

German workers up in arms against GATT

by Birgit Vitt

For the first time in the postwar history of Germany, 32 coal miners from the Lohberg mine, near the city of Dinslaken in the Ruhr region, did not come back from their work shift, but decided to stay underground in protest, until federal Economics Minister Jürgen Möllemann gives up his policy of shutting down German coal and steel production, as demanded by the Anglo-Americans at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations.

Möllemann plans to cut production by the year 2005 from 71 million metric tons (1990) to 45 million tons—instead of the 58.7 million previously planned—laying off 50,000 of Germany's 135,000 miners as a result, in order to reduce government subsidies.

The wildcat strike followed three months of friendly and impotent "informational" protests organized by their trade union, the Mining and Energy Industrial Union. Although the union distributed huge quantities of brochures and leaflets, and organized a 150,000-person demonstration, still the Oct. 16 "Big Coal Round" talks in Bonn with Chancellor Helmut Kohl led to absolutely nothing.

For 35 hours, the miners in Dinslaken held out, 1,000 meters under the earth, before union representatives talked them into ending the protest. In the meantime, a similar protest started at the Sophia Jacoba coal mine in Hückelhoven, where first 200, and then 600 miners carried out a grim protest, 600 meters below the surface of the earth.

A representative of the Schiller Institute went down into the mines to talk with the workers, and characterized the mood as "ready to fight." Said one young man: "We created the wealth of this nation—not my generation, but not Möllemann either. And now they have forgotten about us." Another asked, "What has this to do with Christian policy?" He has called for the union's factory council to organize a mass on Sunday. Another miner referred to the fact that Germany is importing coal at cut-rate prices from Colombia and other Third World countries, while destroying its own production. As for the politicians like Möllemann, he said, "In the right hand they are proud to have the cheap blood-coal, which is imported from developing countries, and in the left hand they are carrying the banner of 'human rights.' "

These demonstrations are part of a crisis that began on

Oct. 10, with a press conference in the steel-producing city of Dortmund by the management of the steel companies Krupp, Essen, and Hoesch. They told a startled press corps that Krupp has bought up 24.8% of the stocks of Hoesch. Krupp's representative, Gerhard Cromme, said that his company intends to buy up the majority of shares as soon as possible. Cromme is viewed as a radical "reformer" in the Manchester Capitalist school of British liberalism—what in the United States would be called an "asset stripper." Hoesch's work force believes, quite rightly, that their jobs will soon be on the chopping block.

Steel production threatened

Immediately after the press conference, Dortmund's Hoesch workers took to the streets. For the first time since the big steel demonstrations of 1981, the city was an uproar. If Hoesch closes down, important parts of the production of not only the city of Dortmund, but the entire surrounding region, will die. The mines that produce the coking coal for Hoesch, the small and medium-sized industrial enterprises that supply Hoesch, and numerous subsidiary companies, will all be in trouble.

The workers demanded that the Social Democratic prime minister of the state of North Rhine Westphalia, Johannes Rau, block the sale to Krupp. But Rau, who claims that no jobs are in danger, refused to do anything besides promise that he will do his best to "save" the eastern Ruhr region. Rau, who is soft on the greenie "back to nature" ideology, has no particular desire to save the industry of his state.

Dortmund Mayor Günter Samtlebe issued a call for a solidarity demonstration of Dortmund citizens, which took place on Oct. 17, with 20,000 people turning out in the pouring rain to demand that the area's industry and jobs be preserved.

Appeal by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the president of the Schiller Institute in Germany, wrote a public appeal to the people of Dortmund. "No to Krupp's takeover of Hoesch! End the mafia methods in the Ruhr!" she wrote, in a leaflet which was circulated to the demonstrators.

She reminded people that 10 years ago, when Dortmund workers took to the streets the last time, she told them to think big, to fight for a new world economic order, to develop the Third World, in order to save the steel industry in their region, to prevent the closing of a steel plant there. But unfortunately, they did not listen, and instead of steel production, they got a gambling casino, which in the meantime has become the biggest in Europe. Now they face the brutal policy of deindustrialization once again. She explained that the "Krupp coup" is part of the strategy of GATT and the International Monetary Fund to finish off Germany as an industrialized nation, and a competitive threat to the bankrupt Anglo-Americans.