

Interview with the West German

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Resistance!

Recently, *Libertad* was able to interview *Weinke Zitzlaff*, sister of *Ulrike Meinhof* (assassinated leader of the Red Army Fraction, RAF) and activist in her own right, about the nature of the revolutionary resistance in West Germany and the current political situation there.

Libertad: What can you tell us about your trip to the US?

Weinke Zitzlaff: I came to New York City, along with other people, to attend the discussion in the United Nations' Human Rights Committee. The German government has just completed its second report about human rights in the Federal Republic of Germany. These reports are debated in the Human Rights Committee's public hearings and committee members pose critical questions and comments to the government representatives.

In the report, the federal government asserts that prisoners from "the terrorist scene," (as it refers to political prisoners), "are subjected to the same legally regulated imprisonment and enforcement conditions as other delinquents." Only "in view of the special danger which exists," it would be "indispensable to take certain security precautions during their detention which, in each individual case, are re-examined at certain intervals to ascertain whether they remain necessary." (as stated in the German government's report.) The government's first report to the UN Human Rights Committee in 1977 also denied the existence of political prisoners and human rights violations.

In order to inform the members of the UN Human Rights Committee about the real situation in the FRG's prisons, we compiled information and documented our findings in a report entitled *Fatal Shootings, Confinement in Isolation, Killings in Prisons, the Manipulation of the Right to Legal Defense and*

Criminalizing the Struggle Against Confinement in Isolation. This documentation was first published in 1983 and reprinted in the FRG in 1985. It was presented before the UN by 20 well-known international personalities, i.e., Eva Forest from Spain; Michaelis Raptis, Georgios Wocsis and Panayotes Kanelakis from Greece; and others from Switzerland and Great Britain including five members of the European Parliament. This document is already translated into Spanish and will soon be published in Spain.

The members of the Human Rights Committee were impacted by this document and we think, with other documents as well. Some of them posed very important and carefully thought-out questions to the FRG representatives about solitary confinement and the manipulation of the right to legal defense. They correctly argued that solitary confinement and the restricted right to legal defense are not in compliance with the UN Human Rights Covenant. In order to continue our work against solitary confinement and the restriction of the right to legal defense, we felt it was important for us to attend the UN hearings.

L: Tell us about your organization's work.

WZ: Everyone who came to New York to attend the UN hearings has experience with RAF prisoners and solitary confinement, which has been practiced in the FRG since 1971. We work in different groups throughout the FRG. I work in a small anti-imperialist group. I must add that there is

nothing we can call an anti-imperialist organization in the FRG, and there are many people who like us, work in a similar fashion. Theoretically, we follow a Marxist-Leninist orientation. It is necessary to analyze and comprehend that behind the State's repression, with which everyone has much experience, there is capitalism and imperialism which urge the government to work as it does. NATO is the government's main arm in the FRG. We must struggle against capitalism and imperialism as represented in the FRG by the US Army and the German government. But to be successful in this struggle you must have a very decided Marxist-Leninist analysis.

We work, as do others, as closely as possible with the prisoners. However, the government has prohibited me from visiting political prisoners since 1979. Our goal in supporting the prisoners' struggle against solitary confinement is to help the prisoners win the right to meet together in large groups, continue their political work while imprisoned and coordinate that work with us.

L: How is your work related to the ongoing work of the Relatives of Political Prisoners?

WZ: There have been two sisters of FRG political prisoners in New York, too. They work in the relatives group. The relatives of FRG political prisoners first came together in 1974. Since that time, the group has worked very closely together because we understood that it is necessary to fight together, to learn from the prisoners in order to support their struggle against solitary confinement. Since 1972, the prisoners have carried out 9 hunger strikes. In 1977, as a result of a hunger strike, a group of 8 prisoners were held in Stammheim prison for two months. The group was later assassinated by a special police force under the pretext that the 8 were too "dangerous" to live. I am sure you are

familiar with this type of "pretext".

The document I mentioned earlier contains a report written by Ingrid Schubert about the special police raid on Stammheim prison. Ingrid was assassinated later that same year.

The Relatives' Committee attempts to break the government-imposed silence around the prisoners. No German newspapers or radio stations report anything about the solitary confinement. Not only is the media prohibited from disseminating information around the prisoners' cases, but they are also paid not to do so. Many journalists also believe what the government tells them, that there is no solitary confinement or human rights violations in West Germany. Others further believe that there is no need for an anti-imperialist guerrilla group such as the Red Army Fraction and will do everything possible to destroy the struggle.

For instance, in 1981, it was not until the Relatives' Committee took over the offices of the well-known periodical the *Speigel*, that the media was forced to report about the prisoners' hunger-strike.

The Relatives' Committee sponsors several public meetings in cities throughout the FRG to report about the prisoners' conditions. During the 1985 hunger-strike, over 13,000 people attended those meetings. However, the government has done everything in its power to repress the Relatives' Committee. There are constant house searches, accusations and the government even prohibits family visits with the prisoners. But the government's repression has not been able to stop our movement. During the 1984-85 hunger-strike over 3,000 people attended a huge rally held in front of the federal court in Karlsruhe, where the decisions about solitary confinement are made. It was a very militant demonstration organized by the Relatives' Committee and our group. This is the type of work we carry out together.

L: Tell us about the current situation in West Germany.

WZ: The RAF political prisoners and those of the other anti-imperialist resistance groups have been held in solitary confinement in specially-designed, maximum-security prison wings for many years, some of them for as long as ten years. Any prisoner who is alleged to be a member of the RAF, or sympathetic to their cause, is automatically subject to the 24-point statute of pre-trial confinement. For our prisoners this means continual solitary confinement in specially-sealed cells with insect screens or perforated metal in front of the windows, solitary showers, solitary walks in the prison yard, exclusion from all recreational activities, daily inspection of cells, constant "inconspicuous" surveillance, strip searches and cavity searches before and after all visits, including legal visits. The prisoners incarcerated in these special maximum-security wings are isolated from the rest of the prison population at all times and subjected to sensory deprivation and behavior modification. As far back as ten years ago, medical experts testified that most of the political prisoners were unfit to stand trial because of the inhuman prison conditions they are forced to endure.

Many laws which have been enacted since 1975 severely restrict the rights of a defendant. For example, the correspondence between a prisoner and his lawyer is read by a judge. The oral communication between a prisoner and his lawyer is also obstructed by a glass partition in the visitors' room. There is also a law prohibiting collective defense strategies which the courts interpret in such an extensive manner, that some prisoners were denied attorneys for several weeks after their arrest.

Communication during visits of family and friends is also obstructed by a glass partition. You cannot touch each other and you

can hardly see each other because the lights in the visitors' room are always flickering. You can barely hear each other either, because you are forced to speak through a small vent in the partition. Behind the prisoner and the visitor sit 2 or 3 members of the special security police who are present during the entire visit. They write down every word you say and constantly interrupt your conversation. You are not allowed to talk about political matters, hunger-strikes or prison conditions. Actually, all you can safely discuss is the weather.

The RAF prisoners and those of the other anti-imperialist resistance groups demand the following:

- an end to solitary confinement;
- international control;
- treatment in accordance with the basic rights guaranteed under the Geneva Convention;
- uncensored political literature and correspondence; and
- the release of Guenther Sonnenberg.

Guenther Sonnenberg was arrested in May of 1977, after receiving a serious gunshot wound to the head. Since his arrest—for nearly nine years now—Guenther has not received adequate medical care. Of course, we unconditionally support the prisoners' demands.

L: Can you elaborate on the state of the resistance?

WZ: There are several forms of resistance in West Germany. First, there is the peace movement. They oppose the stationing of Cruise missiles and other US weaponry on German soil. They organize mass demonstrations and sit-ins and distribute leaflets at the proposed missile sites. This is a very large pacifist movement, but to date they have not been very successful. Then there is the movement against the construction of Runway West 18, near Frankfurt. This began as an environmental issue, against destroying nature. But we soon discovered that this runway was

being built for use by the NATO and especially as a landing pad for US troops. The runway will also serve as a springboard from which to launch US invasions into the Third World. This movement is partly a pacifist one, but it is also rather militant. The demonstrators always aim to destroy the fences around the runway and there have been some real military attacks against the firms which work for the runway. The movement against the construction of new nuclear reactors is organized very much like the anti-runway struggle. There is great solidarity among these three groups. Also, many, many youths realize that there is no future for them under the current system in West Germany. No employment—no decent housing. They are also very militant. For instance, for a long time, they occupied abandoned houses and factories and constructed make-shift shelters for the homeless. This movement began in the late '60s and early '70s. However, most of the homes have since been cleared by heavily-armed police.

L: *What is the strategy to defeat the State's counter-insurgency campaign against the prisoners?*

WZ: Through their unconditional support of the prisoners, the Relatives Committee I mentioned earlier works to defeat the State's counter-insurgency campaign. During the last hunger-strike, several clandestine groups levied strong military attacks against imperialist corporations, atomic energy plants and NATO bases in solidarity with the prisoners' demands.

L: *The RAF considers West Germany to be an occupied country. Can you elaborate on this issue?*

WZ: West Germany is a completely imperialistic country, where US capitalism has flourished since 1830. Historically, the strongest opposition has always been that of the workers' movement. The



US and NATO Air Force Headquarters in Ramstein, West Germany after the RAF bombing on 8/31/81. 20 military personnel were wounded.

fascists tried to destroy this movement. And the US and German imperialists have always tried to co-opt the workers. West Germany is occupied by imperialism—US and German capital. And both are protected by NATO.

US troops use our country as a springboard from which to destroy liberation movements in the Third World and the Soviet Union. West Germany is the main base for US troops. There are more US troops and weaponry stationed in Western Germany than in any other part of the world, excluding the US. And of course, the US army is actively involved in trying to destroy every anti-imperialist resistance group in West Germany. For example, the laws against the RAF prisoners and other resistance fighters were specifically designed by NATO officials. This means that any freedom fighters captured throughout the world, whether Puerto Ricans in the US or Puerto Rico, Palestinians in Israel, the Grapo comrades in Spain or the Red Brigades in Italy, will all be subjected to these same inhuman regulations.

During the Viet Nam war, the US bombing was organized by US army strategists using computers located in Heidelberg and Frankfurt. In 1972, these two US army headquarters were severely attacked by RAF commandos in an attempt to stop the bombing of

the Vietnamese comrades. The comrades who claimed responsibility for these attacks were later murdered while in prison.

This is why the RAF intervenes wherever the US organizes its death blows against liberation movements such as Viet Nam, on German soil. Since 1977, the captured RAF combatants have claimed Prisoner of War status and demanded treatment in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

As you undoubtedly understand, it is not enough for us to oust the US troops from German territory—that would still leave the German army controlled by the US and NATO. It is necessary to wage an equally militant fight against imperialism and the NATO.

L: *How can we help the Resistance?*

WZ: You can help support the Resistance in many ways:

—by publishing information about the RAF prisoners and the real situation in West Germany.

—uniting with us and comrades from other countries as well, to discuss how we can help each other, work together and fight together against our common enemy—US imperialism.

Our aim must be to build a world-wide communist community where all people are guaranteed the human rights accorded by the United Nations Covenant on Human Rights.