Associated Press

West Germans wait by armored vehicle at Chancellery in Bonn for glimpse of officials meeting on kidnapping

A Reporter's Notebook: Bonn Is Gloomier Than Ever As It Awaits Outcome of Schleyer's Kidnapping

By PAUL HOFMANN
Special to The New York Times

BONN, Sept. 11—Rain clouds have been hanging over the capital of West Germany for several days now, deepening the gloom that has enveloped it ever since urban guerrillas armed with submachine guns kidnapped the country's top industrial spokesman, Hanns-Martin Schleyer.

"The worst week in Bonn's history," said a Munich newspaper in a headline. The history of this city on the Rhine goes back to the Celts and the Romans; what the Munich daily probably meant was that the mood in Bonn had not been so depressed since the Government of the Federal Republic was established here in 1949.

Nobody has ever contended that Bonn is a dazzling place, but in some neighborhoods it does have a quiet provincial charm. In the historic center tourists from other parts of Germany and from as far away as Japan keep crowding into the small graceful house where Beethoven was born.

It is official Bonn in the modern government district on the Rhine embankment far to the south of the center that has been a study in grimness through these days of waiting for an end to the kidnapped man's ordeal, and of worrying about the wave of terrorism that has engulfed this prosperous country.

A Sinister Looking Ghetto

Bonn's federal enclave with its geometric, institutional-style buildings has always struck visitors as singularly joyless, although great efforts at landscaping have been made, and flowers abound. These days, however, the government ghetto looks outright sinister.

Armored cars patrol nearly empty streets. A lone stroller is eyed suspiciously by young men in plainclothes standing around in clusters and speaking into walkie-talkies. The steel gates outside Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's office are shut. Policemen with automatic weapons are posted in front of villas where Government members or high officials must have found a refuge from the rigors of their offices.

Swarms of armed guards escort the heavy dark limousines with morose-looking members of the Government's "crisis staff" riding—presumably behind bullet-proof glass—to and from emergency meetings at all hours.

•

"Bonn has suddenly clammed up," a resident correspondent complains. West German politicians and officials have always been easily accessible to the press, often eager to provide information, sometimes in greater detail than expected. All this has changed.

Officials who ought to know about the huge police effort to track the kidnappers or about the Government attempts to free their captive through negotiations do not answer their phones and do not return calls.

The Interior Ministry where a ninth-floor "crisis center" is staffed around the clock became off limits for anyone who does not work there. The Government's official spokesmen do answer phone calls, but only to say that there is a news blackout on anything related to the kidnapping case.

Federal ministers have been advised by security specialists to change their itineraries and schedules every day, and some members of the Government have slept in a different place every night.

•

A good deal of the hunt for kidnappers is a matter of electronics. Computer disks spin at the Interior Ministry and at the antiterrorism unit at Bad Godesberg, a Rhine resort town that has become a southern suburb of Bonn. Other computers are busy at the Karlsruhe headquarters of the Federal Criminal Bureau and in police centers in West Germany's 10 states and West Berlin.

All available data on what is known in West Germany as the "terrorist scene" have for years been fed into vast electronic systems, and every scrap of information that investigators think may be a clue is checked against the stored mass of knowledge.

"The trouble is," a police officer explained, "that many of our computers aren't compatible. West Germany is a highly decentralized country, and each state has its own police with its own red tape and its own data retrieval system. What we need is an F.B.I."

The prestige of the Federal Bureau of Investigation may not be what it used to be in the United States, but in West Germany it is high. The current series of ideologically motivated murders, kidnappings, bombings and other crimes may well hasten a trend toward building a superagency for law and order here.

There is already a nucleus in West Germany—the Federal Criminal Bureau. When it was created 26 years ago, it had just 231 employees. Now it has 2,500, and many new ones are being hired and trained while a strong law-and-order lobby is pressing for more funds and power for the bureau.

•

"The militant anarchists aren't all wrong when they say we are becoming a police state," a radical student who insisted that she was against any form of violence remarked over a cup of espresso. "Only, the nihilism of the kind of desperadoes who staged the Cologne kidnapping speeds up the coming of the police state."

The student, who wants to become a teacher, criticized not only the guerrilla strategy of the militant anarchists, but also their language.

"Their German is atrocious," she said. "Their dreary messages to the authorities and the press are written in a lingo that is half barracks bluster, maybe to show that their Red Army Faction is a real military movement, and half pseudo-Marxist jargon that sounds like a translation from Albanian."

An Estimate Is Revised Upward

When one of West Germany's leading bankers, Jürgen Ponto, was murdered by two young women and a man in his home near Frankfurt—presumably because he resisted being kidnapped—in July, officials said there were just a few hundred terrorists at large in the country.

The estimate has now been revised upward. Even before Mr. Schleyer was abducted and his driver and three police bodyguards were killed, the chief of the Federal Criminal Bureau, Horst Herold, told a parliamentary committee that there was a hard core of 1,200 "highly dangerous" ultraleftists and in addition 6,000 sympathizers who may help and hide the activists when they are on the run.

Since the Cologne ambush, which was staged with guerrilla-handbook accuracy, many people here suspect in anguish that the manpower and logistical base of the shadowy movement that wants to destroy the West German consumer society may be much stronger than had been thought until recently.

"Who are they?" a middle-aged high school teacher asked uneasily. "They are in our midst, and yet we don't know them. They never gave us a chance for dialogue. The police never managed to infiltrate their tiny secretive cells."

The teacher apprehensively added a remark that one hears often in West Germany these day: "The good years may be over."

The New York Times
Published: September 12, 1977