

Miners' strike in eastern Germany gains international support

by Rainer Apel

The hunger strike being conducted by miners at the Thomas Müntzer potash mine in Bischofferode, Germany, which is in its fourth week as we go to press, has become the focus of international attention and solidarity by those fighting for a new, just world economic order. The strike, in a small town in the eastern German state of Thuringia, is the first of its kind in German history. It represents an important strategic intervention against the free market austerity policies that are ripping apart the former communist states of eastern Germany, plunging the population there into unemployment and misery. This has implications far beyond Germany itself. Since the Schiller Institute issued a call several weeks ago for international support to be given to the miners, telegrams have been flowing in to strike headquarters (see *Documentation*).

As *EIR* reported last week, the Thomas Müntzer mine was scheduled to be closed down by the Treuhand agency, which has been overseeing the privatization of industry in the east since the reunification of Germany in 1990. This "privatization" policy has, more often than not, been equivalent to deindustrialization. Basing itself on the advice of the investment house Goldman Sachs, the Treuhand concluded that there was no international market for German potash. The miners strongly disagree; they are stubbornly refusing to be bought off by promises of jobs in other fields, insisting that the use of potash for fertilizer production is indispensable to meet the food needs of the Third World, and Africa in particular.

The strike received prominent coverage on July 26 in the Paris daily *L'Humanité*, in an article by former communist Roger Garaudy. "This movement," he wrote, "marks a shift in labor action for all of Europe: For the first time, the only possible solution is clearly indicated for unemployment in Europe and hunger in the Third World. . . . With this first awareness that the interests and the future of the workers of Europe and the people of the Third World are intimately connected, a seed of the future is about to germinate. Let us not allow it to die. It is urgent to organize international support for the Bischofferode miners."

Protest rallies in Thuringia

Two protest rallies in Thuringia July 28 and Aug. 1 marked a significant change in the hunger strike. The July 28 protest rally in Zella-Mehlis, which took several thousand workers of various east German firms to the streets against

the Treuhand policy of deindustrialization, was important because it documented to the potash miners that support for them was broad enough to enable them to resist phony or half-baked offers for "secured substitute jobs" and to continue their hunger strike. The day after that rally, July 29, the strike council in Bischofferode stated its commitment to continue the strike until the future of their mine was secured, so that they could produce potash again.

The miners' cause was supported in a July 30 Deutschlandfunk radio interview with Swiss expert Peter Arnold, who said that there were secured clients for the mine's 650,000 tons of annual production capacity, in Sweden, Belgium, Finland, and France. The mine runs below its capacity at present, producing only 12,000 tons per day—on directives from the mother company Central German Potash (MDK), whose merger agreement with the west German fertilizer group K&S/BASF included the halting of potash mining in Bischofferode.

The solidarity of workers from other Thuringian firms with the Bischofferode strike paid off directly for workers at the DKFL ball-bearings producer in Zella-Mehlis, who occupied it in mid-July to fight for its survival. The DKFL strike council reported on July 30 that the 600 workers had been able to extract a concession from the west German parent company FAG for the first time in weeks. FAG had refused to sign contracts with DKFL because of secret agreements with the Treuhand agency to close down the Zella-Mehlis plant along with three other production sites in east Germany, but has now decided to sign a contract of DM 2.9 million (\$1.7 million) to DKFL.

Strike leaders at DKFL welcomed the concession, but added that the plant would be kept occupied, in spite of the fact that production there has been resumed, for the time being, until FAG and Treuhand agree that the plant and its 600 workers be given a future.

The second protest event, drawing about 10,000 to Bischofferode for a "day of solidarity," was important because it helped to elaborate programmatically the slogan "Potash: Bread for the World," which has played a galvanizing role in the strike and also emerged at the July 28 rally in Zella-Mehlis.

In their speeches at various actions recently, many Thuringian factory council members could be heard demanding a

“new economic world order,” the cancellation of “illegal old debt,” and the “nationalization of the Bundesbank,” Germany’s central bank. Many eastern German workers have become fascinated with the idea that a debt moratorium for both Germany and the developing countries would be necessary before German industry could resume production at full capacity, and that under those circumstances, no glut would be in sight on the world market.

The programmatic aspect of the strike ferment is crucial, because it is the only way to prevent the protest from being put into the straitjacket of the labor bureaucracy, the commodity cartels, the government, and the post-communist radical groups, which are all working to turn the strike into a phony “social conflict” between the eastern and western German states, which would result in the destruction of even more jobs.

Reverberations felt in Bonn

The government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl is feeling the heat from the crisis in the eastern states. “The Treuhand is Germany’s biggest policy fiasco,” charged Manfred Kolbe, a representative from the state of Saxony to Germany’s federal parliament and a prominent member of Kohl’s Christian Democratic Union, in a statement at the end of June. The financial and economic consequences of the Treuhand’s “pure marketing policy” are catastrophic, Kolbe said, because, from the very start, it has pursued a “fundamentally wrong policy.” In order to stop the unparalleled dismantling of industrial jobs in Germany’s eastern states, and to have firms which can stand on their own feet economically, the Treuhand must be transformed into a common-stock industrial firm owned by the federal government, but with strong participation of the five eastern German states, he concluded.

From the mouthpiece of the liberal Free Democratic Party, Thuringia’s Economics Minister Jürgen Bohn, came complaints to the Treuhand and to the federal Finance Ministry, that the Treuhand has been using all the income from the firms it administers for the servicing of old debt, instead of investing it productively, and that therefore it is no mystery that already 75% of the jobs that existed in Thuringia in 1990 have been eliminated. The Thuringian Economic Association (VWT) issued a statement demanding an “end to shock therapy.”

These criticisms highlight the fact that behind the miners strike is the question of Germany’s future economic policy. It has become quite evident that Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the ruling Christian Democratic-Free Democratic coalition cannot continue to turn their backs on their own party members in the east.

The “Bonn people,” as they are called, never got to first base in their efforts to contain the Bischofferode strike by using a mixture of threats and “once-in-a-lifetime” offers (which has been the practice in western Germany for years), with the help of news media that are well-versed in how to lull the public into passivity. The political brushfire which

had been feared ever since the beginning of the Treuhand’s radical deindustrialization strategy in the summer of 1991 (following the assassination of its head Detlev Rohwedder), has now broken out, and is spreading into western Germany as well. In Duisburg-Rheinhausen in the Ruhr industrial district, steel workers who have gotten an equally raw deal from Bonn have joined in solidarity with the Thuringian potash miners. Indeed, workers in the fertilizer industries of Belgium and Holland, which get their potassium salts from Bischofferode, have sent delegations to the strikers at the Thomas Müntzer mine.

Two important contributions

There are two institutions that are making important programmatic contributions to the Bischofferode strike. The first is the Catholic Church: Two papal encyclicals on social questions, the 1987 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and the 1991 *Centesimus Annus*, enjoyed a lively reception among the predominantly Catholic community of the mining region in northern Thuringia. That region stayed rebellious against the pro-Soviet east German communist regime in the 44 years of its rule, forcing the regime to make considerable economic and political concessions.

Many observers believe that this particular Catholic contribution supplies moral strength to the potash miners to carry on their protest against all odds, and even to consider an escalation. The July 30 issue of the *European* weekly, for example, carried a picture of miners attending a Catholic mass.

The religious aspect also surfaced in a speech by Gerhard Jüttemann, vice chairman of the Thomas Müntzer mine’s factory council, at the Aug. 1 Bischofferode protest rally. He said that when the hunger strike began, it first seemed to be as hopeless as the audacity of David to challenge Goliath: “Our slingshot today is the solidarity we’ve gained in this strike and for our cause. With that in our hands, we’ll win this battle.”

The other crucial programmatic input comes from two organizations inspired by Lyndon LaRouche: the new political party Civil Rights Movement Solidarity (BBS), which had organized support telegrams from the Americas, Asia, and Africa to the hunger strikers; and the independent Association of German Farmers (VDL), which endorsed the hunger strike in mid-July.

VDL executive member Walter vom Stein addressed the protesters in Bischofferode on Aug. 1, denouncing the deindustrialization policies of the commodity cartels and the International Monetary Fund. Stressing the key role of potash in food production, he blasted the lie of surpluses—whether of potash or of food—as self-serving lies invented by the cartels, which are benefitting from IMF policies, choking the economies of developing nations, and reducing their purchasing powers for potash imports and thereby creating the hoax that “markets are shrinking.”

Support messages flood Bischofferode

United States

I am a United Mine Worker. I am on strike in the state of Virginia in the United States. We too are on strike for a better way of living and better production.

I have learned about your strike and I think it is extremely important that you succeed. You have my full support.

Jimmy Viars, President, Mountain Empire Labor Council, Tazewell, Virginia

The following statement of support was circulated at a Schiller Institute meeting in Norfolk, Virginia on July 27:

. . . We see in your fight the demand to return to a rational economic policy to maintain and expand industrial production and technological progress to the benefit of all the people in your country and in the rest of the world.

We recognize in it the rejection of speculation, monetarism, and the wild free market liberalism, as demanded by the International Monetary Fund, which violate the inalienable rights of all men to economic justice.

We stand at your side under the banner, *Wir sind das Volk*.

We, the people of North Dakota, are in the midst of a great agricultural catastrophe, because of the continuing floods. We recognize the importance of potash in modern fertilizer production; also, we are saddened by the continued starvation in the world. . . .

Your hunger strike and occupation of the mines is in the spirit and tradition which brought down the Berlin Wall, stopped the segregation in America, and ended the phase of obvious colonialization in India. It is your courage, and the courage of such leaders like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, which inspires us.

We are battling a new form of colonialism here in the United States. We, the undersigned, are gathered in North Dakota to revive the idea of *imago viva Dei*. To reassert this concept into our schools, so as to ensure that our children do not become photocopies of Satan.

We are inspired by the tradition of Schiller, Beethoven, and the Humboldt brothers as exemplary of the tradition to which we must return if we are to defeat the economic and

moral collapse of our civilization.

Your victory shall become our victory.

Africa

On behalf of the African Anti-Malthusian League of the Schiller Institute (an international solidarity organization), I commend all of you, moral human beings, for the unbridled action you have taken thus far in protesting on behalf of the inalienable rights of humanity. Your action reminds me of what Friedrich Schiller proclaimed in the poem entitled *Hope*, in which he said: "Each of us is born for that which is better." . . . It is in this regard, I view our struggle as one.

Furthermore, as an African, I understand your plight and applaud your stand for the fact that if a similar stand had been taken in the 1960s by the Republic of Congo in resisting the exploitation of the "fertilizer cartels," the Congo fertilizer projects would have been saved, and Congo would have experienced genuine development in this area. Therefore, your slogan that reads, "The potash is needed to feed the population in the developing sector nations, including Africa," is not only correct, but humane.

Baltimore, Maryland, July 26, 1993

Siahyonkron Nyanseor, chairperson, African Anti-Malthusian League of the Schiller Institute (Amalesch), citizen of the Republic of Liberia

We, the Somalis in Sweden, very much regret the planned closure of the Thomas Muntzer potash mine in Germany. We fully support the cause of the German workers and therefore request an immediate reversal of the decision to close the mine.

Stockholm, July 29, 1993

Somali Community in Stockholm, Sweden

Europe

I have learned of your strike from the Schiller Institute, and of the battle that you are conducting in "your" potash mine.

Your enterprise is politically important, in two respects: 1) because of the defense of jobs; and 2) because of the consideration that potash is important for fighting against hunger in the world.

I wish you full success in the battle which you are leading in the general interest.

Cordially,

Sen. Edda Fagni, Rome, Italy

As a candidate for Mayor of Munich, I support your courageous battle and assure you that I am campaigning fully for the defense of the Bischofferode mine. Your battle is decisive for the future of the whole republic.

Elke Fimmen, candidate for mayor on the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity ticket, Munich, Germany

The following message was sent from Moscow in English to the strikers at Bischofferode.

We are greeting and expressing moral support for the strike of the potash mine in Bischofferode. Cutting production and closing of enterprises is a dead end. People need more commodities and increasing production at a time when half of the world is dying of starvation.

Between communism and liberalism there is a third way, one approach of which was reproduced in the infrastructure development project, which was proposed by "Civil Rights Movement Solidarity."

We wish you success.

Vasyl Kolomatsky, Schiller Institute, Moscow, Russia

Viktor Petrenko, Schiller Institute, Moscow, Russia

Vladimir Matveyev, Democratic Union, Moscow, Russia

Ibero-America

The new world order was already old when it was born, but appeared under more brutal features than ever before. The growing, irrational use of military might to impose its will upon nations which it already made victims of hunger and death, is only one example of its sordid intentions. That international bodies openly make themselves accomplices of this barbarism calls for imminent, immediate solidarity to fight them.

We Panamanians have lived through the unpardonable, violent, criminal, cowardly invasion of our country by the armed forces of the U.S.A. in December 1989, followed by occupation, the aim of which is to keep the Panama Canal under the control of the U.S. government and to keep its bases on our territory.

Your bold struggle is exemplary and takes on greater importance day by day. It is precisely by exercising such courage and determination that the perpetrators of this international injustice and its "new world order" will be finally defeated.

From exile in Europe, July 30, 1993

Elmo Martínez Blanco, former Minister of Trade and Industry of the Republic of Panama

The right to work and to development is a fundamental issue for human life. When the working class places itself at the front of the fight for the defense of the most precious national rights, we identify fully with that act. And that's the situation with you, who have had to resort to a hunger strike for your demands to be heard.

Forward in your fight for the right to work and for the sovereign development of your country.

Sincerely,

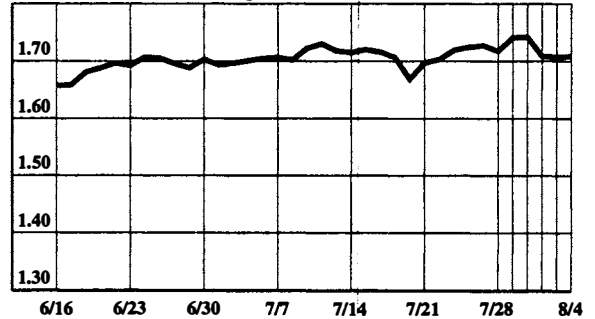
The United Trade Union Front of the State of Jalisco, an affiliate of the Mexican Confederation of Trade Unions (CTM)

Zapopán, Jalisco, Mexico, Aug. 1, 1993

Currency Rates

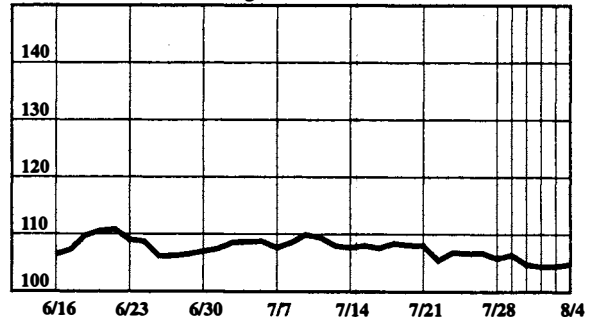
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



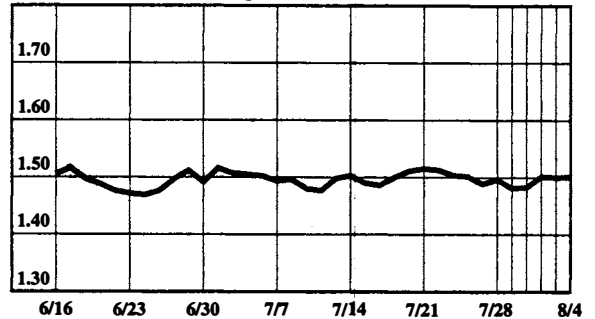
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

