

# Defender of German Terrorists

Klaus Croissant

Special to The New York Times

BONN, Oct. 28—A Left Bank neighborhood in Paris was teeming with policemen on Sept. 30 when a West German lawyer, Klaus Croissant, was arrested at the request of the Bonn Government. The charges: complicity with terrorists and propaganda for a criminal association.

Man  
in the  
News

The small apartment that French radical friends had let Mr. Croissant use as a hideout is in a building — 110 Avenue du Général-Leclerc — in which Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known as Lenin, wrote pamphlets 65 years earlier. The 46-year-old lawyer from Stuttgart, a fugitive from his country's justice, must have savored the coincidence.

As counsel for Andreas Baader, the leftist guerrilla leader who died in Stuttgart's Stammheim Prison together with two other convicts on Oct. 18, Mr. Croissant has never left any doubt that he regarded himself as a revolutionary, although he insists he has nothing to do with terrorism.

Like many members of the small but vehement West German radical movement, Mr. Croissant comes from the middle class. He is the descendant of a French Huguenot family that 300 years ago fled to Germany to escape religious persecution.

The son of a prosperous drugstore owner in a small town near Stuttgart, Mr. Croissant went to law school in Tübingen and Heidelberg, and at the age of 30 opened a lawyer's office in Stuttgart. He quickly made a name for himself as a specialist in divorce and inheritance cases.

A bachelor, Mr. Croissant has retained many friends and contacts among the well-to-do in Stuttgart and the Rhineland, a segment of West German society that he and his leftist friends and clients have vowed to destroy.

Through most of the 1960's, the successful young lawyer was known as a man-about-Stuttgart, a tireless partygoer, a gourmet and a frequent guest at art shows. A change in Mr. Croissant's outlook and lifestyle occurred when he teamed up with a younger colleague, Jorg Lang, who has since gone underground.

## Employed Many Young Women

From Stuttgart's fashionable Königsstrasse Mr. Croissant's law office moved to a sidestreet. The new walk-up offices soon filled up with long-haired young people in blue jeans and a changing pool of young and attractive woman secretaries and assistants.

Investigators of the Federal Criminal Bureau charge that Mr. Croissant between 1967 and 1972 gradually drifted into the "terrorist scene" and made his law practice into a front for clandestine activities. Personal involvement with extremists much younger than he was may have been a major motivation, these officials suggest.

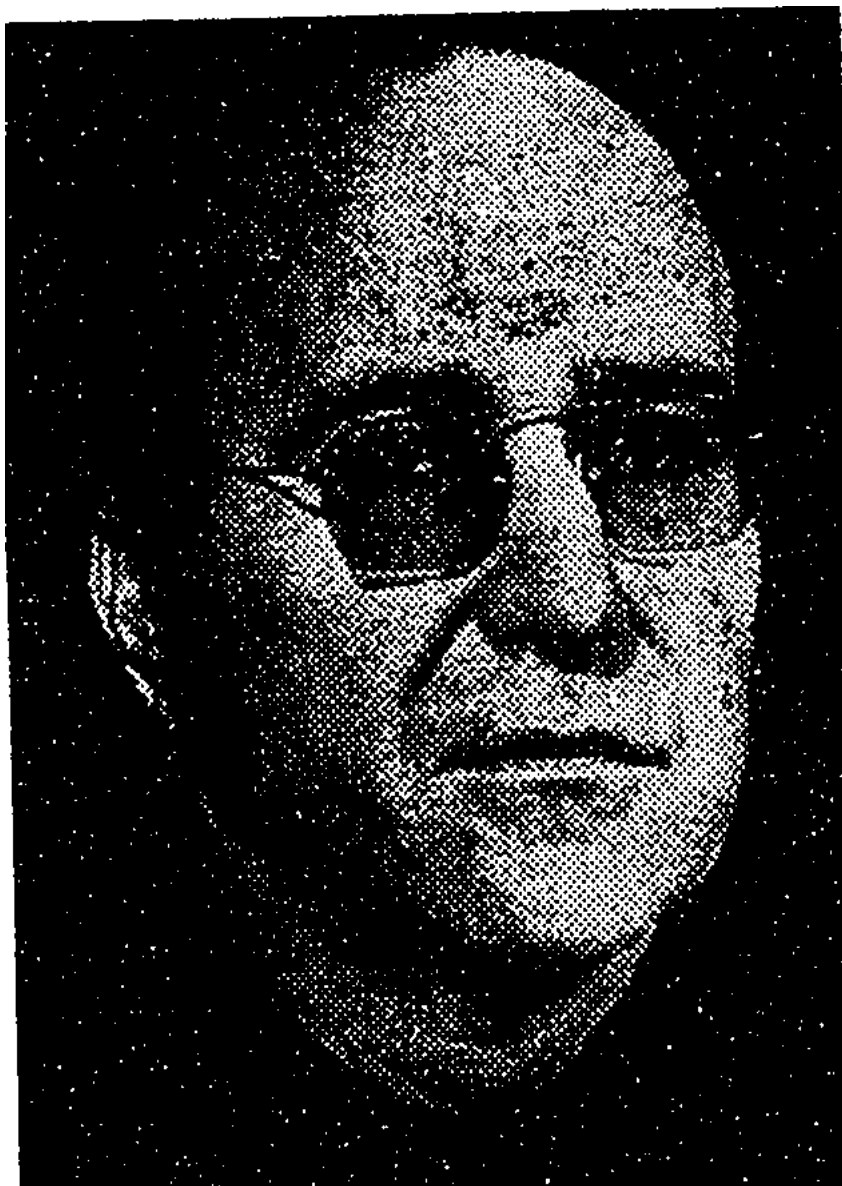
Persons in Stuttgart who have known the lawyer for years say that young leftists whom he had started cultivating at first regarded him as a liberal attracted by radical chic but after initial distrust found his professional competence useful.

In any case, the lawyer seemed to become interested only in the cases of his new radical clients, especially Mr. Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, the leaders of West Germany's deadliest terrorist network, the Baader-Meinhof gang.

The state of Baden-Württemberg built a special maximum-security facility in the Stuttgart suburb of Stammheim for the trial of Mr. Baader, Mrs. Meinhof and other members of the gang. The trial started in May 1975. Mr. Croissant headed a panel of radical lawyers who defended the Baader-Meinhof members against charges of multiple murder and other crimes.

Outside the courtroom, Mr. Croissant became a vocal and indefatigable advocate for the Red Army Faction, the name that the Baader-Meinhof gang had chosen for itself. He lectured and lobbied and helped organize international protests against what he described as inhuman practices and torture in Stammheim Prison.

Mr. Croissant induced Jean-Paul Sartre to visit the Stammheim prisoners. When Mr. Sartre arrived in Stuttgart,



Sven Simon/Katherine Young

*Serves the radical cause with oratory and legal argument.*

the lawyer placed his car and driver at the aged philosopher's disposal.

The police allege that Mr. Croissant's driver, Hans-Joachim Klein, turned up in Vienna in December 1975 as one of the terrorists who under the leadership of "Carlos," the mysterious Latin American plotter, attacked the headquarters of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Mr. Klein has disappeared, as have many other young men and—especially—women who once were in Mr. Croissant's employ or were frequent visitors to his law offices. The pictures of several of them are now on the "most wanted" posters disseminated throughout Western Europe in the hunt for the kidnappers and killers of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, West Germany's leading industrialist. Mr. Schleyer was killed by his abductors within hours after Mr. Baader and the two other convicts died in their Stuttgart cells.

Long before the Baader-Meinhof trial ended, Mrs. Meinhof was found dead in her cell. The medical examiner said it was suicide.

Last April, the Stuttgart court sentenced Mr. Baader and two associates, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe, to life imprisonment. When the three died in prison, the authorities' verdict was again suicide.

In Paris, Mr. Croissant, who then was already being held in prison, maintained that the three had been murdered.

The lawyer had sought refuge in France last July, jumping \$37,000 bail at home. He had been arrested in Stuttgart on conspiracy and subversion charges contained in a 260-page dossier but was released soon afterward.

In France Mr. Croissant, though ostensibly in hiding, granted interviews and appeared on television. He also wrote to President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing asking for political asylum in the country of his ancestors.

A Stuttgart judge issued an international arrest warrant, and Bonn asked the French authorities to search for the fugitive. The West German authorities alleged that Mr. Croissant's law office in Stuttgart had for years been functioning as the secret center for a vast terrorist underground in West Germany.

When the police closed in on the building in Paris, they warned the concierge to look for shelter because there might be some shooting. But the lawyer surrendered without resistance.

So far no one is known to have seen Mr. Croissant engage personally in violence. He has ostensibly served the radical cause with oratory and legal argument only.