to be posed, instead. Herbert Schnoor, the interior minister of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, rejected an offer on Aug. 16 by the government in Bonn to have the special GSG-9 anti-terrorism unit deployed against the hostage-takers.

Twenty years ago, there was no terrorism in Germany, and the crime of "hostage-taking" was unknown.

The first hostage-taking occurred in Munich on Aug. 4, 1971. Police sharpshooters went into action promptly, killing the gangster, who was able to shoot his hostage too, however.

The liberalization of anti-crime laws which began in the early 1970s, encouraged the rise of terrorism and violent crime. The police were given new directives, not to shoot, but to "talk."

By 1973, already 23 cases of hostage-taking were recorded, and 10 years later, 120. In 1977, three spectacular kidnaping cases (federal attorney Klaus Buback, banker Jürgen Ponto, and industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer) led to a public outcry for better laws. The laws were modified, but the liberal approach remained.

A clause introduced in December 1977 readmitted a "shoot to kill" policy into the police service, but the practical realization of the new law was postponed on the state level. As of August 1988, only one state, Bavaria, has strict legislation supporting the "shoot to kill" *modus operandi*.

Interior Minister Schnoor, who prevented the police of his state from ending the hostage drama on its first day, has a record of police sabotage over years. It was the same Schnoor, who almost caused a disaster during U.S. Vice President George Bush's visit to the city of Krefeld in May 1983. Disregarding intelligence about planned street riots, Schnoor issued directives to the police to stay in the background. This allowed a mob to attack Bush's motorcade, and his car would have been stoned, had the police, ignoring their political directives, not arrived and intervened.

Schnoor also prevented police from cleaning out a well-known terrorist safehouse in the Kiefernstrasse district in Dusseldorf.