

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

A depression that can't be talked away

Workers in eastern Germany are taking to the streets in protest, and are mobilizing for the coming elections.

On Aug. 10, roads in the downtown Thuringian city of Gera were blocked by protesters for five minutes. The activists were supporters of an "alliance for action" of workers from various plants, who declared that it was "five minutes to midnight" and high time to stop the deindustrialization of east Germany.

On Aug. 17, roads in seven bigger cities in the state of Thuringia were blocked along the same five-minute model: Erfurt, Weimar, Jena, Meiningen, Suhl, Altenburg, and Nordhausen. In Jena, Gottfried Christmann, the chairman of the local section of the DGB, the national labor federation, said that "enough is enough" after the loss of virtually 78% of all industrial jobs in the state since unification in late 1990. He said that the example of the ongoing, six-week hunger strike of potash miners in Bischofferode, which has become a national symbol of labor protest, showed that only resistance with such commitment would be effective.

Spokesmen for the "alliance for action" initiative, sparked in mid-July by south Thuringian worker solidarity with the Bischofferode strikers, announced that there would be regular "Tuesday protests" against the deindustrialization policy of the federal government and of the Treuhand agency, which commands all of the east German industry that has not yet been privatized or closed down.

This "alliance" initiative among workers of endangered industrial plants has gained a momentum of its own, going beyond the hunger strike in Bischofferode in terms of programmatic outlook. The initiative promises

to be around for the "year of elections 1994" (17 of them), which is also the orientation of those factory councilmen who founded the "alliance for action."

The Christian-Liberal government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, which usually does not pay attention to labor interests, is taking this protest seriously. But Friedrich Bohl, minister of the chancery, on Aug. 17 reiterated the government's position that there was "no chance for Bischofferode." Not even the fact that the European Cartel Office in Brussels voiced concern about the planned merger of the two biggest producers of potash, K&S and MDK, on Aug. 16 (which implies the closing of the Thomas Müntzer mine in Bischofferode), and announced an investigation of the affair, would change Bonn's view.

However, it is not likely that the government will be able to stick to its views on the potash issue or other crises in German industry. The fact that Economics Minister Günter Rexrodt and an increasing number of experts have felt compelled to readjust earlier forecasts of economic trends, signals nervousness in Bonn. Senior figures in German industry, and *EIR*, have been warning that the economic "recession" is deepening and will not simply go away because some politicians decide that recovery is "around the corner."

Early this year, Klaus Murmann, president of the Association of German Employers (BDA), said that the jobless rate would be above 5 million by the end of 1993. At that time, Bonn forecast only 3.5 million or even less. This "forecast" was slightly corrected

in May to between 3.5 and 3.7 million, and on July 18, Economics Minister Rexrodt went on the record with a prognosis of "more likely" 4 million unemployed by the end of this year. On Aug. 12, he spoke of "4 million jobless, definitely, this coming winter."

In a mid-August report, the DIW econometrics institute in Berlin, which holds a seat on the government's economic advisory commission, forecast a jobless rate of 4.5 million. Other independent forecasts, based on the fact that more than 6 million Germans of working age are already without regular employment, and that another 0.8-1.5 million have to be added, are projecting a real jobless rate of over 7 million by the end of 1993.

Labor market statistics, as presented by the president of the Federal Unemployment Office, only list those citizens that receive support from the national unemployment office (3.5 million currently), while all others who receive support from other budgets are not listed as jobless.

There are about 1 million now whose eligibility for the mandatory 18-month jobless support has expired and who have entered the welfare rolls, and there are yet another 800,000 that are listed with their companies as "early retirement candidates" who don't appear in the monthly unemployment report. This explains part of the secret behind the low official data. Thus, in reality, Germany has a jobless rate of 5.3 million, with another 500-700,000, coming from the auto and aerospace sectors mainly, but also from chemical producers and machine-builders, expected even by Bonn by the end of 1993.

This is a "real depression," and *EIR* and the protesting workers are eager to know when this fact will finally be admitted in Bonn.