

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### An army that wins the peace

*The fight against the flood disaster shows that the economy could recover, if the free market were dumped.*

**F**or years, Germany has been dominated by the inability to create jobs and reduce unemployment, and the nation has heard a whole army of “experts” saying that it is virtually impossible to create domestic jobs in the era of globalization. The government has gone along with that ideology, stating its “commitment” to reduce unemployment, but leaving it to the “market.” So, jobless figures are increasing, and the elites have lost all confidence.

But, something has happened in recent days that proves that something can be done — on condition that it done without the “market.” What has driven the free market out of the picture, at least for the moment, is the flood catastrophe along the Oder River, on Germany’s border with Poland. There, in the struggle to protect the water-logged dikes, a dirigistic approach dominates the scene. The command of all emergency military and civilian operations is firmly in the hands of the Army.

It is the biggest peacetime deployment of the German Armed Forces since they were reestablished in 1956. At the peak of the flood, in late July, on the 167 kilometers of dikes along the Oder, more than 10,000 soldiers, close to 3,000 vehicles (including 2,500 heavy trucks), 85 inflatable rafts, and 54 helicopters were deployed around the clock, to reinforce the dikes, prepare evacuations of the population, build reserve dikes, and so on.

All engineering units of the Bundeswehr have been mobilized, many being deployed with earth-moving

equipment, heavy transport vehicles, and water pumps. Close to 8 million sandbags have been packed onto the water-logged dikes, to prevent them from being swept away by the waters of the Oder, which exerted 6-7 tons of pressure on each square meter of dike structure.

The efficiency of the Bundeswehr mobilization, which is widely recognized among the population and a good part of even those media that have an anti-military profile, is based on the fact that the military does not operate on free-market principles, but on the basis of task-orientation. Unlike the political domain, characterized by budget-cutting that kills any impulse to do anything, the military asks, first, what must be done, and, second, how best it can be done. “We are generally working on the normal logistical system of the Bundeswehr, as it has been designed for crises — with fast and short tracks and the usual division of labor,” Maj. Gen. Hans-Peter von Kirchbach, who commands the 10,000 soldiers from throughout Germany who have been deployed, in a rotating system, to the flood front, said in an interview with the daily *Die Welt* on Aug. 2.

“If the Bundeswehr needs anything from the state of Brandenburg [which borders the Oder], and this is very often the case, special equipment from construction firms, for example, for the supply of small stones, all these things are being handled fast, and without any bureaucratic apparatus,” he said, explaining the cooperation between civilian and military authorities. It works, because the command is not

in the hands of bureaucrats who have an uncanny ability to slow things down, to make projects that could be finished in two years, take 20 years.

The military is in charge at the Oder, because Defense Minister Volker R  he and Brandenburg Gov. Manfred Stolpe have given the Bundeswehr a free hand, unconstrained by the budget crisis, to organize the operation in the most efficient way possible, including all the supplies from the civilian sector.

And indeed, the Bundeswehr is the only institution in Germany that can carry out such operations. The fact that Poland and the Czech Republic, which have been worst hit by the flood, mobilized their armies too late to do any good, proves the case. “That which has helped us here most and enabled us to get from speed zero to 100 fast, for this deployment, is the fact that the Bundeswehr has a well-functioning system of leadership,” General von Kirchbach said. “It has been designed for military missions, but it is also fit for a catastrophe of this type. . . . Our technical special units, like Army engineers, ABC defense troops, ground Air Forces, are being trained for military missions. What they are mastering, helps us now, in this catastrophe situation.”

The Army will stay on after the flood. Defense Minister R  he declared on Aug. 3 that, “for us, the task is: The water goes away, the Army stays. . . . The Army can repair roads and make them usable again; it can remove sandbags, help in the restoration of the infrastructure.”

For everyone who has eyes, the way the “combat” against the flood has been organized, shows the way the economy can be put back to work. One just has to throw the free market out, and install a dirigistic system, which does things where they have to be done, and does them in the shortest timespan.