

Report From Germany by Rainer Apel

Monday Rallies Spread in Europe

The German protest wave against austerity is spilling over into Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France.

One of the priorities of mainstream media reports in playing down the importance and scope of the Monday Rally movement in Germany, during the last two months, has been to contain the ferment, not letting it encourage similar protest movements in other parts of Europe. Well, this trick may have worked some of the time, but definitely not all the time. The breakout of the German protest ferment occurred in late September: In Switzerland, the labor union of public sector workers staged a day of national protest in eight cities, on Sept. 23, against the government's plans for brutal budget cuts of almost 10 billion Swiss francs; and in the Netherlands, a protest wave with warning strikes developed in several cities at the same time, in protest of the Dutch government's own version of the German government's Hartz IV austerity package. On Oct. 2, the day of the national protest rally of 45,000 citizens in Berlin, which the mainstream media proclaimed to be "the end of the Monday Rally movement," about 250,000 Dutch took to the streets of Amsterdam—the biggest labor union activity in that country in 20 to 25 years.

These developments in Switzerland and in the Netherlands, for years the alleged "beacons of social stability" in Europe, were encouraged by the protest wave in Germany. Also, in France, several cities in addition to those where the LaRouche Youth have been holding Monday Rallies in support of the German rallies, have begun to see similar actions. The protest genie is out of the bottle.

In Germany, however, an intense conflict has emerged between those who are committed to continuing the Monday rallies, and those who want to phase them out. The government and the mainstream media have consistently opposed the rallies, and leaders of the labor unions tend to be content with modifications of the Hartz IV austerity package rather than working for its abolition. Many local labor union sections, as well as many local sections of the established major political parties, however, want to continue the protest rallies. But the Green Party that has proven to be the "ugly party," being the main propaganda machine for the new austerity policies. There are numerous leftist groups and organizations that opportunistically joined the Monday Rallies from early August on, only to promote their own objective of toppling the present Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. Many of these have already deserted the Monday Rally movement, and more are expected to follow, since fewer citizens are taking part in leftist-dominated rallies. Most citizens want the government to change policies, but they do not want to overthrow Social Democrat Schröder only to make way for Angela Merkel, the neo-con chairwoman of the Christian Democrats, who would definitely be much worse.

At the peak of the Monday Rally movement in Germany in mid-August, a quarter million citizens took to the streets in more than 240 cities. Now rallies will be called off in many cities. But unlike in western Germany, where the political corruption and demoralization of the citizens is deeper,

citizens in eastern Germany (where the protest wave emerged, initiated by the LaRouche movement in Leipzig on July 12), will continue the rallies in many cities. There is more of a spirit of revolt in eastern Germany, and this has to do with the memory of the developments of 15 years ago, when the Communist regime of East Germany collapsed as a result of the wave of Monday mass rallies in cities like Leipzig.

Because it is now the 15th anniversary of those events, citizens in eastern Germany are being constantly reminded of that Autumn of protest in 1989, by exhibits, symposiums, interviews, and radio and television clips from the period September-November 1989. Activists from that period are now being invited to tell school classes what was going on in their cities 15 years ago, and where the Monday Rally movement comes from. Citizens in eastern Germany are reminded again of the turbulent events between Oct. 1, 1989, when the first sealed trains with eastern German refugees from the West German embassy in Prague went westward, and Oct. 9, when in an explosion of outrage, 70,000 citizens took part in a mass rally in Leipzig. Eastern Germans are being reminded that on Oct. 18, the then-leader of the East German regime, Erich Honecker was forced to step down, and that on Nov. 9, the Berlin Wall was opened.

In a rare occurrence in recent human history, the eastern German revolution of September-November 1989 was totally peaceful, and it changed not only the course of German history, but of Europe as a whole. The issues of the sabotaged 1990 revolution have now been put back on the table by the LaRouche movement, with a programmatic perspective of Eurasian Land-Bridge development, to revive the economies of Europe.