

Revolt in the German military

Under pressure from the armed forces, the Bonn government decided to extend the length of military service.

The Jan. 17 decision of the government coalition parties in Bonn to extend the mandatory military service from 15 to 18 months, starting in June of this year, was long overdue. The final decision on this measure, which was agreed upon in 1986, had been delayed for more than two years. It is an important step in the direction of improving the defense situation in a country which will, because of a declining birth rate, face severe manpower problems in its armed forces in the 1990s.

The West German armed forces, based on the mandatory draft system, have a total manpower roster of 495,000, of which 350,000 are combat troops. This is the minimum required for a mission-ready defense against a Soviet surprise attack in Central Europe.

The decision was made in the midst of an escalating witchhunt against the armed forces on the part of the media, leftist and peacenik groups, and the opposition Social Democratic and Green parties.

Several vital projects in defense procurement for the 1990s, like the development of a new main battle tank that is to replace the Leopard II in the late 1990s, a new armored personnel carrier, an anti-air missile systems, and an anti-tank helicopter, have been delayed by the government under the combined pressure of this populist scare campaign against the armed forces, and the budgetary restraints.

Especially the propaganda campaign in the media against NATO air force stationing and low-altitude

training flights in Germany, has caused serious harm to the armed forces. Skillfully guided by pro-Soviet interests, like the main opposition party, the Social Democrats, the campaign has been nourished by any incoming news about "yet another air crash" and the like. The Bonn government gave in to populist views, instead of telling people what is required to have a functioning defense.

Defense Minister Rupert Scholz has been one of the very few, often enough the only one, to tell the public that "what seems desirable to many, to reduce the defense burden, cannot be done, for the sake of maintaining a functioning defense." Scholz has been the only one to point consistently at the feverish pace of new Soviet arms procurement and the superiority of the Warsaw Pact. Left without political and moral support from the government and his Christian Democratic party, Scholz became a favorite target of a whole flood of attacks from the opposition, over the past few weeks. He has been charged with "still holding onto an anti-Soviet image of the enemy," by leading spokesmen of the anti-defense campaign. Scholz has also been marked as a target of Soviet propaganda.

This baiting of Scholz was aimed at the armed forces as a whole. Knowing the cowardly profile of politicians in the federal government coalition, the anti-defense campaign could be certain that any attacks on Scholz would make Chancellor Helmut Kohl (who is always looking at the opinion polls) keep a very low profile on de-

fense issues.

A sense of "this far, but no farther," has been reached among many in the armed forces now, however. Among senior officers in all Bundeswehr services, rage has been building, and the mood is building toward an open political revolt against the politicians.

The Association of Jet Pilots in the Bundeswehr, which represents 1,300 of the 1,500 Air Force, Army, and Navy pilots, decided to go public. In an interview with the Bonn daily *Die Welt* published Jan. 14, Air Force Col. Karlheinz Reichenwallner, the chairman of the association, said of Scholz: "He is one of the few who is really saying, before the TV cameras and on other occasions, that this [low-altitude flights] is necessary. He is protecting our interests, but he is opposed by the [Christian Democratic] parliamentary group and his own party."

Reichenwallner said of the Bonn politicians: "We expect them to state a clear political commitment to the Constitution, which states that the Federal Republic of Germany must be kept defensible; this includes the task of the Air Force, which is determined by a certain amount of low-altitude flights."

The first public response to this sign of protest came from Air Force Gen. Johannes Steinhoff (ret.), head of the special investigative commission on military air crashes. Reporting on his impressions from a tour of numerous Air Force bases, he expressed a "state of deep shock at the embitterment of the pilots at the political climate."

General Steinhoff declared that the pilots are "still doing their dangerous job in a spirit of committed citizens, in spite of the fact that 270 of them gave their lives in peacetime missions since 1958."