

Violent Crime Wave Stirs Debate in West Germany

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BONN, Jan. 20—A wave of violent crime highlighted by the long and intensive hunt for a gang of anarchists has stirred a wide and sometimes strident debate among West Germans.

Recent weeks have seen such spectacular incidents as the kidnapping of an Essen millionaire, his ransoming for seven million marks (over \$2-million) and the seizure of his captors, as well as a daylight robbery of a downtown Cologne bank in which detectives offered themselves as hostages. The bank robbers were eventually captured.

However, it is the case of Andreas Baader, who is said to have set fire to a Frankfurt department store in 1968, and Ulrike Meinhof, a gifted left-wing journalist who has presumably joined him on a crime spree that has seized and divided public opinion.

Police authorities attribute at least four deaths to the activities of the gang—two policemen shot down in the streets and two alleged members of the gang.

Officials also attribute six or more bank robberies to the Baader-Meinhof group with a total loot of more than half a million marks.

Search for Cars Fruitless

In the last week two dragnet operations have been carried out in search of stolen automobiles believed to have been used by the group, with no success.

Six members of the original group that gathered around Andreas Baader, 28 years old, and Ulrike Meinhof, 37, have been apprehended. One self-confessed member, Karl-Heinz Ruhland, 33, is on trial in Düsseldorf this week, and has told the court in considerable detail of his work with the gang.

He testified that the gang had found sanctuary with sympathetic journalists and university teachers during the last 12 months in various parts of the country.

This afternoon the government of Lower Saxony suspended Dr. Peter Brückner, a professor of psychology at the University of Hanover, who was one of those Ruhland said had hidden gang members in his home.

According to current police estimates, the Baader-Meinhof gang has been reduced to about six, all of them relatively young. They are said to have sworn an oath to "support the armed struggle" against West Germany's ruling establishment.

The furor over the gang and

other crime has led to grim calls for law and order from West Germany's conservatives, especially from the Christian Union leader, Rainer Barzel. Police chiefs in Frankfurt and Munich have ordered special sharpshooting courses for their patrolmen.

The avowedly leftist politics of the Baader-Meinhof group has polarized opinion here.

Last week the best-selling author, Heinrich Böll, writing in *Der Spiegel* magazine, accused the conservative papers of the Axel Springer group of "calling for lynch justice" against the gang.

He asserted that reporting in the Springer tabloid, *Bild Zeitung*, had reached a point of tendentiousness "that isn't cryptofascist, any more, not fascistoid, but naked fascism, agitation, lies, dirt."

Mr. Böll, who is president of the International Pen Club, demanded "free passage" for Ulrike Meinhof to a court of justice.

Strong Reaction from Right

The reaction from the right was just as vehement. A Springer writer called on Mr. Böll to quit his Pen Club post because he had defended the gang.

The debate has shown, however, that fewer West Germans are attracted by stern calls for law and order than in previous years, when a serious crime was almost automatically followed by a campaign for reintroduction of the death penalty, abolished in 1949.

Nor is the policeman who shoots first and kills as safe from criticism as he used to be. The hunt for the Baader-Meinhof gang has changed that aspect of public opinion, too. Two purported members of the gang, both students in their twenties, were killed by police bullets last year.