

German Reunification Fuels Fascist Terror

The continuing fascist attacks on immigrants in Germany have been front page news around the world. In an orgy of bloody terror, gangs of fascist thugs armed with iron bars, clubs, pellet guns, chains and flare pistols have been attacking “foreigners” wherever they find them. The assaults occur at every hour of the day in train stations, streetcars, subways, city squares and on street corners. Several Spanish and Turkish restaurants have been burned down. Hundreds of the victims have been badly injured, many permanently, and some have been killed.

The nightmarish scenes of broken glass, burning buildings and bleeding victims recall the Hitlerite terror of the 1930s. It seems to many as if history is repeating itself. Some German leftists have begun speculating that the fascists’ next target could be the organized workers movement.

Official government sources record more than 2,300 organized attacks against immigrants in 1991. Besides the widespread gang attacks on random individuals, there have also been large-scale pre-planned attacks on immigrant residential centers. In Greifswald, in the former German Democratic Republic (DDR), several hundred skinheads and fascists launched a coordinated attack on immigrants in order to drive them away. In Hoyerswerda, a coal-mining region in Saxony, several dozen fascists attacked two immigrant hostels for *seven consecutive days!* Many German residents in the area openly solidarized with the pogromists. In this case, as in most of the other large-scale assaults, the police stood on the sidelines, and finally intervened only to transport the targeted victims out of the city.

In a four-page statement issued on 6 November 1991, at the height of the fascist attacks, Gruppe Spartakus (the German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency) noted:

“Even when the police and courts occasionally arrest fascist murderers, they are usually soon released to continue their dirty work. The state organs are, as always, blind in their right eye. Their main attacks are directed against demonstrators and anti-fascists who try to confront the murderous gangs.”

In recent months the large-scale assaults have eased, but the climate of terror still grips Germany. Attacks by small groups of fascists continue daily, but the media pays little attention and most incidents go unreported.

For the first few weeks there was no organized resistance. Then some liberals and clerics sponsored pacifist vigils (*Mahnwachen*) where citizens gathered in front of asylum centers to show their sympathy with the victims. While those who participated in this activity were certainly well-intentioned, this passive moral witnessing probably did little to deter the fascists. The large-scale

attacks were apparently suspended as a result of pressure from a broad section of the bourgeoisie concerned about Germany’s image abroad.

Who is Responsible?

There is overwhelming evidence that the terror campaign against immigrants was organized on a national scale. Yet the German government continues to deny that the attacks are politically inspired by fascist organizations. German officials continue to insist that the fascists pose no real danger. The Interior Ministry and the Federal Criminal Office dismiss the murderous assaults on immigrants as the “spontaneous actions” of a few “crazy” youths. The truth is that while they often need to be restrained, the fascists have a certain utility for big capital. The racist terror against the “*Untermenschen*” is a direct product of the resurgence of German imperialism, as the Gruppe Spartakus statement pointed out:

“The ideological basis for the racist mood is the growth of German nationalism. The government used the capitalist reunification to promote a national sense of euphoria over the strengthening of Germany. Having regained its international economic centrality, German imperialism intends to begin throwing its weight around. The ruling class would prefer to send *Bundeswehr* soldiers to intervene in the Yugoslav civil war today, disguised as European or UN ‘peacekeepers,’ ...in the Baltics all agencies of the [German] state ministries are actively helping to reestablish capitalist misery with ‘German order.’ And their antennae are pointing in the direction of the ‘former Eastern regions’: ‘German claims’ on Poland, Kaliningrad and Czechoslovakia are discussed daily in the bourgeois press. German capital already sets the tone in Europe—and the planned ‘EC 92’ will further consolidate Germany’s position.”

Since the summer of 1991 the governing capitalist parties and the opposition Social Democrats have been hotly debating Germany’s asylum policy. Germany has a fairly liberal law written into its constitution that grants extensive procedural and appeal rights to asylum seekers. Most of the quarter million asylum seekers who arrived in 1991 came from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Rumania and Bulgaria. They include many Roma and Sinti (people often referred to as “gypsies”) and Kurds fleeing persecution. Very few (6.7 percent in 1991) of those who seek asylum can meet the stringent requirements necessary to become permanent residents. Many of those ruled ineligible for asylum are deported to their place of origin to face prison, torture or to fall victim to pogromists.

Germany has no legal provision for granting citizenship to immigrants. Very few of the four million so-called “guest workers,” or even their German-born children, are eligible for German citizenship. The few immigrants who are accepted usually cannot retain their

former citizenship. Since Germany ceased its “guest worker” program in 1972, the government has consistently sought to pressure those from outside the EC to leave.

German immigration law includes a constitutional “right of return” for people of “German ancestry” living within Germany’s 1937 boundaries (i.e., the former German Democratic Republic and parts of Poland and the former USSR). This “right of return” has been extended to those whose ancestors were German, such as the Volga Germans who settled in the Ukraine during the reign of Catherine the Great. So far some two million *Aussiedler* (as they are called) have migrated to West Germany since 1989. These “real Germans” receive special treatment: automatic German citizenship, full pension eligibility and special assistance in housing, employment and German language instruction.

But even these “ethnic Germans” are increasingly confronted with German nationalism. Oscar Lafontaine, Social Democratic Party (SPD) candidate for chancellor in 1990, wants to halt the flood of *Aussiedler* into Germany. This position is shared by a large section of the German bourgeoisie, who would prefer that the “ethnic Germans” of the East remain in Poland and the former USSR as a bridgehead for German imperialism.

The wrangle over the asylum policy in the *Bundestag* (German parliament) is over how best to stop the tens of thousands of asylum seekers currently entering Germany every month. All parties agree that people seeking asylum should be held in isolated camps. The ruling Christian Democratic and Christian Social Union parties want a constitutional amendment so that potential immigrants can be stopped at the border or immediately deported. The Liberal members of the governing coalition and the Social Democrats of the opposition propose instead to speed up processing so that asylum seekers can be expelled more rapidly. Social Democratic state governments have threatened asylum seekers with deportation if they leave their assigned place of residence for any reason—even to escape fascist firebomb attacks.

The upsurge of nationalism touched off by capitalist reunification has produced a significant shift to the right on the immigrant question by the Social Democrats. The SPD’s campaign in the state elections in Bremen last year was full of nationalist-racist rhetoric. Last summer the SPD state government flatly refused to accept any more Romanian or Polish asylum seekers. The SPD mayor of Bremen called for a limit to the number of *Armutsluechtlinge* (so-called “poverty refugees”) allowed into Germany. In spite of their attempts to adapt to the growing racist-nationalist mood among many voters, both the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats are losing ground to the far-right Republikaner Party and the racist DVU (German Peoples Union).

The April state elections in Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Wuerttemberg catapulted far-right parties into both parliaments. In Schleswig-Holstein, where 6.3 percent of the electorate voted for the xenophobic DVU, 30,000 former SPD voters, mostly from urban working-class districts suffering from high unemployment and severe housing shortages, went over to the far right. In Baden-Wuerttemberg, the Republikaners captured 10.9

percent of the vote. These results have accelerated the other parties’ movement to the right.

The Greens, who belong to the governing coalitions in four states, no longer campaign for immigrants to have local voting rights. The Green Party in the West and the Buendnis 90-Greens in the East (who have deputies in parliament) have both signaled their willingness to limit the number of asylum seekers allowed into Germany. The Party of Democratic Socialism (the social-democratic descendant of the DDR’s former Stalinist ruling party) calls for more cops and “better training” to protect immigrants from attack.

The bourgeois media is constantly blaming immigrants for the explosion of racist violence. To secure “social peace,” they say, immigrants should become less visible or consider leaving Germany. The governing conservative parties as well as the Social Democrats try to assign blame for the current pogroms on the totalitarian mind-set instilled by the DDR. This is a well-worn anti-communist theme—the supposed “unity” of the ends of the political spectrum. The bourgeois politicians who push this anti-communism cannot explain why there have been proportionally more attacks on individual immigrants in the old Federal Republic than in the five eastern states. The Gruppe Spartakus leaflet pointed to the connection between the upsurge in racist terror in the former DDR and capitalist restoration:

“The collapse of production and resulting unemployment is atomizing and demoralizing the working class. The reactionary yellow press tries to find a scapegoat for the results of this capitalist initiative: immigrants are blamed for all ‘social evils’—drugs, crime and unemployment.”

How Strong are the Fascists?

There is a tendency among German leftists to see a direct parallel between the current pogroms and the Nazi terror during the Weimar Republic. Terms like “Fourth Reich,” “continuity of fascism,” “daily fascism” and “sneaking fascism” are widely used in the left press. The anarchist *Autonomen* use the term “fascism” more indiscriminately than the rest because they never acknowledged the difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism in the first place.

In the past several years the Spartakist Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD—German followers of James Robertson’s Spartacist League/U.S.) has also begun talking about a “Fourth Reich.” When challenged, SpAD supporters argue that their use of the term “Fourth Reich” to describe Germany after the absorption of the DDR is merely a matter of numerical sequence. Yet in Germany, and internationally, the term “Fourth Reich” is invariably associated with fascist rule. It is used by leftists precisely because of this connotation. But such terms only have the effect of confusing people who take them seriously. The Gruppe Spartakus leaflet addressed the notion that Germany is again on the brink of fascism:

“Despite the obvious racist consensus in the bourgeois camp, it would be a mistake to think that the German bourgeoisie today needs to play the fascist card to preserve its class rule. The existing fascist gangs are not yet mass movements based upon an impoverished and desperate petty bourgeoisie (comparable to that of the Wei-

mar Republic). Today, smashing bourgeois democracy is not on the agenda.

"Today the ruling class is worried about 'Germany's image' in the world. German imperialism aspires to a more important role in the imperialist 'New World Order.' The imperialist rulers fear that further growth of the fascist terrorists could pose an obstacle to their plans, and that the image of the 'ugly German' could scare away valuable allies."

Pacifism—A Dangerous Illusion

If the German bourgeoisie has no need to turn to Nazi thugs for salvation, it also recognizes that the fascist formations represent a valuable auxiliary to the state's official bodies of armed men. The Gruppe Spartakus has warned against the dangerous illusions peddled by liberals, pacifists and reformist utopians who call on the capitalist state to "outlaw the fascists:"

"The bourgeoisie uses these gangs for their own purposes, sometimes more, sometimes less. For example, today the fascists do the dirty work by frightening away potential asylum seekers and by helping to drive 'unwanted' immigrants out of the country. This heated nationalist climate makes it much easier for the capitalists to divert attention from their attacks on the working class—wage cuts, firings, etc."

Since the ebbing of the revolutionary tide that swept Germany after World War I, the bourgeoisie, with the complicity of the Social Democracy, has kept the workers totally disarmed. This is codified in strict national gun control laws. The Social-Democratic bureaucracy supports a bourgeois monopoly of force and actively discourages workers from defending picket lines.

The SPD and the trade-union leadership, singing along in the nationalist chorus, have made no serious effort to resist the racist attacks. Their only "activity" has been to issue a few limp calls for passive "defense" of immigrant living quarters, while vigorously condemning physical resistance to the fascists as "provocative."

Whenever the German fascists have tried to march or demonstrate in the last few decades, groups of young militants have attempted to confront them. In almost every case massive police formations have defended the fascists and attacked the protesters. During the past few months, as the emboldened fascists have begun to march in greater numbers, chanting "foreigners out" and "kill the reds," police armed with water cannons, tear gas, and batons have routinely attacked anyone trying to stop the pogromists. Immigrants who have picked up the jagged pieces of concrete hurled through their windows and thrown them back at their tormentors are denounced by the cops and the gutter press for violently disrupting "civil peace!"

The German government has not to date released an official tally of the number of immigrants murdered by fascists in 1991, but there were probably about twenty. During the same period only two fascists have fallen. One Nazi was killed while leading an attack on a sex shop in Dresden. In Berlin, a member of the far-right Republikaner Party was killed by a Turkish immigrant who chose to defend himself. The Turkish youth was promptly charged with murder, but after standing trial was eventually acquitted. This is probably because of

angry demonstrations by immigrants and anti-fascists demanding his release as well as the possibility of a negative international reaction.

The *Bleiberecht* Dodge

At officially sponsored trade-union demonstrations, the demand for *Bleiberecht* (the legal right to remain) dominates the banners and speeches. Many left groups capitulate to the union bureaucrats' at best half-hearted defense of immigrants by uncritically taking up this slogan. As Gruppe Spartakus wrote:

"The DGB leadership has for years refused to demand the full integration of immigrants into society. They hide their nationalist prejudices and political cowardice behind demands for *Bleiberecht*. It would doubtless be better if asylum seekers had a legal right to remain, rather than simply being deported as they are today. But it is wrong to limit oneself to a demand that is only aimed at preventing deportations. Limiting oneself to *Bleiberecht* implicitly accepts second and third-class status for immigrants and also denies their democratic rights: [including] the right to work, the right to choose a place of residence, the right to social benefits and the right to vote.

"Many reactionaries can accept immigrants if they are granted no more than *Bleiberecht*—as long as they work for low wages and take the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs."

The German left tends to accept the liberal, petty-bourgeois notion that social, national and racial prejudice can be overcome under capitalism if only decent people would stand up for human rights. One radical-sounding expression of this sentiment is the call for "open borders," which is endorsed by a variety of groups, including Gruppe Arbeitermacht, the German co-thinkers of Workers Power. The petty-bourgeois anarchist *Autonomen*, who also raise the "open borders" demand, are more straightforward about their motivations than the ostensibly Trotskyist Gruppe Arbeitermacht. The *Autonomen* argue that because the German working class is bought off, only mass immigration can furnish a basis for struggle and social change.

While the call for "open borders" is more radical than the union bureaucrats' demand for *Bleiberecht*, it implies that the German bourgeoisie can be pressured into redressing the wrongs done to people victimized by imperialism by permitting unlimited immigration. Communists generally uphold the democratic right of individuals to live where they choose and oppose laws limiting immigration into imperialist countries. But we do not attempt to transform liberal sentiments into a utopian/reformist answer to the gross inequities of the capitalist world order. In the face of the capitalists' attempts to divide the proletariat, Gruppe Spartakus has raised the call for *full citizenship rights* for all immigrants and asylum seekers. They have also consistently attempted to link the struggle to ensure full democratic rights to the fight for working-class power and the establishment of a rational planned economy.

Labor/Immigrant Self-Defense Can Smash Fascist Terror!

In their statement the Gruppe Spartakus attempted to

point to the necessary next step in the struggle against the fascist scourge:

“When we understand that we cannot expect the bourgeois democrats, their state or their police to really resist the fascists, it follows that defense has to be organized independently of, and even against, this state. The question of how and with whom this struggle is to be organized becomes more important every day.

“Trade unionists and the unorganized, both Germans and immigrants, must build self-defense groups together, based on the unions. Such groups could be a first step toward mobilizing the working class—politically and organizationally—to smash the fascist gangs.

“It would certainly be an illusion to expect such a thing of the social-democratic DGB [German trade-union federation] bureaucrats. Anti-fascist and leftist workers in the unions and the factories have to begin now to struggle against Nazi terror. It is possible to organize workers groups in the plants and trade unions to begin building integrated self-defense groups with immigrants—even without the agreement of the bureaucrats. It would only take a few actions in which fascist gangs were successfully physically confronted to show the effectiveness of such groups in defending immigrants.”

The participation of groups from the printers’ and teachers’ unions in the *Mahnwachen* showed that elements of the working class are alarmed by the spread of fascist terrorism. For decades German and immigrant workers in the unions have fought together against the bosses in coal mines, steel mills and auto factories around the country. The Gruppe Spartakus pointed out that this common experience can provide a starting point for building integrated worker-immigrant self defense groups.

For Class-Struggle Politics!

The “success” of class-collaborationist business unionism was due to German capitalism’s relative competitive advantage in the world market. The current global economic contraction and increased international competition, combined with the immense cost of absorbing the former DDR and the increased overhead occasioned by the economic integration of the European Community compel the German bourgeoisie to launch a major offensive against the working class. Capitalist “rationalization” has already closed many mines and steel mills, and tens of thousands more jobs are scheduled for destruction as German corporations prepare to shift production to low-wage countries.

Last October a special government “Deregulation Commission” finally issued its long-awaited report. The report called for rolling back the legal rights of workers in order to make German capitalism more competitive. The Commission proposed that the employers or the state have the power to overrule industry-wide contracts and dictate lower wages, reduce benefits and impose substandard working conditions in “less competitive” businesses. Ex-DDR workers are already getting less than half West German wages, and the report suggested that workers from other European Community countries employed in Germany should be paid at the lesser wage rates prevailing in their country of origin.

A class-struggle leadership in the unions would seek to block attempts to split the working class by fighting to ensure that every worker doing a job gets paid at the highest union rate. The best way to oppose layoffs is through a national campaign to divide the work according to the number of workers—with no loss in pay.

A class-struggle orientation, which poses the problems of the masses in clear class terms and allows even the more backward elements among the exploited to understand the situation and to identify their real enemies, can dramatically undercut the dangerous appeal of fascist demagogues. The recent electoral gains of the far right and the savage attacks on immigrants have been encouraged by the prostration of the pro-capitalist misleaders of the SPD and DGB.

The fascists are a useful lever for German capitalism as it prepares to intensify its class war on the proletariat. These depraved killers can and must be stopped. The Gruppe Spartakus statement concluded:

“The fascists must be driven off the streets now, before they gain a mass following. Self-defense groups based on the unions could patrol immigrant homes, streets and subways and drive the fascists back into their holes.

“The seizure of power by the fascists in 1933 was a world-historic defeat for the working class. The main responsibility rested on the Social Democratic Party. The Stalinist Communist Party of Germany, with its ultra-leftist politics (rejection of united fronts, for instance), was unable to break through the SPD leadership’s loyalty to the capitalist system.

“The left and the workers movement must learn the lessons of this experience!

“No free speech for genocide!

“Full citizenship rights for immigrants!

“For self-defense groups based on the unions to smash the fascist murder gangs!”